

## Beyond Photography. William Henry Fox Talbot (Cambridge, 24–26 Jun 10)

Mirjam Brusius

Conference invitation

William Henry Fox Talbot: Beyond photography

Thursday, 24 June to Saturday, 26 June

Location: Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences and  
Humanities (CRASSH), University of Cambridge

William Henry Fox Talbot (1800-1877) is remembered primarily as a photographic pioneer and influential early voice on photographic aesthetics, but his activities as a Victorian intellectual and 'gentleman of science' ranged widely across the natural sciences, classical scholarship and Assyriology. This interdisciplinary conference will approach Talbot's work with this wider perspective in mind, bringing together art historians, curators, historians of science, and practitioners of the many scholarly fields to which Talbot contributed. It will situate Talbot against the networks and institutions of Victorian intellectual enterprise, while raising basic questions about the relation between photography and these other fields.

The occasion for this conference is the British Library's recent acquisition of a large archive of Talbot's manuscripts, including research notebooks, diaries, correspondence, and photographic prints. The majority of papers delivered during this conference will present new research based on the study of hitherto unexamined items in this collection. They will explore such topics as Talbot's lifelong engagement with mathematics, his successful attempts to decipher cuneiform scripts, his interest in philology and literature, the meaning of his botanical specimens, and his fascination with optical illusions and physiological optics. Contributions on Talbot's photographic oeuvre will take into account the connections between Talbot's invention of photography and his other scholarly and scientific activities. Further papers will explore the historical context of Talbot's Cambridge education at Trinity College and his habitual practice of keeping research notebooks, in order to suggest how we might understand the manuscripts as material records of an intellectual culture and way of life that both enabled and constrained Talbot's activities. The two keynote lectures, by James Elkins and Larry Schaaf, will explore the

conference's larger themes: the relationships between science, art and photography, and Talbot's identity as a Victorian intellectual.

Programme: <http://www.crassh.cam.ac.uk/events/1113/programme/>

#### Exhibition

The conference will be accompanied by an exhibition (14 June to 9 July 2010, date tbc), displaying facsimiles of a selection of Talbot's manuscripts and photographs at the Wren Library, Trinity College Cambridge, Talbot's former college.

#### Registration

Please register on the Crassh website:

<http://www.crassh.cam.ac.uk/events/1113/>

Deadline for booking is Friday 18 June 2010.

For administrative enquiries please contact [mm405@cam.ac.uk](mailto:mm405@cam.ac.uk)

#### Sponsors

This conference has been organised with the support of the British Academy, the Gerda Henkel Foundation, The Mellon Centre for Disciplinary Innovation (CDI) at CRASSH, The British Library and Trinity College Cambridge.

#### Convenors

Mirjam Brusius (History and Philosophy of Science, University of Cambridge and the British Library)  
Chitra Ramalingam (Mellon/ACLS Fellow, CRASSH, University of Cambridge)  
Katrina Dean (Curator for the History of Science, British Library)

--

#### Reference:

CONF: Beyond Photography. William Henry Fox Talbot (Cambridge, 24-26 Jun 10). In: ArtHist.net, Mar 3, 2010 (accessed Jul 4, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/32465>>.