

Early Gaze

EARLY GAZE

Unseen Photography
from the
19th Century

Ongeziene fotografie
uit de
19de eeuw





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Collodion printing-out paper,
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Foreword

For me, photography remains a constant source of pure magic and wonder. When I was studying photographic restoration in 1997, I discovered the *Directory of Photographers in Belgium 1839–1905*, at the Provincial Museum of Photography (FOMU – Fotomuseum Antwerp’s name at the time). The exhibition and accompanying publication, featuring images from the early years of Belgian photography, increased my fascination with the discipline in all its complexity and confirmed my choice of career in the field of photographic heritage.

Since then, the *Directory* has been a common thread running through my work at FOMU. What started out as a reference work has evolved into an extensive, constantly updated, digital data bank, with information extending to 1914.¹ Containing more than 8,500 records, this authoritative resource offers a rich and detailed insight into nineteenth-century photographic practice in Belgium. The pioneering work of Steven F. Joseph, Tristan Schwilden and Marie-Christine Claes continues to underpin the project, but it is always changing. By supplementing the information, enhancing search capabilities and creating links to related projects, we aim to make the data broadly deployable across the heritage sector, fostering wider access to photographic images.

Work on the *Directory* is not finished, however. Despite the knowledge available, the early history of Belgian photography is fragmentary and incomplete in many respects. There is still much to (re)discover and to explore. The images, both within and beyond our collection, are ripe for reinterpretation and invite the addition of new histories.

With *Early Gaze. Unseen Photography from the 19th Century*, we hope to draw attention to lesser-known images, stories and perspectives by means of thematic texts. This publication does not aim to be a comprehensive guide, but seeks to contribute to a broader and more critical examination of nineteenth-century Belgian photography. What is being exhibited here is merely a beginning. A great deal of material is still waiting to be uncovered, interpreted and reassessed.

May this book spark the same curiosity in the viewer as the *Directory* once did in me.

Ann Deckers

Head of Collections, Conservation and Restoration, FOMU

NOTES

¹ Database by Steven F. Joseph, Tristan Schwilden, Marie-Christine Claes and Michiel Demaeght, *Directory of Belgian Photographers*, accessed at www.directorybelgianphotographers.be.



Ernest Candèze
View from a tethered balloon, c. 1882
Albumen print, 11 × 16.4 cm

Introduction

In 1839, nine years after Belgium declared independence in 1830, photography was invented in France and England. A few weeks later, the new medium found its way to Belgium, where a handful of pioneers rapidly recognised the possibilities of this revolutionary technique. While the young nation was busily shaping its identity, photography offered a new way to document reality. Belgian photography actively contributed to the visual construction of the country.

Belgium played a key role in the early development of photography. Yet Belgian photographic history remains underexposed in comparison to that of France, the UK or the United States. It was not until 1989 with the exhibition and publication ‘...door de enkele werking van het licht...’ [...By the mere action of light...] that the introduction and dissemination of photography in Belgium and the Netherlands (covering the period 1839–69) was first explored.¹ Almost 40 years later, it is time for a fresh perspective, founded on recent research and contemporary social questions. This approach is by definition fragmentary, and does not claim to be complete, but serves to supplement existing research, and to offer nuances and corrections where necessary.

The publication *Early Gaze. Unseen Photography from the 19th Century* appears in tandem with the exhibition of the same name held at FOMU – Fotomuseum Antwerp from 24 October 2025 to 1 March 2026. In recent decades, a great deal of previously unknown historical material has come to light, and thinking about photography has changed fundamentally. Contemporary discussions about representation, power, multiperspectivity and ethics also encourage a critical re-evaluation of photographic heritage. This approach chimes closely with FOMU’s mission. Questions that are prevalent today about image creation, privacy, archiving and access to visual culture are grounded in the early history of the medium.

By returning to this pioneering period, we want to both expose historical hiatuses, and reflect upon this approach to photographic heritage: who appears in the collections, who remains invisible, and why? This publication is an opportunity to look at Belgian photographic history from a critical and inclusive perspective – not as a closed chapter, but as a dynamic and evolving field. Here, photography is not approached purely as a technical or aesthetic invention, but as a socially embedded phenomenon.

Early Gaze presents a broad and exceptional overview of Belgian photography in the nineteenth century. Numerous rare photos and prominent items are brought together for the first time. The selection is based on works from the FOMU collection, augmented by images from public and private collections in Belgium, the Netherlands and France. It charts how between 1839 and 1900, photography in Belgium developed from an experimental process to a versatile medium with a diverse range of applications.

