

AFRAID OF THE DARK

LA PEUR DU NOIR



M. Olmeta. Diving therapy. Marseille, 2000.

NOTE-BOOK

CARNET



Matthias Olmeta. Underwater, 2000, platinum print.

AFRAID OF THE DARK

A NOTE-BOOK

INVESTIGATING
THE HISTORY OF PSYCHIATRIC PHOTOGRAPHY

REVEALING
THE INFLUENCES OF SOLAR ECLIPSES

INTRODUCING
MATTHIAS OLMETA'S DISCOVERY



SERGE PLANTUREUX
ROYAL ACADEMY OF ART
MAY 2005



To collect or not to collect photography ? M. Olmeta. Scary, Cuba, 2003.

TO COLLECT PSYCHIATRIC PHOTOGRAPHY ?

One of the first physicians to study the faces of people with psychiatric disorders using the medium of photography was an English man. In a still famous address to the *Photographic Society* in 1856, Dr Diamond asserted that Photography could help the insane to recover by presenting them with a true image of their ill self.

A similar line of research emerged in France. In 1863, the alienist Legrand du Saulle delivered a report before the Société médico-psychologique in Paris, *De l'application de la photographie à l'étude des maladies mentales*, mentioning many examples of continental psychiatric portraiture : the drawings by Esquirol's and Guislain, the daguerreotypes by Baillarger and Ferrus, and Dagonet, Laurent and Billod's *Recherches physiognomiques*, not to mention Adrien Tournachon and Duchene de Boulogne' masterly pictures of mental affliction.

Legrand was fully aware how photography could become an abusive technology and degrade the sense of self. However he mentioned if used correctly the effects could be redemptive. An important contribution of the new medium was made through the constitution of asylum archives.

M. Olmeta

Hands out

Masora, 2003

Silver, 40x50 cm



The photographer Cayré pursued this aim with an intensity that still inspires us today. We are privileged to show five of those decisive portraits, recovered from oblivion after 1 1/4 century, at the Royal Academy of Art.

Stepping in with the 20th Century, the avantgardes, Dadaists, Surrealists and Expressionists suggested insane æsthetic should become the fashion, as a compensation for the dangerous over-representation of the straight. In 1905, Einstein had his big idea during a solar eclipse which simultaneously induced complete madness in over 500 people previously affected with partial mental disorders. Isn't it in 1915 that a Serbian surrealist leader theorized the influence of solar eclipses on art market trends ? 21st Century. Turning a deaf ear to the yells of art critics, a young Frenchman declares : «*When I completed I'm afraid of the Dark, I invited friends and visitors to my atelier in Marseille, and left with a girl. We had eight glasses of champagne and smoked two coibas. When we came back, everybody hated me more than before. Dark, Dark, Dark. No end....*»

One classic thesis which remains unpublished goes some way to explaining the use of portrait photography in 19th century human science is Andreas Bröeckmann's *A Visual Economy of Individuals*, 1995.

Assistant Cayré

Insane Studies

Rodez Asylum, 1862

Five albumen prints, 104x71 mm, oval masks, signatures on each image in red ink, and captions on the mount : «*C. Idiotie congénitale. Microcéphalie. 61 ans d'âge, parle un peu, mange seule, est propre au lit, ne travaille pas, accès de fureurs fréquents*» [C., Microcephalic, 61 years old, hardly speaks but clean in bed, doesn't work but often breaks in extremely violent crisis].

Publication : Reported first by Legrand du Saulle (1863), reproduced by Dagonet, 1876, quoted by Broeckmann, 1995 : «*In his dissertation, Cayré suggested the possibility and advantages of taking portraits of patients to his superior, superintendent Dr. Combes, who was convinced enough to request a special fund for the acquisition of equipment from the asylum prefect. This fund was created within the budget of the asylum, and the apparatuses were bought. This procedure confirms what was said earlier about the typical situation under which photography was taken up by such institutions*».





Démence - agitation maniaque rémittente - goître.



A - Epilepsie et Démence - 35 ans d'âge, 32 d'épilepsie et d'aliénation, enfant naturel - frayeur - D'abord irascibilité et fureur - maintenant puérilité et dévotisme - passe la plus grande partie de son temps à raccommoder des chapelets.



Manie rémittente entée sur faiblesse mentale.



Eulalie - Démence avec hallucination de la vue et peut-être de l'ouïe - 55 ans d'âge et au moins 20 ans d'aliénation - cris inarticulés - claquements de langues et de lèvres - gestes automatiques. Aime à barboter dans l'eau comme un canard.

