

**F. F. Gouraud, "Manner of Making Portraits by the Daguerreotype," 26
March 1840**

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MANNER OF MAKING PORTRAITS BY THE DAGUERREOTYPE.—We are indebted to Mr. Gouraud for the following communication, in which he describes the progress by which portraits may be taken by the Daguerreotype. It has been in our hands from the 16th inst., the publication having been in the meantime deferred for want of room:—

Within fifteen days after the publication of the process of M. Daguerre, in Paris, people in every quarter were making portraits. At first they were all made with *the eyes shut*. M. Susse, of the *place de la Bourse*, was one of the first amateurs who succeeded in making them in the most satisfactory manner. The achromatic lens, recommended by M. Daguerre was naturally first made use of. But these amateurs soon perceived that in using a glass of this kind, a very long time was required to make the drawing. Every one began to look about for some means of shortening, as much as possible, the period of from fifteen to twenty-five minutes, which M. Susse, who had the whole disposal of his time, had employed in making his pretty portraits—with the eyes shut. Almost at the same time a young man, in the employment of the Minister of Public instruction, Mr. Abel Rendu, directed by the most simple optical principles, adopted an idea which seemed new to him, and produced to the admiration of some of the Paris circles, portraits of men and women, with the *eyes open*, executed in the most satisfactory manner. The mathematical perfection in the representation of the eyes, which M. Daguerre had been seeking for so long a time, was to be sure, not to be found in these portraits; but this difference was so minute, that it was scarcely perceptible at first sight even by the most practiced eye. On expressing the astonishment with which I was struck, and giving the warmest compliments of encouragement to M. Abel Rendu, that gentleman, without seeking to make the slightest mystery of the means he had employed, told me immediately that he had obtained these first results by means of a *Meniscus!* I immediately made a trial of this method. I used at first the Meniscus recommended by Wollaston, then the common one with one side plain, then one with a parabolic concavity, and obtained also the most satisfactory results, thanks to the information communicated in a manner so obliging by M. Abel Rendu. As these experiments were made just on the eve of my departure, it was impossible for me to repeat them, and not being able to resist the request of the person in whose portrait I had succeeded in making the very best of my attempts, I left this most successful specimen behind with him, intending to supply myself with specimens at New York or elsewhere, when the fine summer sun should return, to offer us his brilliant light,

so essential to the rapid execution of this operation. The portraits I had made in Paris, as well as those obtained by Mr. Abel Rendu, were formed in from ONE *minute to TWO minutes twenty-seven seconds*, at the farthest. Considering the foggy atmosphere of Paris, this was already an immense step, but as M. Rendu did not attach any great importance to a discovery which did not offer the positively mathematical perfection which M. Daguerre required, and which M. Daguerre had undoubtedly himself, already disdained, he did not wish to make the thing an affair of *reputation*, but authorized me to make any use of it in America which I pleased. Before I quitted Paris, I made use of his Meniscus to take the pretty view of the *Pont Louis Philippe*, and the magnificent *facade des Tuilleries*, which are found in my collection. From the slightly nebulous sides of these two pictures, in contrast with the clearness of the centre, may be seen at a glance the adaptation of the *Meniscus*, in preference to the other kinds of glasses, as regards the art of making portraits with the Daguerreotype. It will be perceived that the centre of the design, offers in sharpness, in the lines, and in general clearness a vigor in inverse proportion to the nebulosity of the sides. The reason why the Meniscus should give more clear lines, and act in a shorter space of time on the iodine plate in the camera obscura, will be obvious to all persons acquainted with the most simple principles of optics.

What is important, then, to the amateur in Daguerreotype drawing to know, is the manner of making use of it. The following is the process, (with the exception of some minute details, which it would be impossible to give in the columns of a newspaper,) as I communicated it on my arrival at New York to all who wished to hear it, and in fact as I have described it, (even to its details) in my crowded public lectures. I render it thus public, by means of the press, in order that those who may not have the opportunity of hearing my verbal information on the subject, may make experiments for themselves, and in fine, that by the means already made use of, they may know that I am able to make the *portrait of any person who wishes it*.

