



N O I R S
B L A N C

A PHOTOGRAPHIC AESTHETIC

Collection of the Bibliothèque nationale de France

GRAND PALAIS

8 AVRIL - 6 JUILLET 2020

The commercialisation of a colour photographic process in the twentieth century could have sounded a death knell for black and white photography. Despite this, monochrome photography remains in place. From technical or financial constraint, black and white photography had acquired a firmly founded artistic bias by the middle of the century. Deemed elitist and backward-looking by some, for its defenders it represents a guarantee of graphic and artistic excellence, of poetry, of symbolic distancing, of universality. For them, it is Photography with a capital 'P'. The Bibliothèque nationale de France is an important place for the collection of black and white photography. In the 1970s and '80s, it accompanied the commitment of black and white photographers in the face of the intoxication with colour. Today, it supports the revival of monochrome photography and, especially, silver-based methods. The exhibition offers a resolutely formal introduction to these riches. By comparing different periods, currents and techniques, it examines the works of 204 photographers from 36 countries from the perspective of their black and white production, freeing itself of any chronological constraint. By its profusion, it invites the observer to gain a sense of all the power and creative vivacity of black and white photography.



THE ORIGINS OF BLACK AND WHITE PHOTOGRAPHY

Before the invention of colour photography by the Lumière brothers in 1903, one might think that all photography was limited to black and white. The reality is more complex: the early days of photography were typified by a varied range of tonalities in which pure black and white were the exception and sepia tones the most common. The negative/positive process patented by the Englishman Fox Talbot in 1841 made it possible to print proofs on paper in multiples and therefore also to vary these tonalities. The artist photographer could choose the colours of his prints by playing with the chemistry of the fixing baths or the nature of the papers. Gold print toning, known from the 1850s, produced deep blacks but was very expensive. Baryta or platinum papers appeared at the end of the century and further accentuated the contrasts between black and white. Certain subjects made the most of these contrasts: the mountain views of the Bisson brothers, *The Great Wave* by Gustave Le Gray, and the portraits of a prolific amateur photographer called Blancard. The strength of the blacks and whites and the variations of colours affect our perception of the image: the more it is contrasted, the more it is readable for our eye saturated with absolute blacks and whites, and the more it is nuanced, the more the distance of time becomes noticeable.

I. AIMING FOR CONTRAST

From the end of the nineteenth and throughout the twentieth century, the deep black of silver grain rendered black by chemical development along with the almost pure white of industrial baryta paper dominated photographic practice: they became THE colours of photography. Using these tools, the avant-garde movements of the 1920s and '30s invented formal variations, playing on the sharp juxtaposition of light and dark. From the 1950s, in response to the growth of colour processes and their chromatic dispersion, the choice of an op-

position based upon and characterised by black and white was increasingly asserted. This aesthetic of contrasts was taken to an extreme in the 1970s and '80s. By exploiting a simple contrast in values, photographers were able to make the contours of their subject emerge clearly. This essential, striking style intensifies the perception of reality: placed on a contrasting background, the forms stand proud and impose themselves, black on white, white on black. The fortuitous meeting of motifs with opposing tones were also reason to take the shot: photographers would watch and capture the contrasts of the world able to be sublimated by black and white.

WHITE PAPER

A sheet of photographic paper saturated with white surrendered to the marks, the traces, the contrasting drawing of shapes and silhouettes, snow is a subject eagerly chosen by photographers. Snow photography crosses all currents, be it a humanist, formal or even documentary. Beneath its apparently bland simplicity, however, it is an extremely difficult motif that requires technical skill. The large expanse of white changes the usual balance of contrasts. Excessive brightness and possible overexposure erase all detail, the very matter of the snow, the roughness that it covers. Mist, instead, suffocates the natural colours, with the potential pitfall too of a grey image lacking in contrast and missing out on any light effects. Photographers have to adapt their know-how to recreate the poetry of winter snapshots and the majesty of snowy expanses.