Adolphe Neyt (1830-1892)

The Enlarged Moon

Bruxelles Observatory, 1868

Vintage albumen print, 242x242 mm, mounted on original board, an early retouch in the lower right angle.

Publication : Christie's, Nov 16, 2002 (catalogue ill. n°2)

A wealthy entrepreneur from Gand, Adolphe L. Neyt (1830-1892) was an enthusiastic medieval weapons collector and an efficient photographic experimenter. The *Moon Album* in the Bibliothèque Royale de Bruxelles is the lonely remaining proof of Neyt's prowesses as a celestial photographer.



George Calvert Clarke

Lunatic Character selling fledglings

Durham, 1860's

Albumen, 238x180 mm, titled in ink on the mounting : «*Photo'ed
by Clarke*».



H. A. Lawrance & C. Ray Woods

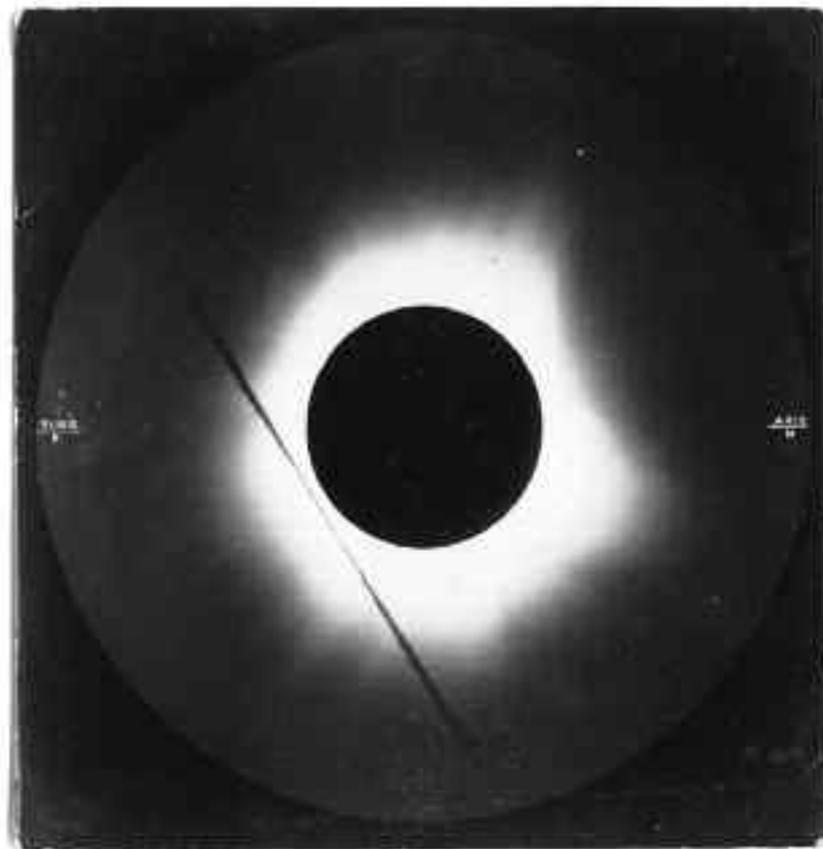
Solar Corona during the Total Eclipse

Caroline Island (Kiribati), May 6, 1883

Vintage P.O.P., old caption : «*Solar Corona, 1883 May 6. Caroline Island. Lawrence (sic) & Woods*». 238x180 mm.

Publication : Lawrance & Woods, both assistants to Lockyer at South Kensington were charged with photographing the solar corona during the eclipse, thereupon introducing photography in Kiribati.

The party of Anglo-Saxon Astronomers headed by Edward S. Holden was transported from Callao (Peru) on the U.S.S. Hartford, arriving after 29 days on April 21. Caroline was a small and extremely isolated Pacific islet then leased by Queen Victoria to a Mr John T. Arundel who, after digging some guano had planted coconut trees. See : Young, *Report of the Eclipse Expedition to Caroline Island*, M.N.A.S, II, 1883.