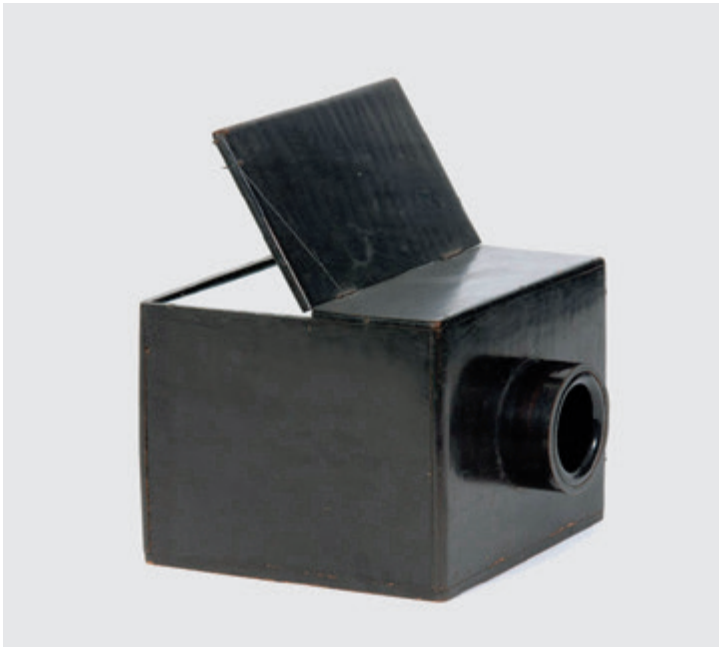
The exhibition and accompanying publication arose from a series of core research questions. One of the initial questions concerns the accessibility of the medium: in the early period, who had access to photography? This approach sheds fresh light on the social and economic thresholds that



PHOTOGRAPHY IN BELGIUM: A GAME OF MAGIC AND POWER

Tamara Berghmans
Ingrid Leonard

What does a look at nineteenth-century Belgian photography reveal? This article provides an overview from the early experiments of 1839 to the emergence of photography as a versatile medium around 1900. In addition to the technical evolutions, the main fields of application are covered, from portrait, reportage and cityscape to science, art and propaganda. Through the work of several important photographers and striking case studies, in which special attention is paid to social barriers and ethical concerns, it becomes clear how this visual technique spread in Belgium.¹



Camera obscura, early 19th century
Unidentified manufacturer,
possibly French or Swiss,
double convex lens, 5.5 cm diameter

Unknown photographer
H.M. The Emperor, silhouette drawing,
undated
Pen and ink on paper, 19.3 × 12.3 cm

Antecedents

Although photography was only invented in the 1820s–30s, the pursuit of visual representation dates back to antiquity. Philosophers such as Mo Ti, Aristotle and Ibn al-Haytham had already described the optical principles that would later underpin the camera obscura: a darkened room into which an inverted image is projected through a small hole. From the Renaissance onwards, artists used the camera obscura as a tool to depict perspective and proportions more accurately in their drawings and paintings. In the eighteenth century, inventions such as the physionotrace and the camera lucida marked a shift towards more mechanical forms of image production, driven by an increasing cultural emphasis on precision and reproducibility.²

Against this background, a true image revolution took place in 1839: the birth of photography. On 7 January, French astronomer and politician François Arago announced Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre's invention at the Académie des Sciences in Paris. The daguerreotype – a unique process that captured an image on a polished silver plate – built upon the pioneering work of inventor Joseph Nicéphore Niépce. At Arago's initiative, the French state acquired the rights to the process and made it freely available. The official announcement of this decision, made during a public session of the Académie des Sciences on 19 August 1839, marked the beginning of photography's widespread social diffusion.

Around the same time, William Henry Fox Talbot in England independently developed the calotype: a negative–positive process on paper that enabled the reproduction of images, unlike Daguerre's unique plates. A print was produced by placing a paper negative over silver-treated paper and exposing it to light. The result was a salted paper print – a positive image with soft tones and a matte appearance. In contrast to the French approach, Talbot opted for patent protection for his process, making it more expensive and less widely adopted. The unrestricted availability of the daguerreotype largely explains its more rapid international advance. Nonetheless, both inventions laid the foundation for photography as a modern visual medium.³



Le Daguerréotype, 1839
[1967 replica]
Alphonse-Giroux, Paris
Sliding-box daguerreotype camera
for exposures on 16×22 cm plates,
single lens 1:17 / f 380 mm

Le Grand Photographe, 1840–44
[modern replica]
Charles Chevalier, Paris
Daguerreotype camera for
exposures on 16.2×21.6 cm plates,
with convertible lens system

Bourquin daguerreotype camera,
c. 1845 [modern replica]
Bourquin, Paris
Rigid-body daguerreotype camera
for exposures on quarter plates,
Petzval lens by Alphonse Darlot, Paris

Voigtländer Ganzmetallkamera,
1840–41 [official replica from 1978]
Voigtländer und Sohn, Vienna
Daguerreotype camera for round
plates 90 mm diameter,
Petzval lens 1:3.7 / f 149 mm



B. Leba
Group portrait of five young women,
1853–55
Daguerreotype, 10.6 × 14.7 cm



William Henry Fox Talbot
Statuette of 'Eve at the Fountain'
by E.H. Baily, 1840-43
Salted paper print, 14 × 16.7 cm



William Henry Fox Talbot
Leaves, 1840
Photogenic drawing, 19.2 × 23 cm



Delorme (Mrs.), Supper - Belding-Lake

W. M. B. S. C. C.



Lady Drakon - Belding-Lake

W. M. B. S. C. C.



Arrel (Mrs.), Belding-Lake

W. M. B. S. C. C.



W. M. B. S. C. C.



Geradon (Jean), forgeron - Balday-Lalor

WM B'S & CO



Parent (Joseph) - Herbillion (Jean)
Bouilliers & Balday-Lalor

WM B'S & CO



Herbillion (Jean), forgeron - Balday-Lalor

WM B'S & CO



Louis (Jean) - Lape (Henri)
Forgers - Balday-Lalor

WM B'S & CO



Albéric Lunden

Young donkey drivers on the beach, c. 1895

Gelatin printing-out paper, 24 x 29.3 cm







(left)
Photographie Américaine (studio)
Portrait of a baby, 1881
 Ferrotypes, 2.1 × 1.8 cm

