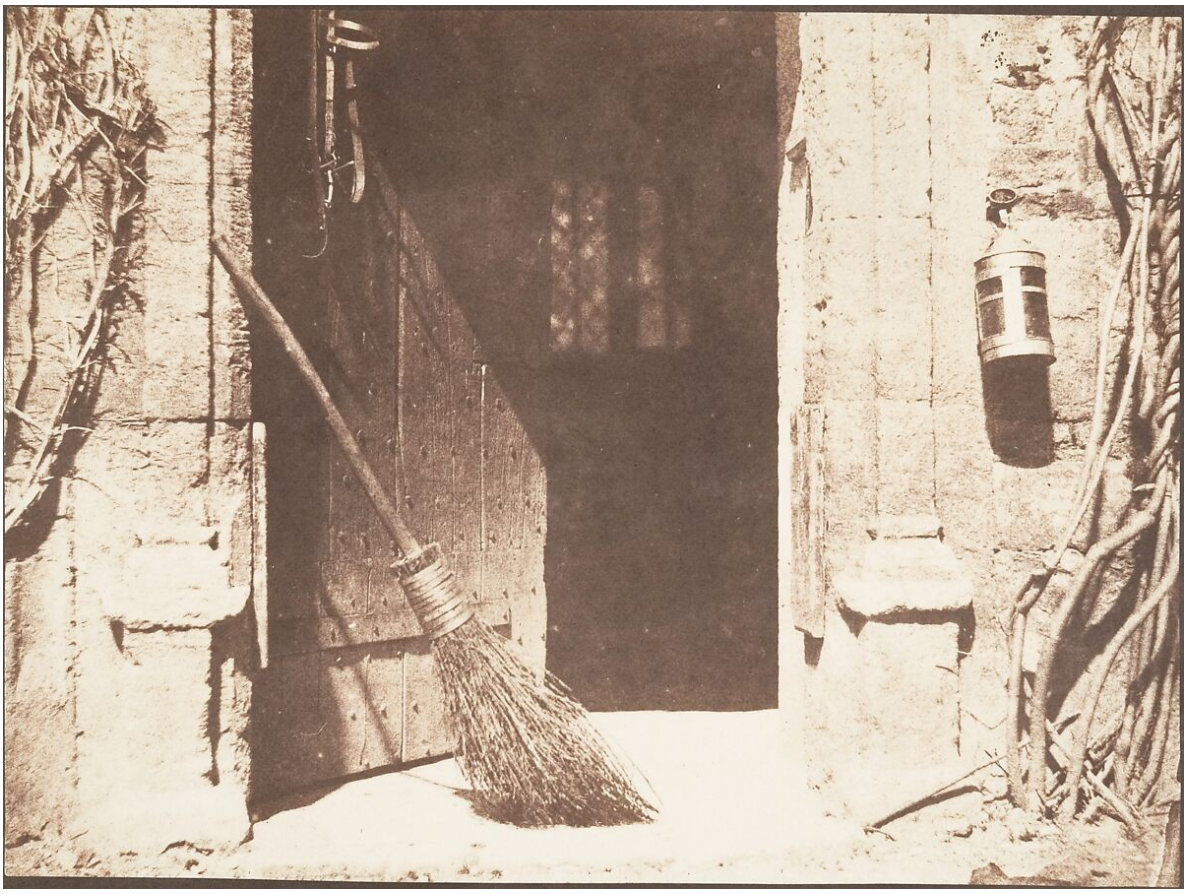
SESSION 01 · UNIT 1 — LIGHT & OBJECT · Sept 22, 2026

William Henry Fox Talbot & Louis Daguerre

Talbot 1800–1877 · British — Daguerre 1787–1851 · French

The invention of photography — and the reproducible image that won



The Open Door, Lacock Abbey · 1844

"The plates of this work have been obtained by the mere action of Light upon sensitive paper. They have been formed or depicted by optical and chemical means alone, and without the aid of any one acquainted with the art of drawing."

