



Lesson 9: Photography and the History of Art

Background

The earliest daguerreotypists sought inspiration for their compositions from fine art. Photographed portraits resembled their painted counterparts. Similarly, the format of the earliest landscapes echoed the layout of printed and painted landscapes. The connections to fine art did not stop at format. Artists also collaborated with daguerreotypists by applying color paint and tint to the surface of a black and white photograph. In the earliest hand-tinted photographs, the sitters often remained black and white, while the drapery behind them was heavily brushed in red paint. This kind of ham-fisted tinting disappeared quickly as the number of talented colorists increased along with the proliferation of photographic studios, and hand-tinting was directed into enhancing the features of the living subjects in photographs. One of the most well-known examples of collaboration between a daguerreotypist and artist in Cincinnati is found in prints by James P. Ball that were hand-colored by artist Robert Duncanson.

Prompt

How did James Ball and Robert Duncanson collaborate in the 1850s? (Hand tinted and colored daguerreotypes, backgrounds, Ball's Mammoth Pictorial.)

Reference Images



Image 1

Boy with Riding Crop, 1848-1852, hand-colored daguerreotype, James Presley Ball, Cincinnati Art Museum.



Image 2

Portrait of a man and a woman, c1846, hand-colored daguerreotype, Ezekiel Hawkins, National Gallery of Canada.



Image 3

Mrs. W.C. Witzel, c1853, miniature salted paper print with applied color, William S. Porter, Smithsonian American Art Museum.



Image 4

The Hercules Family, c1850, daguerreotype with applied color, James Presley Ball, National Gallery of Art, Ross J. Kelbaugh Collection.

Academic Fields

Fine Arts:

- Apply relevant vocabulary to define and describe works of art.
- Interpret art by analyzing the characteristics of its context and media.
- Connect various art forms to their social, cultural, or historical purposes.
- Analyze how art is used to inform or influence the beliefs, values, or behaviors of a community.

- Build relevant vocabulary to describe and analyze works of art.
- Distinguish visual characteristics related to the meaning of works of art.
- Interpret how community context, beliefs, and resources influence works of art.
- Discover how cultural differences impact personal perceptions.
- Identify aesthetic choices within works of art.
- Increase relevant vocabulary to describe and analyze components related to visual art.
- Identify the relationships between community or cultural values and trends in visual art.
- Understand how works of art reflect diverse communities, viewpoints, and perspectives.
- Recognize contributions of the visual arts in everyday life.
- Examine personal and social contexts related to works of art.
- Examine various aesthetic theories and visual culture.

Documentary Reference Clips

Clip 1: James Presley Ball, 22:32 -30:35.

Discussion Questions

- How does photography shift from a science to an art over the course of the 1800s?
- Where do we see overlaps between artists and photographers, especially in terms of turning photos into prints or paintings and colorizing photos?
- How does the compositional structure of photographs relate to fine art? Where does it differ?
- Were photographers of the 1800s artists? Are photographers today artists?

Activities

- Create your own mammoth pictorial panorama to depict people, places and/or current issues that are important to you. Present it to the class.
- Look at *Boy with a Riding Crop*. Can you find any painted portraits that use a similar format?
- Analyze images in color for their tone, emotion, meanings, social significance. Now use any image editing program to remove the color and analyze again. Then go in reverse—black and white or sepia to color. How does the presence or absence of color affect your reaction to these images, and their relative utility for understanding the past?
- If you were the colorist, and were provided with only one color, which would you choose, and how would you use it? Colorize your own black and white image through an image editor, then critique it as a class. How has color augmented or detracted from the image, or changed your impressions of the sitters?

Online Resources

- “J.P. Ball and Robert S. Duncanson: An African American Artist Collaboration,” exhibition, Smithsonian American Art Museum, September 15, 2023 – March 24, 2024. The website for this past exhibit has a lecture video about research on Ball and Duncanson by Dr. Deborah Willis, New York University. SAMM link: <https://americanart.si.edu/exhibitions/ball-duncanson>
- “Robert S. Duncanson,” *Freedom Center Voices*, National Underground Railroad Freedom Center, Cincinnati. NURFC link: <https://freedomcenter.org/voice/robert-s-duncanson/>
- *The Power of Art and Freedom: A Look at Duncanson’s Cincinnati and his Enduring Freedom*, article by Tamera Lenz Munte, Associate Curator, Taft Museum of Art, Cincinnati, Taft Museum link: <https://www.taftmuseum.org/blog/posts/2020/august/the-power-of-art-and-freedom>
- *James Presley Ball: An American Journey*, Google Art website article, James DaMico and Scott Gampfer, Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati. CMC link: <https://artsandculture.google.com/story/james-presley-ball-cincinnati-museum-center/dQWWhr2PbNAV4Kw?hl=en>
- *Currier and Ives: Colorful Pictorial Records for the People*, Gilcrease Museum, The Archive/Library Collection, <https://collections.gilcrease.org/articles/article-currier-and-ives-colorful-pictorial-records-people>

- *Dawn's Early Light: The First 50 Years of American Photography*, Cornell University
<https://rmc.library.cornell.edu/DawnsEarlyLight/exhibition/handcolored/index.html>

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