

Samuel Dwight Humphrey, "On the Daguerreotype," 15 February 1859

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On the Daguerreotype.

BY S. D. HUMPHREY.

The art of "Sun-drawing" is of vast importance in this country, and one in which the mass of the people are interested. Every member of society knows what a Daguerreotype is. These beautiful pictures are familiar to all, and, judging from the past, we look forward with perfect confidence to the time when the discovery of Daguerre will hold its old position as being the foremost of all the known processes for producing miniatures by the aid of light. We only reiterate a well-established fact when we assert that, at the present time, the Daguerreotype is the most perfect and reliable of all pictures.

The frail and fading Ambrotype is often sold, by unprincipled operators, for a Daguerreotype, and thus the unsuspecting public are defrauded and led to condemn the most beautiful pictures which it is possible to produce. The soft finish and delicate definition of a Daguerreotype has never yet been equalled by any other style of picture produced by actinic agency, while for durability we have no proof of any other impression being permanent. There can be no question, that if the public were fully posted as to the real worth of Daguerre's discovery, his process would be the only one that would meet with favor at their hands. If the operators would hold fast to this process, and recommend no other, they would greatly enhance the value of their art and improve the somewhat shaken confidence which now exists with regard to it.

Whenever we hear a person decrying the old Daguerreotype we look upon him as one who cannot make a good picture by that process, which, by the way, is far more difficult than most of the others, and hence the reason of its being so much neglected of late. We do not believe that any experienced and *successful* Daguerreotype operator can be found who will not lift up his voice in favor of his old art, as he must have realized the most eminent satisfaction from his early practice and received a far better remuneration for his services; he can also conscientiously assert that his customers will never have cause to regret that their patronage has been bestowed on durable pictures.

We look back with much satisfaction upon the impressions which we took in '45 and '46; every picture is as brilliant and pleasing as when it was taken, and bids fair to last hundreds of years yet.

There are few persons familiar with the practical department of the heliographic art generally who will not give their testimony in favor of the Daguerreotype for securing likenesses of their friends. The process of finishing one of these pictures is founded upon scientific principles, and there is the most overwhelming argument in favor of their

durable properties—they are secured from the oxydizing influence of adulterated atmosphere, and are the only pictures so secured; for in the Ambrotype we have organic matter in direct contact with the silver, and the same with the Photograph. We again repeat what we have said many times before to all our friends: Procure a Daguerreotype in preference to any other style of picture!

[End of text.]

EDITOR'S NOTES:

A similar sentiment, written by a fellow photographic journal publisher, is found in Henry Hunt Snelling, "Timing in the Camera," in *Sunlight Sketches' or the Photographic Textbook: A Practical Treatise on Photography* (New York: H. H. Snelling, 1858): 25–27.¹

1. http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/B8580005_SNELLING_SUN-SKETCH_1858.pdf

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