BLACK IS BACK

By pushing the contrasts of black and white, photographers reveal the lines of force and the actual volumes that structure reality and, in particular, the architecture of urban and industrial modernity. Some go so far as to print them in the form of line drawings, composed of pure dark forms against a light background devoid of any halftone. Accentuated by the clear oppositions of

tones, the latent geometry of the world is organised and revealed in flat areas, or emphatic and stylised lines. In this, black and white photography joins the ranks of sculpture influenced by abstract painting. Through the evocations created by lines, imprints of reality, and by its powerful rendering, monochrome photography can also bring out a subtle script, drawn from natural forms. Isolated from any context, the fine photographic outlines are reminiscent of a pencil or drypoint line on a white page. By translating the drawing of the world and the world into drawing, photography asserts itself as heir to the graphic arts.

II. LIGHT AND SHADOW

Light is the necessary condition for photography. When the shot is taken, the flow of light inscribes the forms before the lens on to the sensitive surface of the negative. To control this fleeting and changing luminosity and to modulate its effects, the photographer needs a whole range of technical equipment: reflectors, shutters, flashes, more or less sensitive film stock... If the light reaches the light-sensitive layer in excess, the negative will be overexposed and thus too dark. It will be impossible to render details or halftones in the print. Depending on the position of the camera relative to the light source, backlighting, shadows or glare can occur; all of these are anomalies that the photographer sometimes deliberately causes. Light also forms patterns that structure the image. Rays, beams, circles, nets and halos contribute to the drama of a composition and create moments of grace. Some photographers even adopt light as their only subject, exacerbated to the point of abstraction. They return to the very etymology of their art: the writing of light. Black and white excels at recording the possibilities offered by light and shade. While colour distracts the eye, black and white refocuses it.

CAPTURING THE NIGHT

Until the end of the nineteenth century it was impossible to photograph the night, and it remains complex even today. The photographer can choose to use a flash but may prefer to increase the sensitivity of the sensor, increase the exposure time or open the diaphragm to the maximum. He can also take advantage of optical defects - blurring, luminous halos and so on - to sublimate the gloom. Surrounded by urban halos or left in its natural darkness, the night offers a free terrain in which daytime hierarchies and boundaries fade away. Flooded with artificial lighting, Paris - the Ville Lumière - is paced by the nocturnal idler or stalked by the reporter in search of disorder, while, in the nocturnal wilderness, photographers seek out the ancestral poetry of the world. In all cases, night time photography responds to a temptation to invert values. White shapes - the Moon, lightning, street lights - are outlined against a background of shadow, echoing the aesthetic of the photographic negative.

BLACK MAGIC

Until 1950-1960, artists were forced to use black and white for technical reasons and also, for some, for financial ones. In addition, while the colour negatives launched in 1935 could only be printed by laboratories, monochrome techniques enabled photographers to make, process and even manipulate their prints independently, in the dark of their own studio. This is how, from the 1920s, avant-garde artists created a new aesthetic that overturned academic codes from this binary process: inverted positive prints inspired by the aesthetics of the negative; white prints of objects placed on light-sensitive paper (photograms); the blurring of black and white values by solarisation of the image while it is being developed, or drawing using lines of light are all inventions that drove the making of photographs to its quintessence of writing with light. Nowadays, the invasion of colour in the production of images has not diminished the appeal of these black and

white light experiments to its practitioners, leading them back to the very sources of their art.

III. COLOUR CHART

By over-exposing or under-exposing their film, by “pushing” the whites or the shadows in a print, some artists give substance to their desire for an absolute black or white. Their black or white monochromes veer respectively towards an excess or dilution of all matter: dazzling white or opacity dissolve the contours of the world to the point of abstraction.

But between pure white and saturated black, there is a range of grey tones matching all the waves in the light spectrum. The expression ‘black and white’ makes us forget that these two values are only the extremes in a wide range of halftones. The exceptional quality of silver papers in the 1970s and ‘80s helped reveal the infinite graphic and artistic possibilities offered by these nuances of tones.

This rich chromatic palette from black to white forms a colour chart, and thanks to its infinite variations, it excels in giving a sense of surfaces and materials. The photographer is thus able to compose with his silver salts as though it were a modelling material.

