

EXHIBITION
02 / 11 / 2015 - 31 / 12 / 2015

On the Camera Obscura

The obsession with capturing images

MONTSERRAT DE PABLO

MAX PLANCK INSTITUTE FOR THE HISTORY OF SCIENCE



INSIDE THE CAMERA OBSCURA I, 2013. Digital pigment print 59,5 x 42 cm.

"As I observed the fascinating image produced in the camera obscura and as I tried to draw it, I felt that same urge which the forefathers of photography felt to capture it. This drove them to search for a way to focus this image and capture it just as it appears, in as precise a way as possible."

This exhibition shows the work process followed in a research Project carried out by Montserrat de Pablo at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science (MPIWG) in Berlin over the course of 2013, 2014 and 2015. The idea sprang from her doctoral thesis *La cámara oscura como prehistoria de la fotografía* (The camera obscura as a prehistory of photography), defended at the University of Castilla-La Mancha (Spain) in 2014 and completed during her time at the MPIWG. This is a monograph thesis on the camera obscura, which provides a broad overview of its evolution by means of a timeline and a database of illustrations related to the camera obscura.



The camera obscura as the prehistory of photography time line, 2014. (detail)

Working with the MPIWG's camera obscura, the artist was able to verify the experimental and artistic dimension of the camera obscura in a practical way and to study its functions and different uses throughout history; from the old questions about how an image is formed through a small aperture

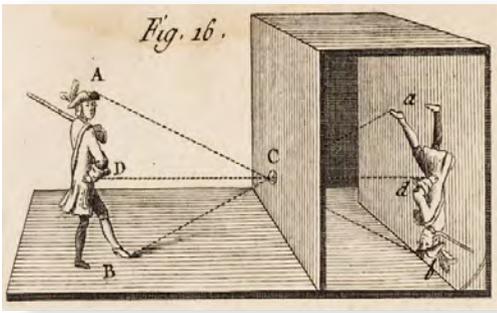
(pinhole) and why the image appears round even though the aperture is irregular, to various innovations such as the use of lenses, diaphragms, mirrors, etc., and onto the early days of photography

when optics and chemistry were combined

and the image produced by the

camera obscura was captured in a direct and mechanical way, allowing nature to replicate itself with all its lights and shadows, just as the forefathers of photography had dreamed.

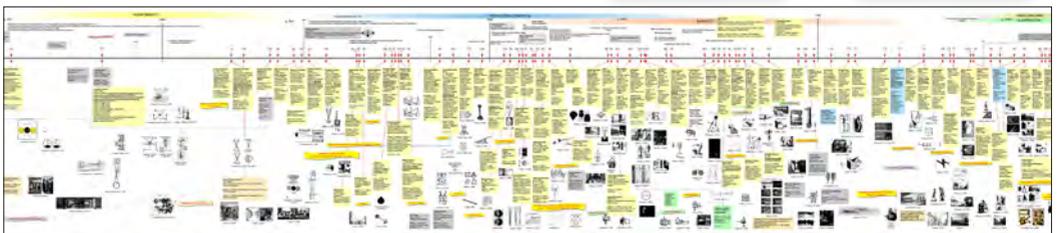




Encyclopédie méthodique. Recueil de planches. (1789) Vol. 4.

When the light reflected off an object placed inside a dark space passes through a pinhole, an exact image of the object is projected upside down on the opposite wall. The scientist, artist and philosopher observe the image formed inside the camera obscura and try to hold onto it, to make it their own. Throughout history, the camera obscura has been used as a model for explaining human vision, as a scientific research tool, as a means of faithful representation, as a means of amusement and popular entertainment and as a philosophical metaphor. A technical precedent of visual culture, it evolved alongside the changing ways of seeing, representing and understanding the world.

The documentary section, which is on display in the library, features the timeline in an enlarged format and a selection of images from the database, in the form of a visual map that summarises the history of the camera obscura and shows the important milestones attained within each historical period, allowing the observer to see how they are interrelated. A selection of old books on the history of the camera obscura, which belong to the MPIWG library, are on display in the Rare Books section.



The camera obscura as the prehistory of photography time line, 2014. (detail)



The purpose of this exhibition is to illustrate the whole work in progress, the practical as well as the documentary aspects. Drawings and photographs produced with the MPIWG's camera obscura; internal and external perspectives, different variations of the same theme and a series of portraits of members of staff at the MPIWG, produced with the camera obscura in the form of a "group portrait".

INTERIOR MPIWG F I, 2014
Direct Positive RC-Base Silver Gelatin
Print 49 x 49 cm.



INTERIOR MPIWG D VII, 2014. Graphite on paper, 42 x 59 cm.



MPIWG GROUP PORTRAIT, 2014. Direct Positive Fiber-Base Silver Gelatin Print 24 x 18 cm. (each)



EXTERIOR MPIWG D VI, 2014 Graphite on paper, 59 x 84 cm.

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