

Exhibition: *Acting Out: Cabinet Cards and the Making of Modern Photography, 1870–1900*
Dates: August 8–November 7, 2021
Location: Resnick Pavilion



(Image caption on page 3)

(Los Angeles, CA—June 28, 2021) The Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) presents *Acting Out: Cabinet Cards and the Making of Modern Photography, 1870–1900*, the first in-depth examination of the cabinet card phenomenon in the United States. Measuring 6 1/2 by 4 1/4 inches, roughly the size of a modern-day mobile phone screen, cabinet cards gave rise to a golden age of photographic portraiture in the second half of the 19th century. Where photographs had once functioned as solemn records of likeness and stature, cabinet cards offered a new outlet for entertainment and remembering life's everyday moments, allowing for different poses, details, action-ready gestures, and an array of props. *Acting Out: Cabinet Cards and the Making of Modern Photography, 1870–1900* was organized by John Rohrback, Senior Curator of Photographs at the Amon Carter Museum of American Art, where it was on view August 15–November 1, 2020. The LACMA presentation is curated by Britt Salvesen, Curator and Head of the Wallis Annenberg Photography Department.

Britt Salvesen said, “*Acting Out* fills in an important chapter in the history of photographic portraiture—a transition from the early days, when getting a photograph was expensive and uncomfortable, to the modern era, when everyone has a camera and makes their own snapshots. While little is known about the cabinet card makers or the subjects themselves, the photographs provide a lively glimpse into the past, showing how people learned to perform for the camera.”

Exhibition Organization

Cabinet cards transformed the way Americans collected and shared photographs of family and friends. Organized thematically and featuring more than 200 works, *Acting Out* investigates how photography became a performative medium, as it is often used today. The exhibition begins with **Caught in the Act**, focusing on actors, orators, and other public figures, who were among the first to embrace cabinet cards. This section examines how the creative innovations employed by New York photographer Napoleon Sarony (1821–1896) and his cohorts built public enthusiasm for a new kind of photographic portraiture founded on a relaxed sense of immediacy, which influenced studio photographers across America. The next section, **The Trade**, looks at the entertaining and evocative ways that professional photographers worked to overcome low prices and fierce competition, and to stand out from their peers. Their creative solutions gave rise to the ubiquity of cabinet cards across America by the 1880s. **Sharing Life** reveals the ways in which cabinet cards, often the favored means for recording and celebrating family life, captured the joys and transits of life, from birth to death. Finally, **Acting Out** examines Americans' acceptance of the camera as a tool for shared amusement and performance as they toyed with photography's pretense of reality and truth.

Related Programming

Anthony Lepore and the R.J. Arnold Photography Archive

Art Talk | September 13, 2021 | 6 –7 pm PT

Free, RSVP required | The event will take place online via Zoom

The recently restored photographic archive of R.J. Arnold reveals the diversity of San Luis Obispo County in the late 19th century. In conjunction with the exhibition *Acting Out: Cabinet Cards and the Making of Modern Photography*, photographer Anthony Lepore and LACMA curator Britt Salvesen discuss the evolving role these images play in our understanding of the history of photography and of California at the turn of the century.

Exhibition Catalogue

The exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue produced by the Amon Carter Museum of American Art and edited by John Rohrbach, with essays by Rohrbach, Erin Pauwels, Britt Salvesen, and Fernanda Valverde.

Credit

This exhibition was organized by the Amon Carter Museum of American Art.

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Lee Offield, Mr. and Mrs. Anthony and Lee Shaw, Lenore and Richard Wayne, Marietta Wu and Thomas Yamamoto, and The Kenneth T. and Eileen L. Norris Foundation.

About LACMA

Located on the Pacific Rim, LACMA is the largest art museum in the western United States, with a collection of nearly 142,000 objects that illuminate 6,000 years of artistic expression across the globe. Committed to showcasing a multitude of art histories, LACMA exhibits and interprets works of art from new and unexpected points of view that are informed by the region's rich cultural heritage and diverse population. LACMA's spirit of experimentation is reflected in its work with artists, technologists, and thought leaders as well as in its regional, national, and global partnerships to share collections and programs, create pioneering initiatives, and engage new audiences.

Image caption: Gilbert G. Oyloe, *Ossian, Iowa, Woman*, 1880s, albumen silver print, Robert E. Jackson Collection, photo courtesy of the Amon Carter Museum of American Art; W. A. White, *Wilson, Kansas, My first baby friend Tompie and His pet*, 1896, collodion silver print, Robert E. Jackson Collection, photo courtesy of the Amon Carter Museum of American Art; Benjamin J. Falk, *New York, New York, Helena Luy*, 1880s, albumen silver print, Amon Carter Museum of American Art, Fort Worth, Texas, P2016.120, photo courtesy of the Amon Carter Museum of American Art; Alfred U. Palmquist and Peder T. Jurgens, *St. Paul, Minnesota, [Skater]*, 1880s, albumen silver print, Amon Carter Museum of American Art, Fort Worth, Texas, P2016.111, photo courtesy of the Amon Carter Museum of American Art

Location: 5905 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA, 90036. Lacma.org