— William Henry Fox Talbot, The Pencil of Nature, 1844

KEY WORKS

- The Pencil of Nature, 1844 — first photographically illustrated book
- The Open Door, Lacock Abbey, 1844 — calotype print
- Boulevard du Temple, 1838 — Daguerre's one-of-a-kind daguerreotype
- The Haystack, 1844 — texture, light, and form

CONTEXT

Talbot invented the negative-positive calotype process in 1841 — one negative could produce unlimited prints, giving photography its reproducibility. Daguerre announced his rival process, the daguerreotype, in Paris in January 1839; it produced a sharper, one-of-a-kind image on a silver plate, but each plate was unique and unrepeatable. History chose Talbot's path. The Pencil of Nature (1844) was the first book in history illustrated with photographs, each print pasted in by hand. By extension, every photograph students have ever taken is a descendant of the calotype.

WHY THIS PHOTOGRAPHER

Talbot is the origin — the negative, the print, the reproducible image begins here. Understanding why reproducibility won over the daguerreotype's precision is understanding what photography is fundamentally for.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. If every photograph were unique and unrepeatable — like a daguerreotype — how would photography be different? Would Instagram exist?
2. Talbot wrote the images were 'obtained by the mere action of Light upon sensitive paper.' What does it mean that light itself makes the image?
3. Daguerre's plates were sharper and more detailed; Talbot's could be copied endlessly. Was reproducibility the right trade?

MORE IMAGES



Latticed Window, Lacock Abbey · Talbot, 1835



Bust of Patroclus · Talbot, 1843



Articles of China · Talbot, 1844



The Pencil of Nature · Talbot, 1844



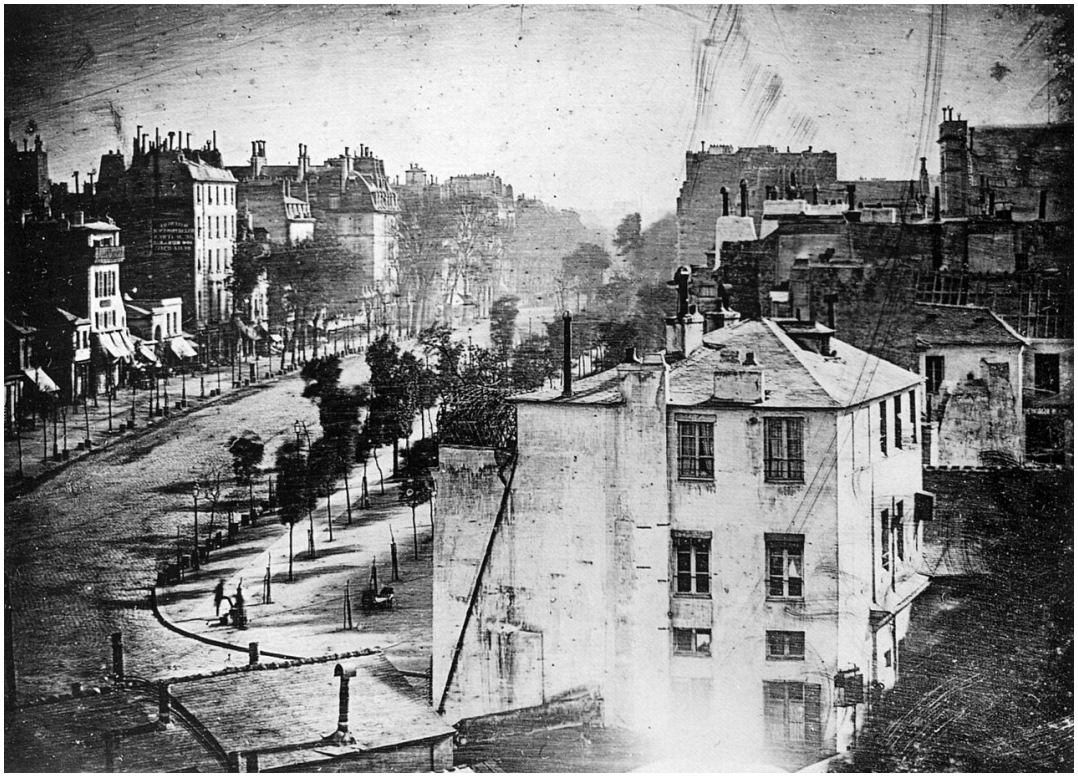
The Haystack · Talbot, 1844



A Scene in a Library · Talbot, 1844



Still Life in the Artist's Studio · Daguerre, 1837



Boulevard du Temple · Daguerre, 1838



Shells and Fossils · Daguerre, 1839