

Through The Looking Glass:

Daguerreotype Masterworks From The Dawn Of Photography



Previous Page: Diptych: "Mother and Two Daughters," circa 1850, French or English, two quarter-plate daguerreotypes. According to the label copy, "The presentation, including printed French language text in the housing, suggests a French origin; the formal style with painted backdrop suggests English."

"Boy in Revolutionary War Outfit, New York City" by Josiah W. Thompson (active 1849–1860), circa 1850, American, quarter-plate daguerreotype.

By Kate Eagen Johnson

POUGHKEEPSIE, N.Y. — In an 1859 article in *The Atlantic*, Oliver Wendell Holmes dubbed the daguerreotype “the mirror with a memory” because it captured a reverse image of the sitter upon a silvered base. In his novel *The House of Seven Gables*, 1851, Nathaniel





"Reverend Stephen Brown with His Wood-grooving Machine" by Studio of Mathew Brady (1822–1896), circa 1850, American, quarter-plate daguerreotype. Brown was employed as a minister with the Genesee Conference, New York, before retiring to Washington, D.C. The famous Civil War photographer Brady operated portrait studios in New York and Washington.

Hawthorne posited the idea of the daguerreotype as revelatory of a sitter's true character, even as it moved from positive to negative depending on the viewing angle. The title of the exhibition currently at the Loeb Art Center makes yet another reference to photographic depictions



both elusory and piercing. "Through the Looking Glass: Daguerreotype Masterworks from the Dawn of Photography" runs until June 14 at Vassar College's Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center and includes more 140 examples belonging to Westchester County, N.Y., collectors Michael Mattis and Judith Hochberg. In a 2005 *The New York Times* exhibition review,

"Homeopathic Doctor Displaying Scalpels and Remedies," circa 1850, American, sixth-plate daguerreotype.

"Two Sisters, One Gloved" by Beckers & Piard (active 1850s), circa 1850, American, half-plate daguerreotype.

Benjamin Gennochio termed their holdings “probably the most comprehensive and important private collection of vintage photography in the United States.” The Vassar exhibition was organized by art2art Circulating Exhibitions, LLC. Queried why he was drawn to collecting photography in general and daguerreotypes in particular,



Mattis reflected, “When Judy and I started collecting vintage art photographs as graduate students 30 years ago, photography was very much the stepchild of the fine art market.

When we focused on daguerreotypes more recently, ‘dags’ were very much the stepchild of the photo market. Apparently we are partial to stepchildren!” He went on to observe



“Architectural Study with Church,” circa 1845–1850, half-plate daguerreotype.

"Twelve Gold Miners at Work, Including a Woman," ► circa 1850, American, half-plate daguerreotype. This image is considered extremely rare due to the presence of a female miner.



◄ *"Solarized Bull," circa 1850, sixth-plate daguerreotype. Since overexposure could result in a blue tint, some daguerreotypists used the technique to color the sky and other features.*

that “viewed through its finest examples, the daguerreian era produced photographic works every bit the equal of the best of art photography from any decade.” ([Continued on page 10-C inside the E-edition](#))

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