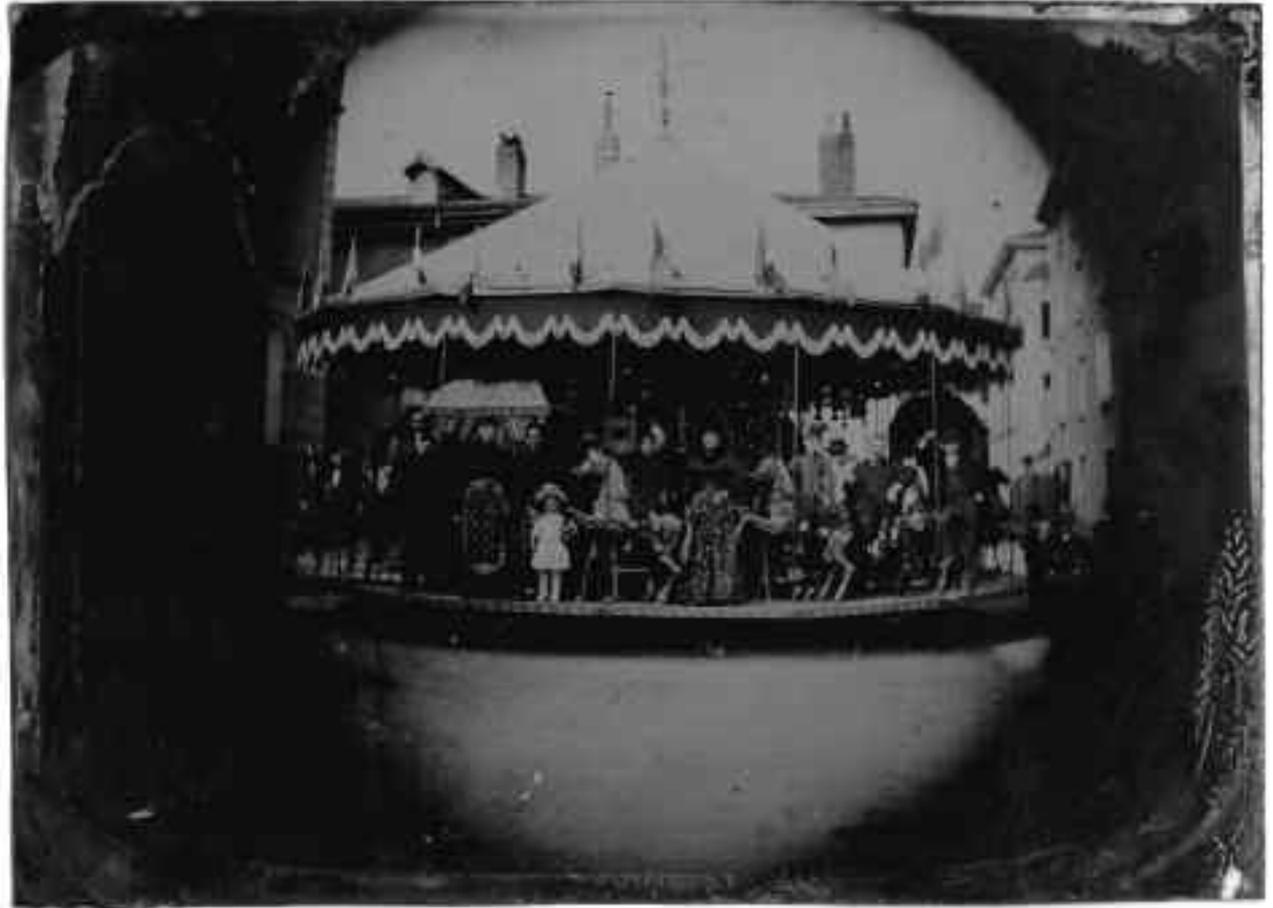


Wandering photographer

The Merry-go-round just stopped

Central France, circa 1895

Tintype, direct and unique positive
through a round objective, 127x180
mm.





The Asylum oldest Patient

«La doyenne de l'hospice, 95 ans : Tachez de me faire belle mon bon monsieur et je vous retiens 3 cartes postales».

Besson. The Manager. St-Ouen, 1935

2 vintage silver prints, 240x180 mm, stamped and captioned.

Besson was a doorstep commercial photographer, specializing in small shops and cafes, offering the owners to print post-cards.



William Henry Mahoney Christie

Solar Eclipse

Spain, August 30, 1905

Vintage printing-out-paper, 238x180 mm, old caption : «*Eclipse, 1905 Aug. 30 (5 sec). W.H.M. Christie*».

W. H. M. Christie (1845-1922) was the 8th Royal astronomer at Greenwich (1881-1910). The 1905 total eclipse of the sun was photographed by the British in Spain, by the French in Tunis. A report was published by Lucien Rudaux in *La Nature* (2nd sem. 1905, page 43). For the link between the 1905 solar eclipse and Einstein's maturation of his Relativity theory, see : Eddington's Report, 1919.





