

**PHOTOGRAPHY: ITS
RECOGNITION AS A FINE
ART AND A MEANS OF
INDIVIDUAL EXPRESSION**

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Photography: Its Recognition as a Fine Art and a Means of Individual Expression by Thomas Harrison Cummings

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FINE ART AND A MEANS OF INDIVIDUAL EXPRESSION
By **THOMAS HARRISON CUMMINGS**

Editor of "Photo Era," the American Journal of Photography
The Practical Photographer
Art in Photography

AN ADDRESS

Delivered before the Photographers' Association of America, at the
Quarter-Centennial Convention held in Boston August 8-11, 1905

Boston, 1905
Photographers' Association of America



GEORGE G. HOLLOWAY
PRESIDENT, P. K. OF A.



PHOTOGRAPHY

ITS RECOGNITION AS A FINE ART AND A MEANS OF INDIVIDUAL EXPRESSION

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN: Boston is indeed a city rich in historical associations, but among all the memories of the past there is none we prize more highly than the fact that professional photography, of which you are such a distinguished part, first saw the light of day here and took its first rise in the United States sixty-four years ago. It is an actual fact that the first professional studio, with a skylight, ever built in America was erected in this city, and up to four years ago we had the oldest living professional photographer in the world, Josiah Johnson Hawes, of Boston. Though in the ninety-fourth year of his age, he did his own operating and posing until the last. His venerable figure and quaint studio in Tremont Row was a striking landmark in this city for over sixty years.

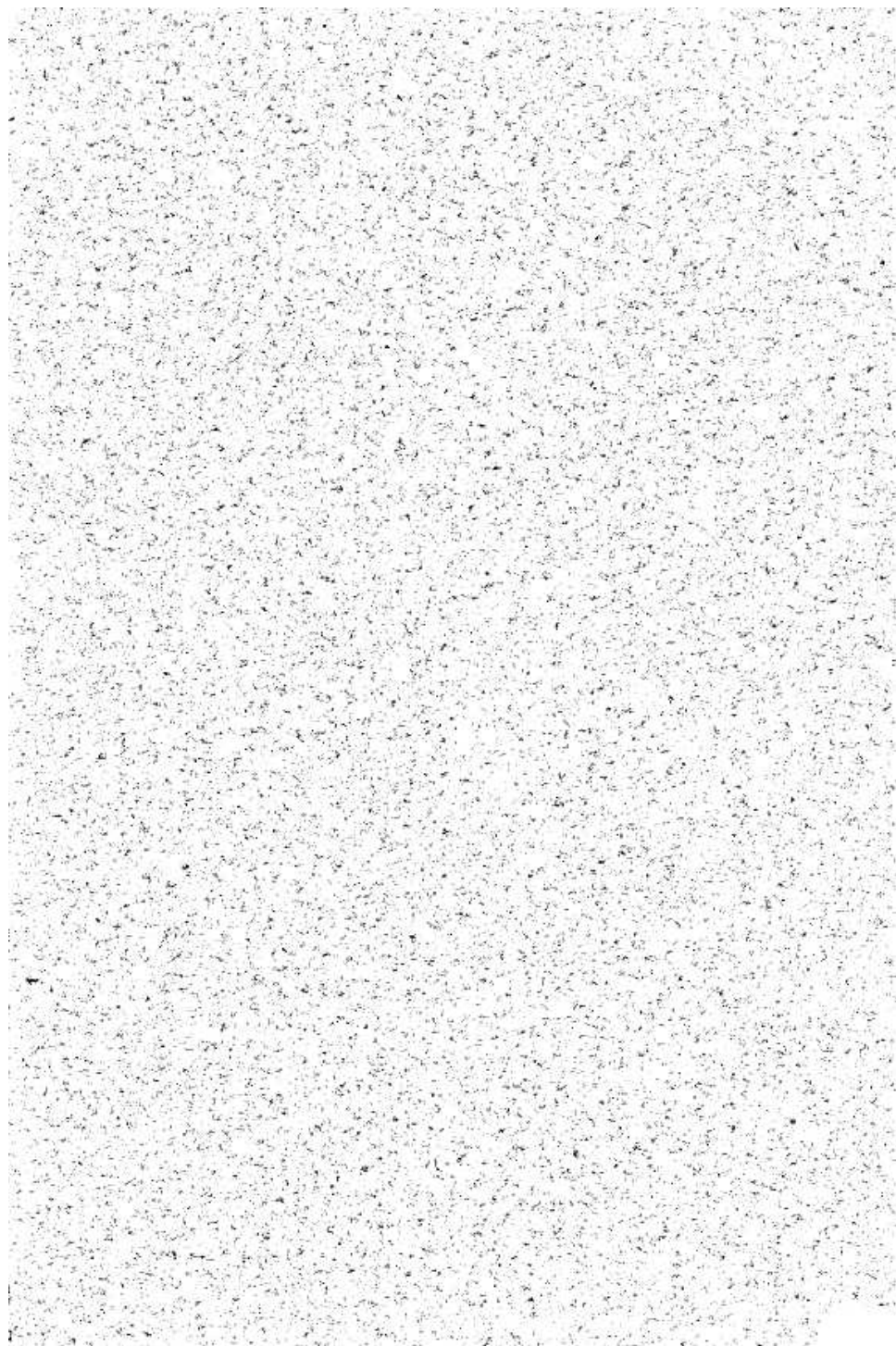
In 1841, only two years after Daguerre had communicated his discovery to the Academy of Sciences in Paris, and in the same year that Fox Talbot first gave the Royal Society in London a description of his process for making a negative, Mr. Hawes, our fellow townsman, was making daguerreotypes in Boston. He was a young man of thirty and was painting portraits in oil when Daguerre's representative arrived here, and he took the first agency for his process established in the United States. Two years later Doctor Draper, of New York, reduced the time of exposure necessary from thirty minutes to twenty-five seconds. The process now being practical, Mr. Hawes associated with him a partner named Albert Southworth. Together they built the first skylight for sun pictures ever built in America, and this studio of Hawes and Southworth was famous for nearly half a