(right)
Louis Duhaméeuw
Portrait of two children, c. 1890
 Ferrotypes, 4.7 × 3.4 cm



Unknown photographer
Portrait of woman at fairground, 1890
Ferrotype, 11.5 × 9.5 cm



Louis Ghémar
Portrait of King Leopold I, 1856
Salted paper print, 22 × 15.8 cm



Jacques de Lalaing

Study of female nude model,
1883–1905

Albumen print, 16.4 × 10.2 cm

→

Jacques de Lalaing

Study of female model, 1883–1905
Albumen print, 16.9 × 9.9 cm



Photography as an Autonomous Art Form

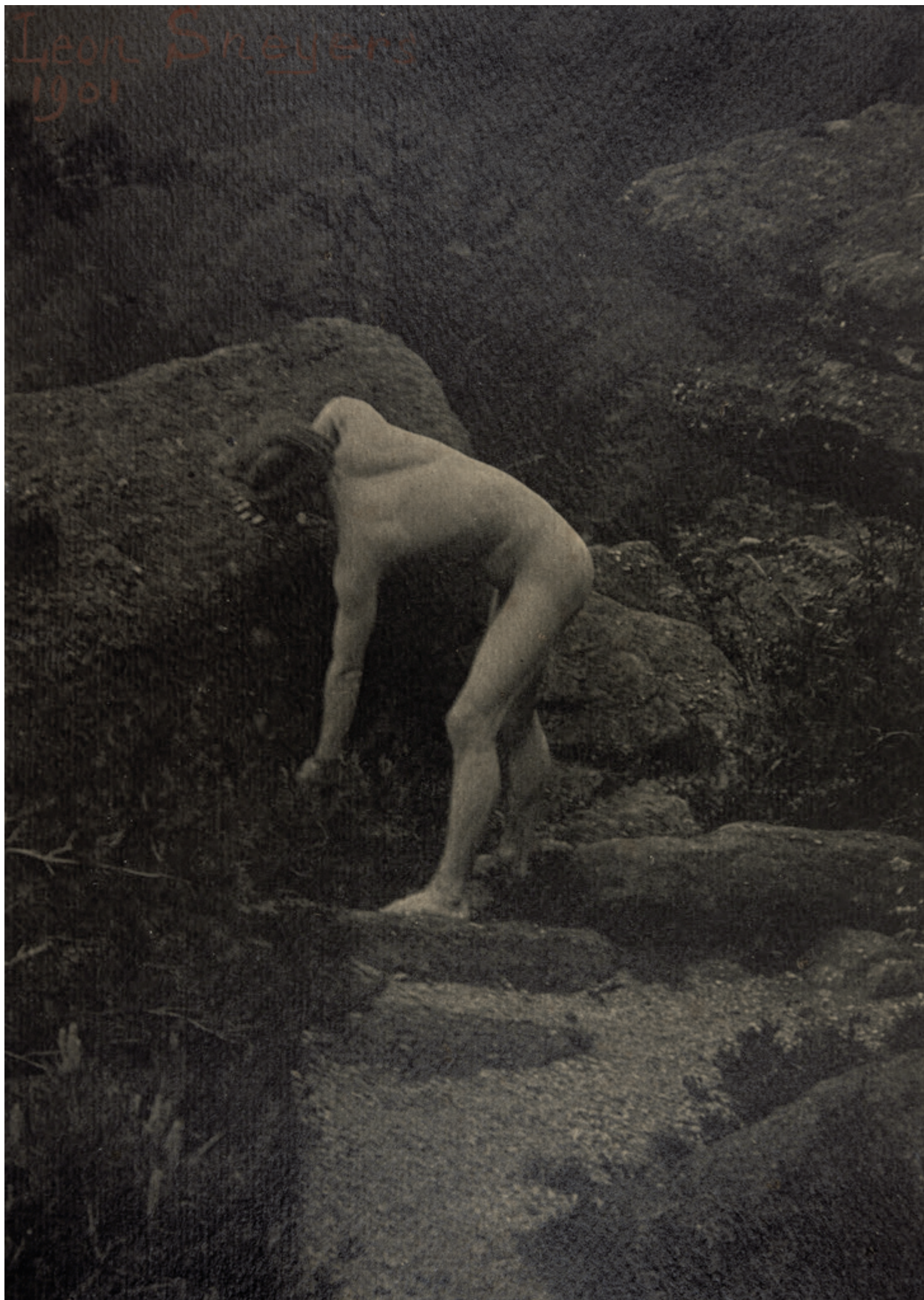
In the late nineteenth century, the democratisation of photography – aided by innovations such as the Kodak No. 1 camera – led to the medium's mass distribution. This, in turn, prompted a reaction from an elite group of photographers, mostly from the bourgeoisie, who sought to distinguish themselves by using photography as a vehicle for artistic and social self-representation.