Gaston Pâris. Mad Women crashing a Country Ball, 1930's.

2 vintage silver prints, 180x128 mm, stamped and captioned :
«*Des malades se sont glissées dans la foule qui n'a pas fait attention à elles, avec leur caraco de toile grise parmi les jeunes filles en robe rose. Vallenay (Cher)*». (Patients are now in the crowd, nobody notices the grey skirts neighbouring the pink dresses of the teen].



Marcel de Kerolyr

M11 in the middle of The Little Cloud

Forcalquier, July 1932

Vintage silver print, signed, dated, stamped and captioned at the back : «*M. de Kerolyr, 1932. Le «Petit Nuage», au centre : M 11, 1 cm = 28'4*»». 180x163 mm.

De Kerolyr (1879-1962) was a professional violinist, who had married the singer he was accompanying. When she lost her voice, he turned into a secondhand furniture dealer. But three lines in the local newspaper in 1928, telling the creation of an observatory in Forcalquier with a new 0^m80 telescope, convinced him to become a photographer of stars. His astronomical photos have been published in Jean Giono, *le Poids du ciel*, 1938.





Anonymous Inspector

Train accident

East France, circa 1934

2 vintage silver prints, 175x126 mm.





Marcel de Kerolyr : M 27, The Dumbbell Nebula

1250 light years out of Forcalquier, 25 october 1932

2 vintage silver print, signed, dated and captioned at the back : «25 Oct. 1932 - Chère Madame et amie ... au verso, détails de la Dumbbell pris au 0^m80. Je vous l'envoie «en cachette» car je n'ai pas encore l'autorisation de M. Esclangon — alors ne la montrez pas je vous prie. H. de Kerolyr, [scale :] 1 mm = 16''5». 140x105 mm.



Tina Modotti with students

La Vieja feliz

Mexico, 1942

Vintage silver print. 238x180 mm.

This portrait belongs to a small group of 12 images produced during a school investigation with the students of the Escuela Normal Superior, Prof.



The Mushroom Cloud twists in a Zig Zag Formation

Yucca Flat proving ground, Nevada, 1962

Vintage silver print, 180x182 mm, stamped, captioned : «*Las Vegas, Nevada : The mushroom cloud from an atomic detonation at Yucca Flat Proving Ground breaks up and twists in a zig zag formation over the desert*». Published in *The San Francisco News*.



Car Salesman Norman Webster's Stay at Home Spanish Holiday

Liverpool, 25 September 1980

Press silver print, 195x160 mm, captioned : *«Car salesman Norman Webster was browned off because he couldn't afford a holiday in the sun. So Norman hatched an amazing holiday hoax. he told his pals he was taking his girlfriend Lynda Thomingham on a two-week trip to a Spanish sun-spot. Instead Norman, 31, and Lynda, 26, locked themselves in their flat in Walton, Liverpool, with two sun lamps and a fortnight's supply of food ! While friends thought the couple were lying on the beaches of Torremolinos, the pair were bronzing themselves behind closed curtains. But their cheap way to a quick tan left them with red faces. They were spotted by a friend when they sneaked out for a drink one night. Norman said «We couldn't afford to go away this year. This way we could have had a tan for nothing». Lynda, a telphonist, said : «It was a fantastic holiday while it lasted. There was no travelling to do, no greasy foreign food to cope with and we had guaranteed sun. But it was ambarrassing being found out».*

A perfect image from the inventory of Lenny Helicher, Garage on 25th Street (Lower floor), NY, NY. (Saturdays and sundays only).



M. Olmeta

**O u t s i d e
T h e r a p y**

Havana, 2003

Silver, 40x50 cm.





Matthias Olmeta.

**Carnival Party at the Edouard Toulouse Hospital, Marseille,
2000.**





Matthias Olmeta

Mother shouting

Marseille, 1987

Silver print, 18x24 cm, torn
out in the darkroom.



Matthias Olmeta, Mum at home

Marseille, 1987

2 silver prints, test images, 13x18 cm





Matthias Olmeta. J'ai peur du noir [Afraid of the Dark]

Relatively Scary Reality on-going project, 2001-2007

Panoramic Synopsis n°1, unique silver print. 777x122 cm.



This new Photographic Investigation from the V.I.D.O.C.Q. Project
(Verification & Investigation on Document, Objective Control of Quality) was composed
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