



Smithsonian Associates

Shapshots Of History: The Story Of Photography

Matthew Palczynski, Ph.D.

Monday, January 12, 2026 - 6:30 p.m. to 8:45 p.m. ET

Summary

Photography burst onto the scene in the mid-19th century and has since become one of the enduring forms of art. Art historian Matthew Palczynski traces the development of the earliest photo images with the introduction of the daguerreotype in 1839 and examines how Alfred Stieglitz and Edward Steichen championed for photography to become a recognized art medium in the first years of the 20th century. The Depression-era images of Dorothea Lange and Walker Evans documented the most destitute of the period, and their work profoundly impacted Americans' understanding of that desperate time. Palczynski surveys some of the most notable Pulitzer Prize–winning photographs and examines the widespread role photography has played in the last 50 years.

Selected Readings

Susan Danly and Cheryl Leibold, *Eakins and the Photograph: Works by Thomas Eakins and His Circle in the Collection of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts*, 1994

Sarah Greenough, ed., *Selected Letters of Georgia O'Keeffe and Alfred Stieglitz*, 2011

Paul Moorhouse, ed., *Cindy Sherman*, 2019

Beaumont Newhall, *The History of Photography: From 1839 to the Present*, 1982

Andy Warhol Museum, ed., *Andy Warhol: Photography*, 1999

Robert Wilson, *Matthew Brady: Portraits of a Nation*, 2013