

“The Daguerrotype,” 30 March 1839

(keywords: Louis J. M. Daguerre, daguerrotype, history of the daguerreotype, history of photography.)

THE DAGUERRETYPE: AN ARCHIVE OF SOURCE TEXTS, GRAPHICS, AND EPHEMERA

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THE DAGUERROTYPE.

M. Daguerre is a man of talent, for he is an excellent artist; he is a man of genius, he invented the Diorama; but he is an ambitious man, he created the Daguerrotype; and his name and his fame will be European, and will be handed down to posterity as belonging to a man of transcendent genius, who, by unexampled industry, power of analyzation, and of synthetical combination, has created a new art. It is not a discovery, it is a brilliant creation.

What, then, *is* the Daguerrotype? We will explain. You paint a picture; there is a mass of colour on the canvass, as if it had been laid on by a Martin!—it is a brilliant colour; it is seen by daylight. You throw the light produced by the admixture of hydrogen and oxygen gas upon it. The picture vanishes; the canvass is as it were bleached. You paint another picture; it is composed of various colours; the colours are of equal depth; you manage to distribute the light thrown upon it in various intensities. The picture is perfect; all the lighter tints appear as if you had painted it with ten thousand shades of colour. Is this the Daguerrotype? No! You take a metal plate, with a black substance; you apply a prism, so that any object will be cast upon it; you take the prism away; the object remains as if had been engraved by the most delicate *burin*. This is the Daguerrotype. What is the substance spread upon the plate? it is a secret known only to M. Daguerre.

Such is this wonderful creation. The light of the sun or moon becomes an engraver, which makes no mistakes; every line is in undeniable proportion, a microscope of the highest power can discover no error; you see your face reflected in a glass, you retire, the reflection vanishes; your face is reflected on a blackened plate, the reflection remains. This is the Daguerrotype. A butterfly flutters from flower to flower, you cannot catch it; had it the swiftness of light itself the Daguerreotype has a more rapid flight; its pencil draws with unerring fidelity every hue, every flutter of its wings. You want a sketch—an index to your imagination; the Daguerrotype gives you it. You want every line, every dot, every shade, you cannot trust to your own fancy; the Daguerrotype perfects the work! Honour then to M. Daguerre! He is to the Fine Arts what Bacon was to Science. The Daguerrotype is the *novum organum* of Art.—*Idem*.

[End of text. Variant spelling of “daguerrotype” (daguerreotype) is per original text.]

EDITOR’S NOTES:

The stilted language of the text indicates that it is a translation from a foreign-language source. The editor would welcome information regarding the original source text.

This text subsequently appears, with additional text and modifications to punctuation, in "The Daguerrotype," *Albion, or British, Colonial, and Foreign Weekly Gazette*. (New York) 1:14 (6 April 1839): 109.¹

1. http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/P8390019_DAGUERRE_ALBION_1839-04-06.pdf

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