

Keynote Lecture

Science Photography in the Marketplace

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The business of science photography ran in all directions, especially after the 1850 introduction of wet collodion on glass technology and the numerous photographic exhibitions at London's Crystal Palace in 1851. Few markets went untouched: education, publishing, tourism, mining, printing, designing, paper making, art galleries, photographic industry, and government agencies to name only a few. This talk explores three of the main markets where science photographs circulated, highlighting the networks of science photographers, the photographic companies who promoted science, and finally government sponsored photographic campaigns.

Part 1: The Market of Natural Wonder

Geology, Meteorology and Microscopy formed their own grand tour of volcanoes, clouds, geysers, rock formations, crystals and more. Their often striking images were bought and sold around the world as research images, art, design motifs, tourist mementos, and publication illustrations. While they formed a significant part of most photographic exhibitions, they were also serious objects of scientific study. Some scientists made their own images, some collected images by others, and some did both. The network of scientists and the exchange of science photos reveals how closely the art and science were connected.

Part 2: Seduced by Colour

In the interwar period of the 1920s and 1930s, the science of colour photography and the colour photography of science advanced beyond all recognition. Companies at the forefront of colour technology, like Agfa and Kodak, actively pursued scientific ends for their colour materials. There was little talk of 'false' or 'colorized' colour, but much enthusiasm for the natural photographic colour palette. These two decades of optimism about the empirical promise of colour didn't last, but it did highlight the role of Industry in science photography.

Part 3: Government, Photography and Observation

From the early survey campaigns to extensive collections of photographs, government agencies have been the catalyst and main funder of some of our most iconic science photography. The government related observations, labs and projects pattern science photography with certain visual tropes and leave traces of political policies in their enormous archives. These archives in turn, pattern much following research.



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