

## Photography as Both Art & Document What is AI Going to Do to Art? (Part II)



LOS ANGELES (Noema Magazine) -- Trust in a camera's ability to produce objective pictures was built up over the nineteenth century by emphasizing the technology's externality to human subjectivity. Fox Talbot celebrated his estate's ability to draw itself because it removed human interpretation. His French contemporaries, Louis Daguerre and Joseph Nicéphore Niépce — with equally solid claims to the invention of the medium — insisted on the elimination of the draftsman as a critical step in the "fixing" of nature's visual expressions.

An existing literature in the history of science traces how the development of the photograph helped negotiate "objectivity" as a neutral conceptual category. In nineteenth-century science, photographs of biological and anatomical samples displaced illustrations as a more trustworthy form of visualization, even if they were less clear. Photographs could be fuzzier and more visually ambiguous than hand-made illustrations, but their mechanical nature helped them circulate as comparatively more reliable.

Framing photography as distinctly outside the realm of human fallibility was one of the technology's biggest selling points. The maintenance of this idea, however, prompted difficult questions about attribution. If a photograph was truly an automated form of draftsmanship, could photographers be thought of as artists?

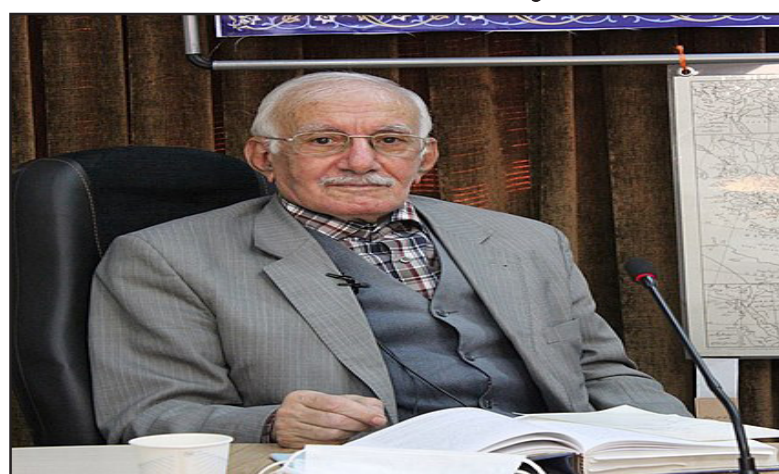
The production of a photograph certainly couldn't happen without human operators, but could they be considered a creator more than someone using a machine in a factory?

As with AI-generated artworks, the "automation" of draftsmanship prompted new ways of thinking about authorship. One early contender for photography's true author was light itself, acting autonomously on behalf of the sun. An early form of the technology invented by Niépce in 1826 required a full day of exposure to the sun and was thus coined "heliography," or "sun writing." English art critic Elizabeth Eastlake, describing the emergent genre in the 1830s, referred to photographic tools collectively as a type of "solar pencil," using light to draw upon the camera's lens. This was decried — but not contradicted — during the Salon of 1859, when the interminably grumpy French critic Charles Baudelaire skewered photography as a form of fanatical sun-worship.

Baudelaire's 1859 rebuke indicates that the presumed objectivity of a photograph was not yet recognized as a universal value. He mocked French aristocrats who believed that true art was an exact replication of nature, describing Daguerre as the Messiah of a "vengeful God." "And now the faithful says to himself: 'Since photography gives us every guarantee

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## Prominent Iranian Historian Passes Away



TEHRAN -- Prominent Iranian history scholar, geography researcher and university professor Parviz Azkaei (Spitman) passed away on Friday morning in his hometown of Hamedan, western Iran. He was 84.

Born in April 1939 in Hamedan, Azkaei received education in his hometown Tehran and Manchester where he received his PhD under renowned British orientalist and historian John Andrew Boyle.

His scholarly work were centered on history and philosophy, including on the life and works of 12-century Iranian mystic and philosopher Ayn ul-Quzat Hama-

dani. He has written extensively on bibliography and the history of science.

'Letter of Hamadan' (Hamadan-Nameh), 'Letter of Baba Taher' (Baba Taher-Nameh), 'Contemporary History of Hamadan', and 'Culture of Hamadan' are among his best-known books.

In January 2015, Azkaei donated his personal library, containing 7,500 volumes of books and more than 6,000 volumes of scientific and cultural magazines, to Hamadan Central Library.

He also dedicated his residential house in Shokrieh neighborhood in Hamadan to be used as a public library.

# Islamic Art in European Museums (II)

ISTANBUL (TRT World) -- From the moment Napoleon set foot in Egypt in 1798, the Arab, and thus Muslim, world took centre stage in the European imagination. In trying to understand their own place in the history of the world, the Europeans began to construct negative archetypes of the Muslims. This phenomenon, which later came to be known as Orientalism, set in motion several movements, and the collecting and exhibiting of objects from the Muslim world became a key strategy in the shaping and re-shaping of the Western imagination.