BLACK AND WHITE IN COLOUR

The ultimate avatar of a black and white aesthetic: some contemporary photographers process black and white scenes using colour techniques. Why use a colour process to depict a subject in black and white, when a monochrome technique would seem more appropriate? At a time when digital technology has made it easier to tap into a wide chromatic range, what is the point of working a black and white image using colour processes? This attenuation of the colour range makes it possible to render the motif abstract and leads artists to establish a certain distance from reality and their practice. They are then able to stress the intrinsic qualities of the photographic

medium, sometimes playing on its affinities and differences with painting, architecture or sculpture. Through the use of chromogenic or digital printing these contemporary photographers have managed to sublimate something that was only a perceptual constraint linked to the use of classic black and white photography. Far from making their images atonal, in their own way they have established a theory of coloured contrasts full of nuances.

Curators:

Sylvie Aubenas, Director of the Print and Photography Department of the BnF

Héloïse Conesa, Curator in charge of contemporary photography in the Print and Photography Department of the BnF

Flora Triebel, Curator in charge of 19th century photography in the Print and Photography Department of the BnF

Dominique Versavel, Curator in charge of modern photography in the Print and Photography Department of the BnF

Exhibition design:

Maud Martinot

Graphic design:

Sabir Design studio

Lighting design:

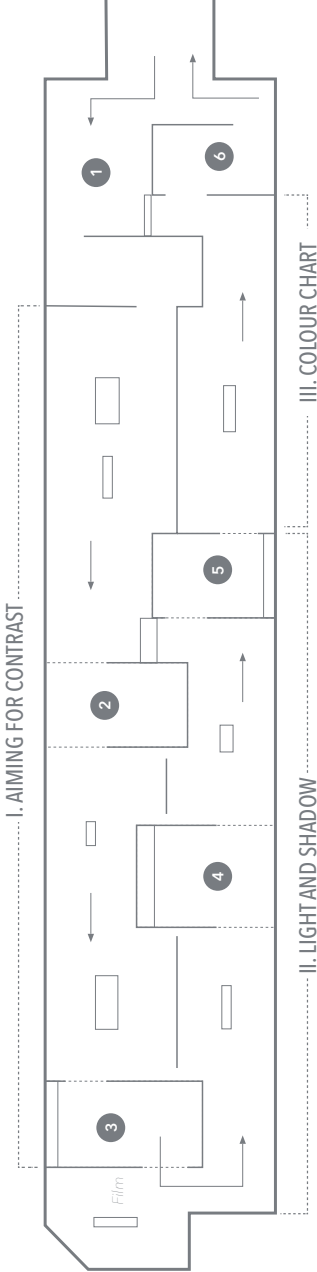
Vaste

This exhibition is organised by Réunion des Musées Nationaux - Grand Palais and Bibliothèque nationale de France.



{BnF | Bibliothèque nationale de France

EXHIBITION MAP



- 1. THE ORIGINS OF BLACK AND WHITE PHOTOGRAPHY
- 2. WHITE PAPER
- 3. BLACK IS BLACK
- 4. CAPTURING THE NIGHT
- 5. BLACK MAGIC
- 6. BLACK AND WHITE IN COLOUR

AROUND THE EXHIBITION

CULTURAL PROGRAMME

Priority access with an invitation available on grandpalais.fr

OPENING CONFERENCE

Wednesday 8 April - 6.30 pm

Black & White: a photographic aesthetic

Presentation of the exhibition by the curators, all four of whom are curators of the Print and Photographic Department of the BnF: Sylvie Aubenas, Director of the Department, Héroïse Conesa, in charge of contemporary photography, Flora Triebel, in charge of 19th century photography, and Dominique Versavel, in charge of modern photography

WEDNESDAY MEETINGS

Wednesday 22 April - 6.30 pm

Writing the world in black and white

Round table chaired by Héroïse Conesa, Curator in charge of contemporary photography at the BnF. Four of the photographers in the exhibition will talk about their aesthetic choices and their use of black and white. With John Batho, Jean-Christophe Béchet, Gilbert Fastenaekens and Laurence Leblanc, photographers

Wednesday 13 May - 6.30 pm

Black and white: working with shadow and light

Round table chaired by Dominique Versavel, Curator in charge of modern photography in the Print and Photography Department of the BnF.

