

The legacy of Nicéphore Niépce

October **17** th 2015...

January **17** th 2016

Opening

Friday October **16** th / **7** pm



This exhibition has been made possible thanks to the support of the Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication / DRAC Bourgogne and the Société des Amis du Musée Nicéphore Niépce, and with the participation of the Centre Georges Pompidou / Musée national d'art moderne, the FRAC Champagne-Ardenne and the Jean-Kenta Gauthier gallery.

The legacy of Nicéphore Niépce

250 years after his birth, and almost two centuries after the first experiments that led to the invention of photography, what remains of the figure of Nicéphore Niépce? His founding work continues to fascinate and inspire artists today.

We know that the man was talented, with an intelligence powered by curiosity. Nicéphore Niépce's life as a researcher and inventor indeed offers a striking example of stubbornness and fervour.

He was infinitely tenacious, he experimented empirically from a place of naivety. For him photography, the mechanical image, was a new continent: « I am like Christopher Columbus when he made his late but certain discovery of a new world... We are moving forward with probes in our hands, on our boat of adventure; and soon the crew will all shout... land! land! ¹ »

He reached land in 1824 with the development of the heliograph. Finally the action of light on a photo-sensitive surface allowed an image captured in a camera which then could be reproduced and fixed. *Le Point de vue du Gras* taken by Niépce circa 1826 – and considered as the oldest photograph currently in existence ² – consisted of a tin plate onto which Niépce managed to “record” the view from his window in Saint-Loup-de-Varenes, outside Chalon-sur-Saône.

Nicéphore Niépce's legacy has no antecedents and made us a people of images, inhabitants of a new continent inhabited by him alone. But in the uncertain world of contemporary culture, Niépce's intervention has taken on so much importance that it has become the very definition of modernity. We still don't have the measure of its effects, even better, the strange consequences. The open window is in fact a Pandora's

¹ / A letter from Nicéphore Niépce to Alexandre du Bard de Curley, “Au Gras, le 24 mai”, BnF, fonds Janine Niépce.

² / Coll. Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas, Austin.

Box that the heirs to the genius inventor never cease to explore.

This exhibition is dedicated to these heirs. From Paolo Gioli to Daido Moriyama, it shows how contemporary creation has taken over both the character to which it renders homage but also of the result of his experimentation that it gleefully reinterprets.

Daido Moriyama's devotion to Niépce thus brought him on a pilgrimage on the tracks of the inventor, from Saint-Loup to Austin, Texas. "As soon as I found myself faced with this view [Saint-Loup-de-Vareennes], the image of shadow and light from Niépce's iconic photograph started to replace the real landscape in front of my eyes and suddenly, I had the feeling that I could see through Niépce's eyes." A reproduction of *Le Point de vue du Gras* hangs over the bed in the photographer's Spartan room "so as not to forget the origins and essence of photography."

This *Point de vue* that has been badly reproduced so often is part of everyone's unconscious. It comes through in a photograph by **Bernard Plossu** taken by chance during a trip to Portugal from the window of the train he was sitting in.

The same photograph inspired **Andreas Müller-Pohle** for his Digital Scores. *Le Point de vue du Gras* was digitalised then reborn in code as a series of alphanumerical signs.

Raphaël Dallaporta, opened the helio-engraving image file of the Cardinal of Amboise ³ with word processing software. In the resulting immense series of abstract characters he then wrote the secret coded figures used by Niépce in his correspondence with Daguerre. The resulting final image contains

the trace of the interaction between the two inventors.

The omnipresence of computers now allows Niépce's work to be reinterpreted in ways that go from the most mathematical to the most zany.

Joan Fontcuberta recomposes *Le Point de vue du Gras* in the form of a photo-mosaic of images found on Google Images.

Olivier Culmann transforms Niépce's posthumous portrait painted by Léonard François Berger ⁴, in an Indian portrait studio ⁵, overdoing the digital retouching.

Patrick Bailly-Maitre-Grand's homage comes through the constant redefinition of the basics of the mechanical image backed up with the scientific history of photography. His credo is to discover and experiment with old techniques. With the *Gouttes de Niépce*, he takes shots of landscapes through drops of gelatine that work as lenses that he then superimposes on the image of the same blurred landscapes.

"In this laborious home-made effort, one should see a nostalgic quest for photography's primitive years when everything was yet to be discovered with a box, a piece of glass, some chemistry and the element of chance."

This reworking of the photographic medium is at the centre of the work produced by **Paolo Gioli** as an homage to Niépce. At the end of the seventies he shifted into Polaroids, experimenting with its potential like someone discovering the past, reinterpreting Niépce's iconic images using new materials.

The variety of viewpoints brought to the table by a group of photographers with such singular origins and careers is evidence of the wealth of Nicéphore Niépce's legacy.

3/ Helio-engraving from the collections of the musée Nicéphore Niépce

4/ Painted in 1854, over twenty years after the death of the model; this painting is kept at the musée Nicéphore Niépce.

5/ A reference to his series *The Others*, which was shot in India and is on show at the same time at the musée Nicéphore Niépce.

Artists /

Patrick Bailly-Maître-Grand

(France, 1945)

Lars Kiel Bertelsen

(Danemark, 1965)

Alexandra Catiere

(Belarus, 1978)

Olivier Culmann

(France, 1970)

Raphaël Dallaporta

(France, 1980)

JH Engström

(Suède, 1969)

Joan Fontcuberta

(Espagne, 1955)

Ralph Gibson

(États-Unis, 1939)

Paolo Gioli

(Italie, 1942)

Daido Moriyama

(Japon, 1938)

Andreas Müller-Pohle

(Allemagne, 1951)

Bernard Plossu

(France, 1945)

Emmanuelle Schmitt-Richard

(France, 1968)

In tandem with the exhibition:

12 photographers pay homage to Nicéphore Niépce in letters accompanied by their "first photograph" or the shot that made them become photographers.

The texts are brought together

in a book entitled

"Cher Nicéphore..."

Éditions Bernard Chauveau

Texts by Sylvie Andreu

and François Cheval,

and the photographers:

Jean-Christophe Ballot, John Batho,

Elina Brotherus, Raphaël Dallaporta,

Valérie Jouve, J.R., Mathieu Pernot,

Bernard Plossu, Reza,

Patrick Tosani et Sabine Weiss.

48 pages

ISBN: 978 2363061515

20 €

(To be published in October 2015)

1 / Andreas Müller-Pohle
Digital Scores I
(after Nicéphore Niépce)
1995
© Andreas Müller-Pohle

2 / Daido Moriyama
Tokyo, Japan
2008
© Daido Moriyama Photo Foundation
courtesy of the artist,
Akio Nagasawa Gallery (Tokyo)
and Jean-Kenta Gauthier (Paris)

3 / Patrick Bailly-Maître-Grand
Les Gouttes de Niépce
2006
© Patrick Bailly-Maître-Grand



1



2



3

4 / Alexandra Catiere

N. N.

2011

© Alexandra Catiere

5 / Raphaël Dallaporta

Correspondances, 2015

after Le Cardinal d'Amboise,

Helio-engraving, 1826,

coll. musée Nicéphore Niépce

© Raphaël Dallaporta,

courtesy Jean-Kenta Gauthier (Paris)

6 / JH Engström

Le fantôme de Niépce

2004

© JH Engström

4



5



6



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every day
except Tuesdays and holidays,
9.30 ... 11.45 am
and 2.00 ... 5.45 pm

Free entrance

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