



Swiss Camera Museum THE CENTURY OF THE FILM



When the film on a flexible support appeared on the market in the 1880s, the whole world of photography was radically transformed. Cameras underwent a complete metamorphosis, rapidly becoming smaller and smaller and more and more sophisticated mechanically. The arrival of the film meant that a sequence of shots could be linked up and with the added advantage of glass-plate negatives, the use of cameras as a whole was greatly simplified, leading to a total revolution in the way people saw everything and communicated their observations. This was the beginning of the intensive activity of 20th Century photographers.

Today's exhibition portrays the ways in which photography has spread to all age groups, all social categories, amateurs and professionals alike. Visitors will be able to admire all kinds of photographic devices, many unusual, rare items and amazing applications, not forgetting the users themselves, whether behind or in front of the camera.

The illustrations are directly downloadable on the site
<http://www.cameramuseum.ch/en/N7634/exposition-permanente-de-en.html?M=7563>
Other illustrations are available on request.

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A new film, photography for the masses!

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Long before George Eastman's invention, Prudent René-Patrice Dagron, a chemist and photographer, produced the first type of film during the French-German war in 1870. On this occasion, important documents were reduced photographically onto a sheet of collodion, then transmitted by pigeon carriers to the besieged Parisians.

When Eastman came up with the Kodak, a compact, user-friendly camera with a flexible film, promoted by the famous slogan « Press the button, we do the rest », photography rapidly became the « witness of happy days » for so many amateurs and their families. Photographic images, now accessible to one and all, suddenly became more spontaneous...

From the invention of the cinema to the golden age of the illustrated press

Of course, the invention of the flexible film opened up the world of cinema and Edison's 35mm movie film led to yet another innovation, Oskar Barnack's famous Leica. This device laid the groundwork for modern-day cameras. Together with the Rolleiflex, the Leica in the late 1920s became an absolute essential for any photojournalist, playing a major role in the golden era of illustrated newspapers and magazines.

Between the two World Wars, photography was progressively used for investigations. Manufacturers developed even more effective tools, sparking the interest of photographers keen to take "stolen" pictures where the subjects were unaware of the camera and probably would not have given their consent.

« To see life, to see the world, to eyewitness great events ; to watch the faces of the poor and the gestures of the proud ; to see strange things – machines, armies, multitudes, shadows in the jungle and on the moon ; to see man's work – his paintings, towers and discoveries ; to see things a 1000 miles away, things hidden behind walls and within rooms, things dangerous to come to ; the women that men love and their many children ; to see and take pleasure in seeing ; to see and be amazed ; to see and be instructed.»

«Life», Manifesto, 23 November 1936

Mass photography triumphs

As World War II came to an end, the economic situation began to improve, giving people more time and money to spend on their hobbies. This gave impetus to the photography industry as a whole. The brilliant American scientist, Edwin Herbert Land, launched the first satisfactory development process of instant images - the Polaroid.

Camera technology advanced by leaps and bounds, and reflex cameras improved with constantly more sophisticated light-setting systems.

As films could now be manufactured and developed industrially on a large scale, photography became a mass market product. With the spread of colour pictures during the 1960s, the film and its secondary products were soon to be found in all supermarkets.

There is no doubt that the greatest revolution since WWII is the invention of the cassette film in the Kodak Instamatic, the best-selling camera of all times: 70 million sold !

Then the Japanese manufacturers began improving and extending the technology of 35mm reflex cameras, suitable for both family and commercial use, thus giving a tremendous boost to the whole industry.

The most significant technological advances of the last 30 years have mainly been made in the automation of cameras, thanks to electronic technology: automatic loading and motorised film rolling, exposure setting and above all, systems which automatically regulate focus settings.