This movement, known as pictorialism, shifted the focus away from the informative value of photography towards subjective expression. Pictorialist photographers such as Alexandre, Edouard Hannon, Hector Colard, Gustave Marissiaux and Léon Bovier drew inspiration from painting, often producing dreamy, poetic interpretations of their subjects. Their work conveyed a sense of nostalgic longing and a romantic aesthetic, helping to establish photography as an art form in its own right. Léonard Misonne, known as the 'Corot of photography', was a leading figure in Belgium; his masterful use of light and atmosphere made him a key figure in this movement.

Belgium played a pioneering role in the institutional recognition of photography as an art form. In 1892, the Association belge de Photographie organised the first exhibition of English art photography on the European continent. Unlike in other countries, where pictorialist groups often positioned themselves in opposition to established movements, the Belgian association functioned as a national institution. It was not until 1900 that this monopoly was broken with the founding of the Cercle d'Art Photographique L'Effort. Belgian salons in 1895, 1896, 1898 and 1901 presented work by both Belgian and international pictorialists, helping to legitimise photography as an art form.

An important step was the recognition of the discipline by the Belgian state. Around 1900, a considerable collection of pictorialist photographs was acquired with a view to establishing a museum of photography.²⁶ This marked a significant change in the perception of the medium, which until then had mainly been presented as part of the industrial arts, as at the *Exposition de l'Association pour l'encouragement et le développement des arts industriels en Belgique* (1856 and 1857). By 1900, photography claimed its place within the visual arts and museum context.

Leon Sneyers
1901





PHOTOGRAPHY AND ETHICS: BEHIND EVERY IMAGE LIE MYRIAD DECISIONS

Kaat Somers

The concept of ethics is derived from the Greek word *èthos*, which means ‘norm’ or ‘habit’. In the field of philosophy, ethics is concerned with moral principles and values that determine human behaviour, and it serves as a basis for sketching an ideal world. Photography demands special attention due to its layered relationship with reality, which is why it is essential for FOMU – Fotomuseum Antwerp to adopt an ethically responsible position. What is the meaning of an image, and what impact does it have? In what historical consciousness, or within what context, can an image be positioned or interpreted? No matter how insignificant a decision appears at first glance, it is always a human choice.



Lemercier
Mugshot of Jean Carcano, July 1844
Daguerreotype, 12.5 × 9 cm

Nineteenth-Century Judicial Photography

Paul Drossens

Experimenting with the Daguerreotype

The daguerreotype was the first commercially successful photography technique. It quickly made its way into Belgium's justice system, where it proved more effective than personal descriptions in identifying criminals and suspicious immigrants. The world's oldest surviving mugshots are four daguerreotype portraits of foreigners, taken in the Brussels prison.¹ The first two photographs, created on 30 March 1843, were the work of brothers Antoine, Baptiste and Julien Brand, who had opened Belgium's second photography studio the previous year. The other two portraits were made by a certain Lemer cier in July 1844. These photographs were used to identify foreigners and political refugees who resided in Belgium. It is unlikely that this practice was used for an extended period or on a widespread scale. The process of creating portraits was complex and costly, the reproduction process led to a loss of quality and the long exposure time made it impractical. Only with the invention of the carte de visite portrait, which allowed for the creation of multiple identical photographic negatives on a glass plate, the process of creating and reproducing portraits became easier and cheaper.²

Photographs of Criminals for Identification Purposes

The use of photography in criminal investigations emerged around 1860. At that time, the first mugshots appear in criminal case files. They were used for identifying suspects. These pictures facilitated collaboration between law enforcement agencies, enabling one jurisdiction to aid another through the exchange of photographs. The photos were taken by commercial photographers.

In 1861, Antwerp-based portrait photographer Joseph Dupont took a photo of two suspects involved in a series of burglaries and break-ins in the cities of Antwerp, Brussels and Ghent.³ In 1868, A. Scheffermeyer of Mechelen reported to the local prison to photograph a detainee suspected of committing a dozen railway station robberies. In his letter, the investigating judge provided detailed instructions for the photographer. The prisoner had to be photographed twice: wearing a hat and a winter coat, and bareheaded, sporting a summer jacket. Twelve copies of each photograph were to be made. In the margin of the letter was written that 30 francs were budgeted for this purpose.⁴

Photographs were also exchanged across borders. In 1862, as part of an investigation into a 10,000-franc theft in which the 21-year-old perpetrator had fled to France, the investigating judge in Antwerp sent a personal description plus a photograph to the police in Le Havre and Lille in the hope that they could track down the man and extradite him.⁵ To combat a wave of thefts in Brussels, in 1871 the London Metropolitan Police sent Belgian authorities 63 photographs of British pickpockets operating on the continent.⁶ In turn, Belgian Justice shared information with foreign jurisdictions. In 1865, the photography studio Delehay e & Sluyts took a picture of a Frenchman who was imprisoned in Antwerp for theft and handling stolen goods.⁷ The man had already been convicted by the court of assize in Rouen in 1862. Having escaped the penal colony in French Guiana the following year, he was still wanted by the French authorities.



Charles D'Hoy
Double murder case crime scene,
Lovendegem, 1882
 Carbon print, 24.1 × 31.5 cm

Reconstruction Photographs for Trials

The earliest crime scene photographs, which were shown at trials, date from the last quarter of the nineteenth century. These visual aids supplemented sketches and diagrams, providing a more detailed and accurate depiction of arson and violent or suspicious death cases.