The shortness of the description will be equal to the simplicity of the method, and I am desirous that this new proof of my efforts to please the enlightened community in the midst of which I am placed, and by which I every day continue to be so kindly patronized—I desire, I say, in offering something of actual utility, as well as a source of intellectual amusement, that this new proof of my efforts, small as it may be in value of itself, may nevertheless be acceptable to all. Reserving for my public lectures a description of the general process, in obtaining drawings by the beautiful method of M. Daguerre, I will describe, in a few words, for the benefit of those who have already a notion of that process, how it is possible at the present time, to obtain a miniature portrait by the Daguerreotype.

In the first place you will begin by preparing a room exposed to the sun, the south east if possible. You will give to this room the form of a truncated pyramid lying down, of which the base will be the whole breadth of the window—which window you will make as large as possible, and extending from the floor to the ceiling. The floor, the ceiling, and the two sides of the room, should be plastered with the whitest kind of lime plaster. Those who cannot dispose a room in this manner, can fix the sides of the room with sheets or other cloth of perfect whiteness. The focus of the room must be covered with a tapestry of white cotton, with knotted or raised figures, which is designed to form the drapery. These are always agreeable to the eye, and should always be shown in interior views. The chair on which the person sits must be of yellow wood. The person, if a man, must be dressed in a clear grey coat, pantaloons of a little deeper hue, a vest of a fancy ground, yellow, orange, if possible, with figures of a colour to make a contrast, the

whiteness of the shirt contrasting with a cravat of a grey ground, either a little less dark or more deep than the coat. The toilet of a lady should be of the same shades, and in all cases black must be constantly avoided, as well as green and red. This arrangement, however, is pointed out as the best means of obtaining the best effect; for, as in a portrait, the face is what is most cared for, the costume can be studied more or less at will, but the portrait, with other arrangements, will not be so agreeable to the eye. By means of mirrors properly disposed at the window or in the room, you will concentrate the strongest possible light on the person, and will considerably augment that of the chamber, which has already been made as clear as possible. If the sun should be too brilliant, and the *patient* is not able comfortably to bear the reflection of it, use may be made of the blue glass, recommended by M. Daguerre.

Having covered your plate well with the coating of iodine—you will fix the sitter. His head should be placed on a semi-circle of iron, fitted to the back of the chair. His arms may be arranged at pleasure. He should fix his eyes on some well defined object in any direction which he may prefer—the focus of the camera obscura must be regulated and provided with a good Meniscus. Now, if every thing has been arranged as it should be, your portrait will often be made, even in less than *twenty seconds*, and in the most satisfactory manner.

This is, *at present*, the most approved method of making a miniature by the Daguerreotype. Others may perhaps pretend to improve or invent, after my explanations have been made, because while employing the same means, they will change their places, or call them by other names. But until other methods shall have better success, it is certainly right that those who attach any importance to a futile celebrity should render to Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and it is right that the method of Mr. Abel Rendu, *rendered* public by me in this country, should be attributed entirely to him.

I will now say, at the close, that by adopting a confidential communication which I have received from M. D. G., the French Professor at Cambridge, since I arrived in Boston, I think it is very probable that we shall succeed in obtaining a Daguerreotype portrait in much less time than by the process above described. F. G.

[End of text.]

EDITOR'S NOTES:

This text was subsequently formed the "short historical introduction" in François Fauvel-Gouraud, *Description of the Daguerreotype Process, or a Summary of M. Gouraud's Public Lectures, according to the Principles of M. Daguerreotype. With a Description of a Provisionary Method for Taking Human Portraits* (Boston: Dutton and Wentworth's Print, 1840).¹

Further information regarding Gouraud is found in Ron Polito, "The Emergence of Photography in Boston: 1840–1841" *The Journal: New England Journal of Photographic History* No. 164 (Spring 2005): 16–32. Polito's article is also reprinted in *Daguerreian Annual 2006* (Pittsburgh: The Daguerreian Society, 2007): 154–73.

Two portraits of F. F. Gouraud are also available within this archive.^{2, 3}

1. http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/F8400001_GOURAUD_MANUAL_1840.pdf

2. http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/graphics/G8440001_GOURAUD_PORTRAIT_1844.pdf

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