

Man Ray

Man Ray, *La Maison*
France, 1931
Photogravure
Museum no. E.1650-2001

PHOTOGRAPHY TEACHERS' RESOURCE

Explore the Photography Centre at the V&A

**Collecting Photography:
From Daguerreotype to Digital**

Key Stages 4–5: Photography, Art & Design

V&A

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Introduction

Photography has radically transformed the way we document and express the world around us. Today, photographs are created and consumed at a rapid pace, but early on the very act of making a photograph was challenging and time-consuming, requiring scientific knowledge as well as artistic ability.

In 1852 the South Kensington Museum (now the V&A) became the first museum to collect photographs. Since then its collection has become one of the largest and most important in the world. It grew significantly in 2017 with the transfer of the collection of the Royal Photographic Society, an organisation founded in London in 1853 with Queen Victoria and Prince Albert as its patrons.

The photography collection at the V&A spans the history of the medium, from its invention in the 1830s to the present day. The works displayed in the Photography Centre (Rooms 99, 100, 101 & 108), are highlights from the V&A's extraordinarily broad collection. They include outstanding examples of a range of processes, from early daguerreotypes to contemporary digital images.

Pre-visit activities

Looking

Search the V&A's collection online at: collections.vam.ac.uk
Look for work by these photographers: Lady Clementina Hawarden, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Man Ray, Alfred Stieglitz, Diane Arbus and Irving Penn. What are the hallmarks of their style? Create a series of photographs in homage to one of these photographers.

Selecting

Select photographs of different genres – for example, portraiture, landscape or abstraction. Create an adjustable viewfinder from two L-shaped pieces of card. Use the viewfinder to alter the crop of the photographs. Create new narratives or analyse detail.

Process

Explore the Photographic Processes webpage: vam.ac.uk/articles/photographic-processes
Compare and contrast different methods, their possibilities and limitations.

The Museum visit

Use the maps on the gallery walls to orientate your students when visiting the Photography Centre. Remind students that taking photographs is permitted but the use of flash is not.

Introduce key words such as frame, exposure, aperture, crop and depth of field to discuss how photography differs from other image-making processes, like painting and drawing. Download the accompanying student activity sheets and explore the following themes.

Document

Photography's supposed status as 'the medium that never lies' has been subverted by photographers who challenge what we believe as truth. HP Robinson and Cindy Sherman are both good examples of photographers staging fictional scenes for the camera. This is in contrast to photographers like Eugène Atget who documented the architecture of Paris around 1900, or Eadweard Muybridge who devised a way to accurately record the movement of animals.

Processes

Camera-less photography covers a range of photographic processes. Photograms are created by placing objects directly onto photo-sensitive paper and exposing them to light. Anna Atkins and Man Ray both worked in this way. Find their work on display and compare this photographic process with others in the Photography Centre. Other photographic processes represented in the collection include autochromes, C-type, collodion, collotypes, cyanotypes, dye destruction, dye transfer, gelatin silver, photograms, photogravures and Polaroids.

Context

Unlimited reproduction and the digital sharing of images allows for re-appropriation of meaning and context. Therese Frare's photograph of a dying AIDS activist was used in a Benetton marketing campaign. Robert Brownjohn used photography to inspire layout, design and typography. Adolphe Braun's photographs of flowers were used by designers to develop patterns for interiors and furnishings. Explore these works further by visiting the Prints & Drawings Study Room: vam.ac.uk/info/study-rooms

Follow-up activities/find out more

Visit the Dark Tent in Room 99 and watch a series of short films that explain photographic processes.

Visit the Project Space in Room 101 to explore new commissions made by contemporary photographers in response to the V&A's photography collection.

Visit the Photography hub page on the V&A website to find out more: vam.ac.uk/photography



DOCUMENT

Select a range of photographs in the collection that explore one or more of these key words:

- Frame
- Viewpoint
- Process
- Time
- Truth
- Detail

What is unique about these key words when talking about photographs? Discuss in groups what the image looks like, the narrative presented and what might happen if these conditions were altered.

Document your day at the Museum through photography. Create a storyboard of images using the key words to help compose your photos. Think about how viewpoint, framing and detail can shape your narrative.

Eadweard Muybridge (1830–1904)
Horse jumping a fence with rider
1887

Collotype
Prints & Drawings Study Room
Museum number: PH.1151-1889



Festuca ovina

PROCESSES

Explore the camera-less photographs on display and think about the materials, techniques and processes used to create them, such as chemicals, paper and manipulation.

How do camera-less images differ in the processes used to make traditional photographs, and how do they compare to processes used in producing other artforms, like painting, drawing and sculpture?

Try experimenting with one of your own photographs by using folds, pleats or tearing the paper to create a sculptural form, or overlay pencil drawings to extend and highlight areas of detail. What other techniques can you apply to photography?

Anna Atkins (1797–1871)
Festuca Ovina (Fescue Grass)
1854

Cyanotype
Photography Centre, Room 100, Level 2
Museum no. PH.380-1981



CONTEXT

Explore some of the photographs that are on display in the galleries.

How is technology changing the way we make and look at photographs?

Has social media changed the way we share images with each other?

Using your storyboard of images from the 'Document' activity sheet, upload them to Instagram or Twitter and create a unique hashtag to title the series, or use Snapchat and add text or drawings to change the context.

Robert Brownjohn (1925–70)

Street Level

1961

Gelatin silver print

Prints & Drawings Study Room

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