To ensure that the crime scene remained undisturbed, the photographer was summoned as soon as possible. The corpses could only be moved and examined after the photography was completed. The photographer usually arrived at the scene with the investigating judge and the public prosecutor, who provided instructions on what to photograph. Before beginning his work, the photographer, similar to the surveyor or architect who made the sketches, took an oath solemnly promising to fulfil his duties to the best of his ability and conviction.

Unlike other court-appointed experts, such as physicians, forensic photographers and illustrators did not testify at the trial. Their work spoke for itself.

Specialised Forensic Photographers

From 1880 onwards, several photographers worked for the public prosecutor's office in Brussels.

Among them was Charles Thiel, who held this position until his death in 1902. During the same period, Wilhelm Nestler also worked as a forensic photographer. On 19 January 1882, he took what is probably the oldest surviving photograph of a crime scene: 'View of the room in which the body of lawyer Bernays was found.'⁸ Nestler received directions from Antoine Peereboom, the expert surveyor in charge of making the sketches and the site description. The purpose of the image was to determine the exact position of the victim.⁹ Once the photograph was taken, the surveyor marked on the floor the location of the furniture that had to be moved to allow the corpse to be taken into the adjacent greenhouse, where two physicians performed the autopsy. The murder trial in what became known as the Peltzer case caused quite a stir, even attracting international interest.

In Ghent, Charles D'Hoy worked regularly as a forensic photographer.¹⁰ As early as 1876, the public prosecutor's office called on him to photograph the scene of an explosion at the La Linière Gantoise factory, which killed four workers and injured another three. The oldest surviving crime scene photographs in East Flanders are of his making. On 30 January 1882, he was summoned to Lovendegem to record the site of a murder, theft and attempted arson. *Le Bien Public* wrote:



Wilhelm Nestler
Peltzer case, body of victim
Guillaume Bernays at the
crime scene, 1882
 Albumen print, 35 × 29.5 cm

Unknown photographer
Peltzer case, sketch of
the crime scene, 1882
 Carbon print, 31.1 × 31.2 cm



‘The operation was hampered by the lighting conditions in the house; nevertheless, the photographs are very successful and will undoubtedly be of immense importance if the perpetrators are discovered and it comes to an assize trial.’¹¹ The next day, a surveyor from the land registry made a sketch of the property, including a street map, an exterior view of the house and a floor plan of the building where the bodies were found. The images do not depict the remains: one of the corpses is concealed behind a barrel, while the other is at the threshold of an adjacent room, where the photo shows only a vast, dark stain. Did D’Hoy intentionally photograph the crime scene this way to prevent the viewer from seeing the naked, partially burned bodies? This never occurred again. In 1883, at the request of the investigating judge, he photographed a corpse retrieved from the river Scheldt, showing signs of a violent death. He also photographed the crime scene of a robbery and murder in Ledeberg, in which a woman was killed in her bedroom. The woman’s naked lower body is clearly visible.

The prosecutor’s office in Ghent also called upon Théophile D’Hauw, an engineer and chemist. On 17 May 1884, he visited the auxiliary prison, where an inmate had thrown a guard over the first-floor

railing three days prior. The victim survived the fall. D’Hauw returned a few weeks later to photograph the crime scene for a second time. He was probably asked to measure the drop height; two photographs reveal the height of the balustrade in relation to the floor. One of them shows a guard at the spot where the victim stood. The five photos do not reveal any traces of violence. Neither the perpetrator nor the victim is present.

Exceptionally, autopsy photographs have been preserved from an 1888 murder case in Eeklo. A man stabbed his pregnant girlfriend to death in a spruce forest.¹² A day after the young woman’s body was transferred to the local hospital, two professors from the newly established Forensic Medicine Laboratory at Ghent University arrived to conduct an autopsy in the open air. The photos are not posed. The focus is on the corpse.

At the end of the nineteenth century, photography gradually appeared in judicial investigations in Belgium, though its use was not yet widespread. It was not until the establishment of judicial police laboratories in the 1920s that photography became a standard tool in criminal investigations. This is also when professional police photographers replaced court-appointed commercial photographers.

NOTES

- 1 Laurence Druez and Xavier Rousseaux (eds.), *Scènes de crimes. La photographie policière, témoin de l’enquête judiciaire* (Brussels, 2023), 34–35; Peter Eyckerman, ‘Misdadigers op de foto in de 19de eeuw’, *Vlaamse Stam*, 53, 3 (2017), 258–259.
- 2 Druez and Rousseaux 2023, 99.
- 3 State Archives of Belgium, Beveren (RABe), *HA Antwerpen*, dossier 2320.
- 4 RABe, *HA Antwerpen*, dossier 2431.
- 5 RABe, *HA Antwerpen*, dossier 2348.

- 6 State Archives of Belgium, *Archief Vreemdelingenpolitie* (1160), 955.
- 7 RABe, *HA Antwerpen*, dossier 2376.
- 8 ‘Vue de la chambre dans laquelle a été trouvé... le cadavre de monsieur l’avocat Bernays.’
- 9 State Archives of Belgium, Brussels, *HA Brabant*, 1149, sub-dossier 80.
- 10 Paul Drossens, ‘CSI in Oost- en West-Vlaanderen. Forensische fotografie en het Gentse laboratorium van de gerechtelijke politie’, in Marjan Sterckx (ed.), *Crime Scenes. Interbelluminterieurs door de lens van de foren-*

sische fotografie (Ghent, 2021), 65–66.

