

The Museum of Modern Art

50th Anniversary



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MUSEUM TO PUBLISH BOOK EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP OF PHOTOGRAPHY TO THE TRADITIONAL ARTS

Before Photography: Painting and the Invention of Photography will be published in conjunction with The Museum of Modern Art's exhibition of the same title, on view from May 9 through July 5, 1981. A well-documented introductory essay, catalogue entries for each work in the show, and an extensive bibliography will be included in this book by Peter Galassi, director of the exhibition and Associate Curator in the Museum's Department of Photography. In addition, the 152-page book will contain 82 plates, nine of them in color.

Ever since the Renaissance invention of linear perspective, artists had considered vision as the sole basis of representation. But only gradually did they formulate pictorial strategies capable of suggesting the immediacy and relativity of everyday visual experience; only after centuries of experiment did they come to value pictures that seem to be caught by the eye rather than composed by the mind. Galassi argues that photography was born of this transformation in artistic outlook.

To support this argument the author has assembled forty-four innovative European paintings made in the half-century before the invention of photography was announced in 1839. These works, landscapes by Constable, Corot and their contemporaries, show an impressive independence from earlier standards of composition, an original sense of pictorial order based on a heretical concern for the most humble scenes. In their fundamentally

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modern pictorial syntax of synoptic perceptions and discontinuous, unexpected forms, Galassi identifies the critical shift in artistic norms that led to the invention of photography.

The paintings and drawings are followed by a comparable group of photographs from the first three decades of the medium. These works represent the considerable artistic capital that such outstanding photographers as Gustave Le Gray, Roger Fenton, and Timothy O'Sullivan made of the fact that the camera could not compose. They show, in other words, the talent with which the best early photographers embraced the artistic strategies that painters had long been inventing and which photographers could not avoid.

Before Photography is an overdue and thorough reconsideration of the relationship between photography and the traditional arts. It will be published in cloth and paper, \$22.50 and \$12.50 respectively, and will be distributed by the New York Graphic Society.

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