The army of social scientists, historians and surveyors that joined Napoleon on his mission came, for the most part, to the same conclusion: these dark desert nomads and poverty-stricken dwellers found in the mazes of ancient cities were not the same people that once ruled the known world and pioneered the fields of science and astronomy — and they were to be treated accordingly.

Today, the Louvre, the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Victoria and Albert Museum, the British Library in London, and the Pergamon Museum in Berlin house significant collections of rare and valuable objects collected from across the vast Muslim world.

These collections — and the museums' attempts to consolidate over a thousand years of culture and art in a few rooms — provide great insight into how these insti-



tutions still view and present Islam and the wider 'Muslim world.' Whereas the objects on display signify sophistication and historical brilliance, there is no narrative that connects the past with the present. And this is no coincidence.

Muslims have always struggled to be fairly and accurately represented in the European imagination, but it's not for lack of trying. In recent years, exhibitions funded — and in part, narrated — by organizations from within the Muslim world have attempted to 'correct' old historical misunderstandings.

In 2009, the Victoria and Albert Museum partnered with Art Jameel, a private Saudi philanthropy group, to launch 'The Jameel Prize competition.' In 2021, it awarded first prize to Saudi artist Ajan Gharem for his widely-praised piece, 'Paradise Has Many Gates.' According to the artist, the title of the piece refers to the different

paths to Paradise described in the Qur'an. The artwork replicates the design of a traditional mosque, but is made of the cage-like chicken wire used for border fences and detention centers.

"The mosque's material provokes anxiety, but it also renders its interior visible and open to the elements... The installation also seeks to demystify Islamic prayer for non-Muslims, tackling the fear of the other at the heart of Islamophobia," the artist says on his website.

Is the artist attempting to explain the suffocating socio-religious norms of some Muslim societies that force people into mosques? Or is he trying to 'demystify' Islam in an attempt at 'tackling the fear ... at the heart of Islamophobia?' If paradise has many gates, what do these gates look like and what do they lead to? Is paradise a cage? And are the adherents to this faith prisoners?

With rising rates of anti-Muslim hatred in the UK and Europe, one would hope that such institutions would pay special attention to prevent misunderstandings about Islam and stereotypes that portray its adherents as intolerant and dangerous.

In early 2020, The British Museum held an exhibition titled 'Inspired by the East: How the Islamic world influenced Western art.' The exhibition, however, would have been better off being called, 'Orientalist art: How the West viewed the East.'

With careful narration, the display of the works of some of the most famous orientalist artists in Europe — from Jean-Léon Gérôme and Antoni Fabres to Ludwig Deutsch and Frederick Arthur Bridgman — could have been a learning experience aimed at re-educating audiences and correcting pervasive falsehoods. But this was not the case.

Instead, the exhibition was an audacious display and celebration of the European imagination, of an 'East' that merely existed in the artists' minds as something that could be molded as they saw fit.

There was no commentary on the social and cultural damage that resulted from the reductionist, and often inaccurate fantasies. The exhibition also failed to highlight that these celebrated pieces were almost always entirely contrived, based on racist and offensive stereotypes

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## U.S. Festival Awards 'A Poetess'

TEHRAN -- The World Music & Independent Film Festival (WMIFF) in the U.S. has awarded Iranian short flick 'A Poetess'.

Made by Sahra Fathi and Saeed Dashti, 'A Poetess' is about Sara who is hesitant to choose between aborting her child and immigrating, or staying in her country.

Considering arguments and issues with her husband and by realizing the truth about him, she makes up her mind and plans for a new future.

The cast list of the movie includes Amir Jafari, Linda Kiani, Nima Shabannejad, and the director Fathi.

'A Poetess' went on screen at some global events, including the International Women Filmmakers Festival in Turkey, and the Cannes Film Market in France, and won the award for the best foreign film at the California Women's Film Festival in the U.S.

The WMIFF is an international film festival that takes place annually in Washington D.C. It was established to celebrate and provide a platform for the achievements of international cinema artists.

## Pottery Vessels Dating Back to 1st Millennium Seized

TEHRAN -- Seven pottery vessels have been seized in the Zanjan province of Iran, a local official has said.

The head of a police unit in charge of preserving the cultural heritage in Zanjan province said the seized objects date back to the first millennium BC.

Police have detained one person in connection with the seizure, Colonel Nasser Habaibian added. The seven historical objects were seized in Khodabandeh county, he said.

The seized objects include five pottery jars and two bowls, he stated.



As enshrined in Iran's law, any excavation in order to obtain historical property is prohibited in the country.

## Picture of the Day



One of the most remarkable places in Siraf in Iran's Bushehr province is its historic graveyard located in the valley of Lirudy Shilo. There are also ruins of the luxurious houses of extremely rich traders who made their wealth through the port's success.