Photography, technique and expertise: encountering the visual professions. With Fanny Boucher, Master of Heliography, Atelier Héliog'g; Thomas Consani, printmaker, Dupon-Phidap; Fabienne Pavia, publisher, Le Bec en l'air, and Daniel Regard, Les Artisans du regard

Wednesday 27 May - 6.30 pm

In defence of black and white

Round table chaired by Sylvie Aubenas, Director of the Print and Photography Department of the BnF and Flora Triebel, Curator in charge of 19th century photography at the Print and Photography Department of the BnF.

Collecting, exhibiting, curating and sharing: the passion for black and white. With Françoise Paviot, Galerie Françoise Paviot; Jacques Damez, Galerie Le Réverbère; Anne Cartier-Bresson, honorary curator, Department of Restorers at the Institut National du Patrimoine, and Christoph Wiesner, Artistic Director of Paris Photo

FILMS

"Stories in black and white" series

In film as in photography, black and white is making a major comeback on our contemporary screens.

Wednesday 3 June at 3 pm

Lover for a Day

by Philippe Garrel, 2017, with Éric Caravaca, Esther Garrel and Louise Chevillotte, 1 hr 16 min

at 4.30 pm

Ida

by Pawel Pawlikowski, 2013, with Agata Kulesza, Agata Trzebuchowska and Dawid Ogrodnik, 1 hr 22 min, original version with French subtitles

at 6 pm

Tabu

by Miguel Gomes, 2012, with Telmo Churro, Miguel Gomes and Hortêncílio Aquina, 1 hr 58 min, original version with French subtitles

at 8 pm

Blancanieves

by Pablo Berger, 2012, with Maribel Verdú, Emilio Gavira and Daniel Giménez Cacho 1 hr 44 min, original version with French subtitles

EUROPEAN NIGHT OF MUSEUMS

Saturday 16 May

Late opening and free admission to the Black & White exhibition from 8 pm to 1 am (last entry at 12.15 am)

THE FESTIVAL OF MUSIC

Sunday 21 June from 4 pm

A sensorial and original experience: equipped with headphones, visitors can enjoy a musical stroll through the Black & White exhibition.

AT THE BnF - MAIN AUDITORIUM

Quai François Mauriac, Paris 13e

Free admission

"Lunchtime cinema" screening series

Tuesday 12 May from 12.30 pm to 2 pm

In the Street

by James Agee, Helen Levitt and Janice Loeb, 1948, 16'

Landscape (for Manon)

by Peter Hutton, 1987, 12'

Boston Fire

by Peter Hutton, 1979, 8'

Screening and discussion with Federico Rossin, film critic, on three American 16 mm films in black and white, screened in their original format.

PUBLICATIONS

EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

Black & White: a photographic aesthetic

Collection of the Bibliothèque nationale de France

26 x 24 cm, Bound, 264 pages, 220 illustrations, €45

AROUND THE EXHIBITION

CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT

AUDIOGUIDES

In French, English, for children in French
On site, from €5 Or using the app, from €2.29,
download on Google Play and the Appstore
tinyurl.com/appgliirandpalais
Book individual ones at grandpalais.fr

ADULTS

Guided tour

Elegant and graphic, for press or for fashion, casting the dark of night or the dazzle of snow, black and white has been an arena of expression for a host of photographers, from Nadar to Diane Arbus. Take a tour with our guide and explore an exceptional collection of prints!
Duration: 90 min.
Price: €20 €24 Concessions: €14
Group ticket (2 adults and 2 young people aged 16 to 25): €54

Adult workshop tour

Dessins en promenade

Do you like drawing? Come and experience the Grand Palais atmosphere on your own or in a group, during a restricted opening session. Take a tour with our tour guide and complete the pages of a sketch book featuring creations inspired by black and white photographs with a particular emphasis on the artwork.
Drawing equipment not provided.
Date: Tuesday 26 May, 2 pm
Duration: 2 hrs
Price: €30 €24 Concessions: €22

FAMILIES AND CHILDREN

Interactive family tour

Take a family tour with our tour guide and discover the beauty of black and white photography through play and interactivity.

