



East of the Mississippi

NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICAN LANDSCAPE PHOTOGRAPHY

When photography arrived in the United States in 1839, it landed first in a few east coast cities and New Orleans, and then spread north and west into the American interior. The proliferation of photography studios and photographers coincided with the beginnings of massive cultural, commercial, and transportation projects that would ultimately reshape much of the American landscape. Photography quickly became an accomplice in the transformation of the landscape, both passively and actively. Some photographs, for example, simply documented the changes in a landscape, often revealing the before and after of a construction project, while other photographs became agents of change, making visible sites that would become popular tourist destinations.

The New Orleans Museum of Art presents *East of the Mississippi: Nineteenth-Century American Landscape Photography* from October 5, 2017– January 7, 2018. Organized by the National Gallery of Art, Washington, in association with NOMA, this landmark exhibition is the first to explore a vivid chapter of America's photographic history—the origins of landscape photography in the United States.

This project is the first to articulate a complete history of landscape photography in the nineteenth-century American East, bringing together some of the rarest and most extraordinary photographs to tell the many stories of photography's relationship to the landscape. Due to the rarity and fragility of these works, this is the first and perhaps only time that many of these objects will be publicly exhibited, offering visitors the rare opportunity to engage directly with objects from the origins of photography in this country.

There are roughly three different kinds of landscape that are presented in *East of the Mississippi*: the natural landscape, the built landscape, and the urban landscape. The following selection, on pages 8 and 9, presents examples of each kind of landscape and several different kinds of photographic processes. It also provides some insight into the variety of reasons that photographers engaged with the eastern American landscape in the nineteenth-century.

Theodore Lilienthal, *St. Charles Hotel, New Orleans*, 1867, detail, albumen print, 10 ³/₄ x 13 ¹³/₁₆ inches, New Orleans Museum of Art, Museum Purchase, 2013.21



Hugh Lee Pattinson, *American Falls*, 1840, daguerreotype, 6 ½ x 8 ½ inches, Robinson Library, Newcastle University, England.

THEODORE LILIENTHAL

In early 1867, Lilienthal was hired by the city council of New Orleans to produce a lavish presentation portfolio of large photographs of New Orleans that could be given as a gift to Napoleon III on the occasion of the International Exposition that year. The project was the first municipal photographic commission in the United States. The photograph on page 6 of the St. Charles Hotel was contact printed from a glass negative of equal size—the largest known to have been produced in New Orleans in the nineteenth century. The incredible detail that these large negatives afforded provides a great deal of information about this block of the city and even about the making of the picture: the giant pocket watch hanging down from John Lazarus’s Great Southern Watch Depot preserves the time that this picture was made, just a couple of minutes after ten o’clock in the morning.

HUGH LEE PATTINSON

The daguerreotype seen above is one of several that Pattinson, a British chemical metallurgist, made in April of 1840 while visiting the United States. Together, Pattinson’s daguerreotypes are the oldest known photographs of Canada, but they are amongst the oldest known photographs made in the US. The daguerreotype process involved coating a copper plate with a chemical solution that produced an image when exposed to light. Each one is unique; a daguerreotype is a negative and positive in one, and cannot serve as a matrix to produce multiple positive prints. Nevertheless, daguerreotypes were frequently copied as engravings and reproduced in printer’s ink. One of Pattinson’s daguerreotypes of Niagara Falls was reproduced in this manner and included in the first publication to be based on photographic images, a two volume publication called *Excursions daguerriennes*.

JAY DEARBORN EDWARDS

Edwards had a nomadic and multi-faceted career that included traveling from New Hampshire to New Orleans, and stints as an itinerant phrenologist (studying the shape of heads as signs of moral character) and a Confederate spy. While in New Orleans, however, he became one of the earliest photographers to make paper photographs (daguerreotypes were much more common here). This image (opposite page, top) of Esplanade at Royal Street presents a view up the avenue that today terminates at the steps of NOMA.



Jay Dearborn
Edwards, *Esplanade
Street from Royal
Street toward Lake*,
1858-1861, salted
paper print, 7 1/2 x
9 3/8, The Historic New
Orleans Collection

HENRY PETER BOSSE

Bosse was appointed draftsman and cartographer for the US Army Corps of Engineers and was charged with surveying the Mississippi River. He produced maps as well as photographs of the river and its surrounding area that documented both natural and man-made sites. This print (right) is a cyanotype, an iron-based photograph that is essentially the same compound used in blueprints. Since the photograph was produced for an engineering survey of water, the cyanotype, with its deep blue color, was a doubly appropriate print choice. Bosse suffered an early and sudden death after eating spoiled canned asparagus.



Henry Peter Bosse,
*Construction of Rock
and Brush Dam, L.W.*,
1891, cyanotype,
10 7/16 x 13 1/8,
National Gallery of Art,
Washington,
Gift of Mary and
Dan Solomon

Russell Lord, Freeman Family Curator of Photographs, Prints and Drawings

East of the Mississippi: Nineteenth-Century American Landscape Photography is on view October 5, 2017, to January 7, 2018 on NOMA's second floor in the Elise M. Besthoff Charitable Foundation Gallery. An exhibition catalogue is available in The NOMA Shop. The exhibition is organized by the National Gallery of Art, Washington, in association with the New Orleans Museum of Art, and is supported in New Orleans by the Freeman Family Curatorial Fund, the A. Charlotte Mann and Joshua Mann Pallet Endowment Fund, the Azby Museum Fund, The Helis Foundation, and Tim L. Fields, Esq. Additional support provided by Delta Air Lines.