11 ‘L’opération était rendue fort difficile par les conditions d’éclairage de la maison...; elle a néanmoins parfaitement réussi et les clichés auront sans doute un intérêt dramatique si, les coupables découverts, l’affaire est introduite aux assises,’ *Le Bien Public*, 2 February 1882.

12 State Archives of Belgium, Ghent, *HA Oost*, 692, dossier 7364.



Théophile D'Hauw
 Attempted murder crime scene,
 Nieuwewandeling prison, Ghent, 1884
 Albumen prints, 20.7 × 31.8 cm (mount)

A characteristic feature is a profound silence and a total absence of the subject's own voice.

How can we reproduce these images today without risking a repetition of the objectifying colonial violence to which Sakala was subjected? One possible approach lies in what Temi Odumosu describes as the 'ethics of care': a careful, mindful handling of the emotionally charged visual material from the colonial archive.¹⁸ This entails taking responsibility for how the images are reproduced; this includes every form of reproduction, whether in exhibitions, on posters or online. This means always providing background and context for each image; and including metadata such as additional titles and contextual descriptions that consciously challenge colonial logic by placing

Sakala's humanity front and centre. Moreover, it is sometimes desirable to explicitly explain these choices for educational purposes. This approach makes visible and counteracts the images' inherent violence. Another option is a restorative artistic intervention that engages in dialogue with the image. Another is a practice of refusal, in which the images are not displayed, in order to counteract the objectifying violence. It is crucial that this occurs in close collaboration with, or from within, the Congolese community. By taking these paths, we evolve towards a more caring, mindful approach to the images from the colonial archive – not founded on colonial appropriation, but rooted in a pursuit of recognition, historical awareness, emotional justice and healing.

NOTES

1 Visiting card of Prince Sakala (1886–87). Tervuren, Royal Museum for Central Africa (RMCA), Liévin Van de Velde Archival Fund, HA.01.0034.22.

2 In this essay, the term 'colonial archive' is used as a collective designation for archives, visual materials and sources produced during the colonial period that carry a colonial ideology and discourse. Although this case study focuses specifically on the 19th-century Belgian colonial archive, it exhibits features that are characteristic of the broader Western European colonial system and the discursive practices associated with it.

3 Lisa Lambrechts, *Constructing the Image of Blacks* (unpublished MA thesis, UGent, 2018), 76–139.

4 Programmes and invitations Willemsfonds, 28 November 1886, 30 January 1887, 10 March 1887. Tervuren, RMCA, Liévin Van de Velde Archival Fund, HA.01.0034.21.

5 Lambrechts 2018, 87; Adolphe Stroobant, 'Le capitaine Liévin Van de Velde', p. 3 on microfilm from Liévin Van de Velde Papers (1785–1932). Oregon, Knight Library, University of Oregon, coll. 048, s.d., Letters and documents International Association of the Congo, DT654.158 1966, Reel 2 (35025028741524).

6 Anonymous, 'Entrevue avec M. Le Lieutenant Vande Velde', 1 January 1886, 33–35. Tervuren, RMCA, Liévin Van de Velde Archival Fund, HA.01.0034.21.

7 M.R., 'Chronique Illustrée. Nos Gravures', *L'illustration européenne. Journal international de la famille* 21, no. 30 (1891), 467; Mathieu Zana Aziza Etambala, 'Antwerpen en de kolonie, van 1885 tot ca. 1920', in Many Nauwelaerts et al. (eds.), *De panoramische droom. Antwerpen en de wereldtentoonstellingen, 1885–1894–1930*, exh. cat. (Antwerp, 1993), 174.

8 Mathieu Zana Aziza Etambala, 'Carnet de

route d'un voyageur congolais: Masala à l'Exposition Universelle d'Anvers, en 1885.

Première Partie', *Afrika Focus* 9, no. 3 (1993), 224.

9 'M. Vande Velde... a ramené du Congo un jeune garçon de treize ans, Sakala.... C'est à notre avis, la démonstration la plus frappante de l'aptitude de la race nègre à la civilisation.... Sakala, il y a un an, vagabondait dans les bois qui entourent le village paternel, aussi peu vêtu que le permet un climat tropical.' Anonymous, 'Société d'émulation. La région du Congo et du Kwilou-Nisdi. Conférence de M. le capitaine Liévin Van de Velde', 21 January 1887, 69. Tervuren, RMCA, Liévin Van de Velde Archival Fund, HA.01.0034.21.

10 Anonymous, 'L'inauguration du Mémorial Vande Velde', *Flandre libérale*, 23 July 1888. Ghent, University Library, [Archive] Van de Velde, Joseph and Liévin, BIB.VLBL. HFL.V.003.17.

11 Anonymous, 'Betooging Van de Velde', *Gazette van Gent*, 23 July 1888. Tervuren, RMCA, Liévin Van de Velde Archival Fund, HA.01.0034.22.