Tour exclusively suited to children and young people from 7 to 16 years old.

Duration: 90 min.
Price: €20 €24 Concessions: €14
Family ticket (2 adults and 2 children aged 16 and under): €47

Family workshops

Suited to children and young people from 7 to 16 years old. After exploring the photographs exhibited at the Grand Palais, children and adults can take part in a Sunday art workshop at the Ateliers du Carrousel of the Musée des Arts Décoratifs. The workshop involves experimenting with contrasts and shading in black and white through different manual processes such as montage, stencilling and tracing. Each family will leave with the series they have created!

Equipment provided.
Overalls or stain-resistant clothing are recommended.
Dates: Sunday 7 June, 14 June or 5 July from 10.30 am to 1 pm
Duration: 90 min.
Price: €33 for 1 adult and 1 child €23 per additional adult. €10 per additional child
Venue: Ateliers du Carrousel - Musée des Arts Décoratifs:
111 rue de Rivoli, 75001 Paris



DISABLED

LSF (French Sign Language) tour

Discover 150 years of black and white photography over the course of two hours with a sign language tour guide.

Duration: 2 hrs
Price: €7 for disabled card holders
Assistant price: €10
Date: Wednesday 3 June, 6.30 pm or Saturday 20 June, 10.30 am

Audioguides

Free visit of the exhibition with Audio description (en) on the Grand Palais mobile application (Google Play, Appstore)tinyurl.com/appgliirandpalais

GROUPS

Discover 150 years of black and white photography with a tour guide.

Adults


Guided tour
Duration: 90 min.
Price: €215 €24 Concessions: €150

School parties

Guided tour
Audience: from CE2 to high school
Duration: 90 min.
Price: €105

MULTIMEDIA

THE GRAND PALAIS APP

 The essential tool for keeping up to date with the latest news and programme at the Grand Palais, enjoy exhibitions and events, save your favourite works and the best parts of the tour. Download for free on Google Play and the Appstore: tinyurl.com/appgliirandpalais

MOOC A brief history of photography

Get acquainted with the history of photography! Read the 6 chapters of the MOOC at mooophoto.com

ON INSTAGRAM

Try out the **Black and White filter** in augmented reality from the artist Inès Longevial. Enter our **photo competition** organised in partnership with Fisheye

ONLINE:

Find articles, interviews, games and more for young people at grandpalais.fr

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Subscribe to the YouTube Channel of the Grand Palais
Subscribe to the Le Mag newsletter at grandpalais.fr

SPRING 2020 SEASON

GRAND PALAIS

POMPEII

Immersive exhibition – Archaeological treasures – New discoveries

25 March - 8 June 2020

An immersive exhibition immerses the visitor in the heart of Pompeii through 360° screenings in very high definition, soundscapes and 3D reconstructions of streets and houses. Combining technology with archaeology, the exhibition tells the fascinating story of this city and the (re)discoveries uncovered by the excavations that are still being conducted to this day. Sharing the latest archaeological treasures and discoveries, the Grand Palais reveals the many faces of Pompeii.

MUSÉE DU LUXEMBOURG

MAN RAY AND FASHION

9 April - 26 July 2020

Exploring the work of Man Ray from a fashion perspective for the first time, this exhibition highlights the work he produced for leading couturiers and magazines. In 1921, when fashion photography was still in its infancy, Man Ray began to develop a new and modern aesthetic. His experiments blurred the boundaries between art and fashion, making him one of the inventors of contemporary fashion photography.

NOIR & BLANC

8 APRIL - 6 JULY 2020, AT THE GRAND PALAIS,

South-East Gallery, entrance H

Open: every day except Tuesday
Sunday, Monday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday from 10 am to 8 pm
Wednesday from 10 am to 10 pm

Free **late night opening for young people under the age of 26** on the first Wednesday of each month, from 12 pm to 10 pm. last entry: 9.15 pm
Wednesday 6 May, 3 June, 1 July

Closed on Friday 1 May 2020

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This exhibition is supported by the Fondation Louis Roederer.



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