

Swiss Camera Museum

A model of a photography studio from the end of the XIXth century



The realisation of this model on a scale of 1:20, enabling a detailed restitution of the various areas, necessitated research in archives and museums, in order to gather the maximum number of sources and libraries: workshop photographs, works and manuals from this period dealing with photography and its applications, richly illustrated with detailed plates, and finally the supplier catalogues of photographic materials.

We referred to Hugo Lienhard, a model-builder specialising in this type of restitution, who knows how to create the perfect illusion, both of stone and of metal and glass, while using as far as possible original materials such as wood.

The building housing the workshop took a great deal of inspiration from Nature – A Review of the Sciences and their Applications in the Arts and Industry.

The illustrations are directly downloadable on the site

<http://www.ceramuseum.ch/en/N7634/exposition-permanente-de-en.html?M=7563>

Other illustrations are available on request.

Swiss Camera Museum - Grande Place 99 - CH-1800 Vevey

Internet: www.ceramuseum.ch - E-mail: ceramuseum@vevey.ch

Tel: ++41. +21.925.34.80 - Fax: ++41. +21.921.64.58

Tuesday to Sunday 11 am – 5.30 pm and public holidays falling on a Monday

1 The entrance hall

The secretary is in her office in the entrance hall. Spacious and welcoming, it enables the first visitor of the day to already discover some photographic works, which she has selected to immortalise it. A number of tasks await this versatile person: opening the mail, welcoming clients, arranging meetings, keeping a careful note of the various jobs carried out for the clients in the appropriate register, organising the deliveries and running the accounting for the studio.

2 The waiting room

In the luxurious waiting room decorated with framed portraits displayed in different ways, the photographer's wife receives the first clients, who at first have all the time in the world to peruse the albums made available to them by the mistress of the house, and to imagine the staging that will suit them best, while also selecting the setting in which they would like to be photographed. They must also decide in which sizes and formats they would like to have their photos, once printed.

3 The shooting studio

The model can adjust his/her attire in the area provided behind the screen in the corner of the posing lounge.

In the shooting studio or posing lounge, bathed in light thanks to a glass panel facing north, the walls are treated in blue to soften the dazzling effects of the light.

The studio camera rests on one stable foot with a device that enables its height and angle of inclination to be adjusted; it is equipped with a special lens for portraits: a slightly long focal length and wide aperture to reduce the posing time. The sensitive glass plates are generally in 18x2cm or 24x30 cm formats, or thanks to reduction frames, even smaller.

4 The plate sensitisation and development laboratory, or dark room

It's in the laboratory or dark room lit by a filtered yellow or red light that the glass plates are sensitised just before the shooting, and subsequent development. It is usually the photographer's assistant who ensures that he has all the necessary products within easy reach.

5 The store room for glass plates

In the glass plate store room, an adequate quantity of glasses in their correct sizes needs to be selected for the day's work. These plates will be cleaned with the greatest of care and then polished. The place can also serve as the workshop for various repairs.

6 The negative retouching studio

At ground floor level in the negative retouching studio, in front of a curtained window, to reduce the glare, the negative retoucher is at work; he sits at a specially-equipped desk where a mirror directs the light under the negative, which lies on a frosted glass, with its sensitive surface upwards. A magnifying glass, scrapers, brushes and poster colours, rubbers and pencils, varnish and turpentine are the main tools.

7 The laboratory for the preparation of sensitised paper

It's in the laboratory for the preparation of sensitised paper, where the sheets of paper "prepared with a fine-grained paste" have to be prepared, with a rather smooth surface. These sheets are submerged for some minutes in salt water, then dried and finally sensitised in a silver bath. It is better not to proceed to this process too soon, to avoid the yellowing of the paper.

8 The exposure glass panel of the printing frame

The exposure or insolation happens in natural light in the glass display panel of the printing frame, placed on an inclining support in order to receive the rays of light most effectively. A laboratory assistant places the negative plate in a printing frame, in contact with a sheet of sensitised paper in a silver bath.

The insolation of this frame can last ten minutes in strong light, or one day in overcast conditions.... The printing-out paper allows a permanent control of the intensity of the image, by opening one of the slides at the back of the frame in subdued light.

9 The printing laboratory

After having correctly exposed his image, the laboratory assistant moves on into the printing laboratory. The print is generously washed then immersed around ten times in a toning bath to reinforce the sepia tint and to prolong its conservation. Washed again for 6 to 8 hours, it is fixed in thiosulphate, rinsed one last time and hung to dry in a suitable dryer.

10 The finishing studio

In the finishing studio, the positives retoucher is busy retouching images or embellishing them with colouring highlights, while his colleague in charge of finishing proceeds to place them under the press to flatten the prints, and then to trim them and mount them on a stiff card or in a frame. A developed print is most often mounted on a cardboard, bearing the name of the photographer on the reverse side, providing him with good publicity.

11 The open air portrait

As our studio enjoys the privilege of a garden, taking portrait photographs outside is quite possible as well as taking advantage of the good afternoon light. In order to immortalise his model, the photographer uses a more manoeuvrable camera, the field camera, and a darkroom tent, which enables him to prepare and treat his plate just before shooting.

12 The photographer's trips

For his trips, the photographer has a caravan and a horse, in order to transport all his material, without forgetting a ladder, on which he can fix his shooting camera, enabling him to be at the right height for architectural photographs...Once emptied of the cartons of materials, the interior of his caravan serves as laboratory, where he can install all the equipment he needs to prepare and develop his negative plates.