12 The monument originally stood where the Museum of Fine Arts is now located. In 1913, to make way for the museum it was moved to its current location atop the rock formation beside the small pond. See Lisa Lambrechts Cruz, 'Standbeeld van Sakala op het monument van de gebroeders Van de Velde' / 'Statue of Sakala sitting atop the Van de Velde Brothers Monument', in *Wandelgids Publiek Park* (Ghent, 2021), 70–74.

13 Champal, 'Sakala', *La Réforme*, 23 October 1887. Tervuren, RMCA, Liévin Van de Velde Archival Fund, HA.01.0034.22.

14 Champal 1887, 'Anonymous, 'Chez le prince Sakala', *Gazette de Laeken*, 26 September 1886.

15 Although Congo was Leopold II's private colony until 1908, and we can only officially

speak of a 'Belgian colonial power' from 1908, the role and responsibility of the Belgian state and society cannot be ignored. Leopold's colony, recognised in 1885, was largely implemented and financed by Belgians; Belgian entrepreneurs and institutions actively profited from the oppression and exploitation of the Congolese populace, while the Belgian state was actively involved in the financing. See Marc Poncelet, 'Colonial Ideology, Colonial Sciences and Colonial Sociology in Belgium', *The American Sociologist* 51 (2020), 150–151.

16 The photo of Sakala by Camille Ectors is a cliché, as is indicated in the caption beneath the photograph reproduced in Albert Chapaux, *Le Congo historique, diplomatique, physique, politique, économique, humanitaire & colonial* (1894). The photo was taken between 9 July 1890, when Ectors departed for Congo, and June 1892, when he returned to Belgium. He never returned to Congo; see Lambrechts 2018, 131; Anonymous, 'Stadsnieuws. Naar Congo', *Het Handelsblad van Antwerpen*, 23 October 1887, 2.

17 Adolphe Stroobant, *Le boy Sakala de Vivi*, October 1942. Tervuren, RMCA, Raphaël Stroobant Archive, HA.01.0029.7; Charles Liebrechts, *Souvenirs d'Afrique: Congo, Léopoldville, Bolobo, Equateur (1883–1889)* (Brussels, 1909), 259; F.D.V., 'Gentse Kanttekening: Waaraan het 'Moorke' ons herinnert', *Het Laatste Nieuws*, 4 July 1948, 4; P.V.L., 'Gentse Kanttekening: Pioniers in Congo', *Het Laatste Nieuws*, 10 September 1950, 2.

18 Temi Odumosu, 'The Crying Child, On Colonial Archives, Digitization, and Ethics of Care in the Cultural Commons', *Current Anthropology* 61, no. 22 (2020), 289–301; Temi Odumosu, 'Sensitive Skin' (2022), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QilKlmsUp8I>; Saidiya Hartman, 'Venus in Two Acts', *Small Axe* 12, no. 2 (2008), 4.



(left)
Charles Dierickx
Portrait of Sakala, c. 1886
 Platinum print cabinet card,
 16.4 × 10.9 cm



(right)
Unknown photographer
Sakala and sons of Lieutenant
Mignolet of Bruges, 1886–87
 Albumen print carte de visite,
 9.2 × 5.8 cm



REVISITING PHOTOGRAPHIC HERITAGE: DECOLONIAL AND INTERSECTIONAL PERSPECTIVES

Sonia Mutaganzwa

In today's museum practice, it is no longer possible to make an historical exhibition without considering the context of the time and its contemporary significance. This holds especially true when a white institution organises an exhibition to inform and engage a diverse audience. With this responsibility front of mind, it is essential to develop a clear vision for integrating contemporary values and current research. In a nineteenth-century context, however, this ambition carries the risk of an anachronistic interpretation and forces one to ask a crucial question: how does one achieve multiperspectivity without rewriting the past? And how does one view images created in a different zeitgeist with a contemporary, critical gaze?



Dorothée J. Louise Detournay
Portrait of a woman, c. 1864
Albumen print carte de visite,
9.2 × 5.6 cm

Female Pioneers of Belgian Photography

Ingrid Leonard

The contributions of women to the history of photography have been underexposed for far too long. They played an active role in the development of photography in Belgium during the nineteenth century. Women were instrumental in all aspects of the field, from operating their own studios and taking over their late husbands' businesses, to working as retouchers, colourists and even cutting photographic plates. Often, their work remained hidden, or it was subjected to cultural, legal and economic restrictions.¹ As a result, Belgian photography in the nineteenth century was often perceived as the exclusive domain of white, middle- and upper-class men.

Museums decide which visions and views will endure. Recently, several international exhibitions and publications have highlighted the work of several women photographers in the nineteenth century, including Anna Atkins (United Kingdom), Arabella Chapman (United States),² Louise Laffon (France) and Alexandrine Tinne (The Netherlands).³ In Belgium, their names are still not well known. But, thanks to extensive research and multiple databases, such as the *Directory of Belgian Photographers*,⁴ knowledge of Belgian women photographers from that period has increased dramatically. The *Directory* – an online database of Belgian photographers active between 1839 and 1914 – was first compiled in 1997 by Steven F. Joseph, Tristan Schwilden, Marie-Christine Claes and Michiel Demaeght from FOMU. Another 100 names of female photographers have been added over the last five years. Today, we know of 321, which represents about 4% of the total number of photographers in the database. Despite their small numbers, these women offer a fresh perspective on the development of photography in Belgium.

Several extraordinary figures, discussed below, highlight the diverse ways in which women were active in this field between 1839 and 1914.

