

“Important discovery in France,” 21 March 1839

(Keywords: Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre, François Arago, Journal des Debats, history of the daguerreotype, history of photography.)

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Messrs. Editors—I send you an account of a recent important discovery in France, which, if you find of use, you can publish in your journal. It is translated from the *Journal des Debats*, January 8, 1839. It was presented to the Academy of sciences, by Arago, the great astronomer, with a view of petitioning Government for a remuneration to the discoverer, M. Daguerre.

“Every one knows the effects of the Camera Obscura, and the neatness with which external objects are, by means of the lens, represented on the tablet. A better idea, then cannot be given of the discovery of M. Daguerre, than by saying that he has been able to represent on the paper of true design, a faithful representation of objects of nature of the arts, with all the graduations of tints, the delicacy of lines, and the rigorous exactness of form, of perspective and the different degrees of light.

“Whatever the extent of the view, it requires but ten minutes or a quarter of an hour after the admission of the light to reproduce it; the light being itself the agent of this wonderful drawing, it acts more or less quickly according to its intensity; it is thus that M. Daguerre, stationed on the “Pont des Saint Pères,” has been able to draw in all its detail, the immense gallery of the Louvre, and also from the “Pont de l’Archeveche,” has represented Notre Dame. No objects, no appearance of nature or external things has escaped this process, and the morning is represented with its freshness just as the dazzling brightness of day and the solemn hue of evening, or the melancholy of a rainy day. In this singular painting, the colors are indicated by the graduation of shadows as insensible as in *Aqua tinta*.

Modern chymistry possesses certain substances which have the property of changing their colors when in contact with light, and one composed of silver, called the chloride of silver, is such a one. If a paper prepared with this material, have some of its parts presented to the light, and others being kept in the shade, it is evident that it will produce a design by means of the different colors which the parts lighted, and the portion not exposed, assume. This is the principle on which M. Daguerre has labored for many years with a perseverance and intelligence which have at last brought him to a result formerly involved in numerous difficulties; and now that the result has been obtained, now that he has been able to render permanent the effects of light, the process of M. Daguerre is found to be so simple, so much within the reach of all, that in the promulgation of his discovery, he risks the fruits of his studies and labors. A patent will not be sufficient to guarantee the property of an idea, which every one, unaided, can produce, when once made public.”

[End of text.]

EDITOR'S NOTES:

An abbreviated version from the same source text appears as "Remarkable Invention," *Boston Daily Advertiser* (23 February 1839): first page of issue.¹

This editor would welcome a photocopy of the original article appearing in the 8 January 1839 *Journal des Debats*.

1. http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/N8390007_BOST_DAILY_ADVERT_1839-02-23.pdf

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