

American Painted Photographs

Portraits: 1850s – 1950s

December 4 – February 13, 2016



L. Parker Stephenson Photographs is pleased to present an exhibition of painted portrait photographs made in the United States between the mid 19th and mid 20th centuries. The selection on view was chosen from a group assembled over the past twenty years by collector and dealer **David Winter**. These fine and unusual examples, from a genre which has received little recognition in the histories of photography or folk art circles, offer insight - although often only hints - into the personal and social lives of those portrayed as much as those who commissioned the work itself.

Not long after the announcement of its invention in 1839, photography was commercially first exploited for portraiture. An expanding middle class clientele, unable to afford the talents of a skilled painter, found it possible with the new accessible technology to bring photographic portraits into their homes. At the outset, many images of oneself and loved ones were small and cased, fitting in the palm of one's hand. However, the evolving market demanded and was granted the opportunity to have a selected photograph enlarged, accentuated with colors, framed ornamentally, and hung on the wall as a marker of stability and sociability. In this way, forms of aristocratic portraiture were brought into a larger democratic sphere.

The anonymous vernacular photographs on view range in subject from **Native and African American** formal sittings; colorful **costumed children's** portraits; **occupational, political** and **military** poses; to people with their **prized possessions; bizarre apparitions** and surprising choices. Whether the base medium is a smaller **tintype**, a **salt print** or enlarged **gelatin silver print**, the painter, who was seldom credited, was at liberty to re-interpret the original image from life. Examining the spectrum of these multi-authored images, offers a greater understanding and appreciation for a less investigated role that photography played in the history of this country.

For additional information or to request images, please contact the Gallery at +1 212 517-8700 or by email at info@lparkerstephenson.com.