Pioneers in Metal and Paper

Madame Guyard: Travelling daguerreotypist

Elisabeth Vandenplas, later known as Madame Guyard, was one of the first female photographers in Belgium and one of the early travelling daguerreotypists. Shortly after the invention of the daguerreotype in Paris in 1839, photographers travelled to Belgian cities to offer their portrait services. Photographic studios were still rare in those early years. Vandenplas advertised in newspapers as 'Madame Guyard de Paris',⁵ which presumably increased her credibility as a photographer. Unfortunately, none of Madame Guyard's Belgian works have been found. However, portraits from her later period in Amsterdam, where she collaborated with Monsieur Guyard, can now be seen in the collections of Leiden University, Museum Rotterdam and the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, among others.

Louise Le Ghait: Work with a 'delicate charm'

Louise Reynders, better known as Louise Le Ghait or Madame L., was the first female amateur photographer in Belgium. In 1856, she became the first female member of the esteemed Société française de photographie (SFP) in Paris, and also the first woman to exhibit her work at an early photography exhibition in Brussels: the *Exposition de l'Association pour l'encouragement et le développement des arts industriels en Belgique*. Unlike other female international photographers, she did not take portraits, but rather landscapes and architectural scenes, using the process of salt printing. Her work included everyday scenes in

picturesque places, such as sheets drying on the grass in Mechelen. In a review in *La Lumière* in 1856, art critic Ernest Lacan praised the rare perfection and ‘delicate charm’ of Le Ghait’s pictures.⁶ Such adjectives are often used to describe art made by women. Today, six of Le Ghait’s salted paper prints are in the SFP’s collection.

Photo Studios

Before 1860, there were very few photographic studios in Belgium, and only the upper-middle classes could afford them. After 1860, the popularity and accessibility of photography increased dramatically and the number of photographic studios grew. This was due in no small part to the introduction of cartes de visite and cabinet cards, stiff paper calling cards in various sizes, usually showing a portrait photograph.

Dorothée Detournay:
A specialist in women’s portraits

In 1864, Dorothée J. Louise Detournay was running her own photographic studio in Brussels, an unusual occupation for a woman at that time. She took the pictures herself, specialising in portraits of women. This was a unique marketing strategy that she also highlighted in advertisements.⁷ After marrying Henri Dupont that same year, she continued to work – but in his studio. Certain cartes de visite mention ‘Dupont Mr & Mme (Henri)’. Following her divorce in 1877, Detournay continued her career as a photographer, in partnership with her son Georges. In the 1880s, she was a pioneer in the use of electric lighting in her photographs. She exhibited this kind of work at several exhibitions, including the *Exposition internationale d’Électricité* in Paris (1881), and received several prizes in Lille and Amsterdam.

Antoinette Roose: Gender M?

Antoinette Roose originally worked as a seamstress in Ghent. She was one of the first women to have her own photography studio. In 1860, she was working with her son. As an unmarried woman,

she used her maiden name and the initial ‘A’ on the cartes de visite. This use of initials makes it difficult to identify a photographer’s gender and, until 2020, the *Directory of Belgian Photographers* classified A. Roose as male. Because most practitioners were male, some women were mistakenly categorised as men. Thanks to recent research at FOMU, about 15 female photographers who had previously been classified as male have been rediscovered.

Gonthier-Cornand-Deton:
Photographic network of sisters

Photography was a craft. The secrets of the trade were passed on from father to son, but also from father to daughter, or between sisters and sisters-in-law. This was the case, for example, with the Gonthier-Cornand-Deton family. Marie Séraphine Gonthier-Cornand took over a large studio in Liège and operated it herself. Her younger sister Césarine, originally a portrait painter, took photos under her own name in Charleroi before opening the successful Deton-Cornand studio with her husband. Césarine taught many students, including her brother-in-law’s wife, Jeanne Deton, who went on to open her own photo studio in Mons. Jeanne used her own name on calling cards and handled the camera herself. Together, the sisters and sisters-in-law had branches in Charleroi, Liège, Namur, Ghent, Antwerp, Mons and Lille, among other places.

Commercial Growth

In the late nineteenth century, purchasing power increased, urbanisation accelerated and mass consumption emerged. Photography studios also grew in both size and number. Many studios started as single-owner operations, but they evolved into small businesses employing managers, receptionists, retouchers and colourists. Retouching was mostly done by women, as shown by the numerous advertisements for a *retoucheuse* (using the feminine form of the French term).⁸

Studios typically specialised in particular techniques. Cécile Schellens’ studio focused on



Louise Le Ghait
Blanchisserie à Malines, 1857
 Salted paper print, 21 × 24.3 cm

Photo studio advertisement
 for Dorothée Detournay
 in *L'Indépendance belge*,
 26 June 1864



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Front cover

Fernand Khnopff, *Portrait of Marguerite Khnopff*, c. 1900
Gelatin printing-out paper,
17.4 × 12.5 cm

Back cover

Ernest Huybrechts, 'L'explosion' in
La Catastrophe d'Anvers. 6 septembre, 1889. Album contenant 18 planches. Au profit des victimes (Antwerp: Section anversoises de L'Association belge de Photographie / Joseph Maes), 1889
Collotype, 17.7 × 14.7 cm



Flanders
State of the Art