century for fine portrait work and was one of the sights of this city, located not far from this spot.

Fifty years ago was also the golden age of literature, art and oratory in Boston. There was Daniel Webster, Rufus Choate, Charles Sumner, Edward Everett, Robert C. Winthrop, all of whom sat for their pictures to Mr. Hawes, and the loftiest peak in all that mountain range of intellect, from the standpoint of pure eloquence, Wendell Phillips, the great abolitionist, the silver-tongued tribune of the people. Among his oratorical achievements was a famous lecture called "The Lost Arts," conceded to be the most popular and charming lecture ever delivered from an American platform. It was mainly an attempt to prove that the ancients surpassed the moderns in all kinds of knowledge, whether of the sciences or of the arts. There are certain lines, he used to say, in which the moderns are content to acknowledge their indebtedness to the ancients. Take poetry, painting, sculpture, architecture and the drama, and anything that relates to beauty in any form, the modern world takes its inspiration from the ancient.

You tell the poet that his lines remind you of Homer, and he is crazy with delight. Stand in front of a painting, in hearing of an artist, and compare its coloring to a Titian or a Raphael, and he will remember you forever. I remember once standing in front of a bit of marble in Rome carved by Powers, a Vermonter. I said to an Italian standing near, "Well, now, that seems to me to be perfection." "To be perfection?" shrugging his shoulders. "Why, sir, that reminds me of Phidias," as if to remind one of that Greek was a greater compliment than to be perfection. And so he concluded that this very choice of phrases betrayed a confession of inferiority, and we of the modern world have added hardly a single line or sweep of beauty to the antique.

I wish that Mr. Phillips could have been present here to-day to see and to hear this story of art in photography as told by this quarter-century convention of the Photographers' Association of America,—Photography, youngest among the graphic arts, not a lost art but a distinctly new and modern art, unknown to the ancients, invented, developed and wholly perfected by the people of our day and generation. I wish it had been permitted him, I say, to stand here to-day with all his polite knowledge of ancient and modern times and to realize, as we are privileged to, the perfection to which this art has now grown; how, within the brief space of fifty years it has grown from a vague suggestion of





O. J. VAN DEVENTER
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an image on a metallic plate, in the early days of Daguerre and Fox Talbot, to a rich carbon or platinum print of to-day, technically superb and artistically perfect—sometimes as beautiful as anything the painters can give us, composition, tone, color, all combined to produce beauty. At last, he would say,—for Mr. Phillips was honest,—there is something new under the sun and that is a sun picture. This arrangement of line, this development of curves, this massing of light and shade, is as an Italian master would compose in the fifteenth century. There is a new era of light dawning in photography—it is a strictly modern form of expressing art and beauty never anticipated by the ancients.

I am announced to speak to you this morning on the Recognition of Photography as a Fine Art. When this announcement was first made public some of my editorial friends among the fraternity said, "Cut it out," "Make it short, Cummings; the conventions are done to death on this subject of Art." I countered on them by saying that they were so swallowed up by the tide of commercialism, chasing the almighty dollar, that they lost sight of the higher interests of the profession. However, I promise not to detain you long in dealing with my subject and I will be brief.

There is a story attributed to the Father of our Country, Gen. George Washington, of a man who went into a Revolutionary inn and asked for a drink. The landlord, who was a little penurious, pushed out a wineglass about half the usual size and when the man had swallowed the contents in one gulp the landlord turned to him and said, "That glass out of which you are drinking is forty years old." "Well," said the thirsty traveller, contemplating its diminutive size and smacking his lips, "It's the smallest thing of its age I ever saw."

Now photography is sixty odd years old, but unlike the wineglass, it is the biggest thing for its age that I ever saw. Why, do you know that it took painting a thousand years and the arts of wood engraving and etching five hundred years each to secure recognition from the world as fine arts. But photography, in fifty years, has risen to the same level, and if we may judge the future by the past it bids fair to distance all the others in the field of art expression. Like electricity in the scientific world it is the coming agency in the artistic world, because it offers a solution of combining the useful and the beautiful. I sometimes wonder if the average professional photographer appreciates to the fullest the dignity of his calling?