



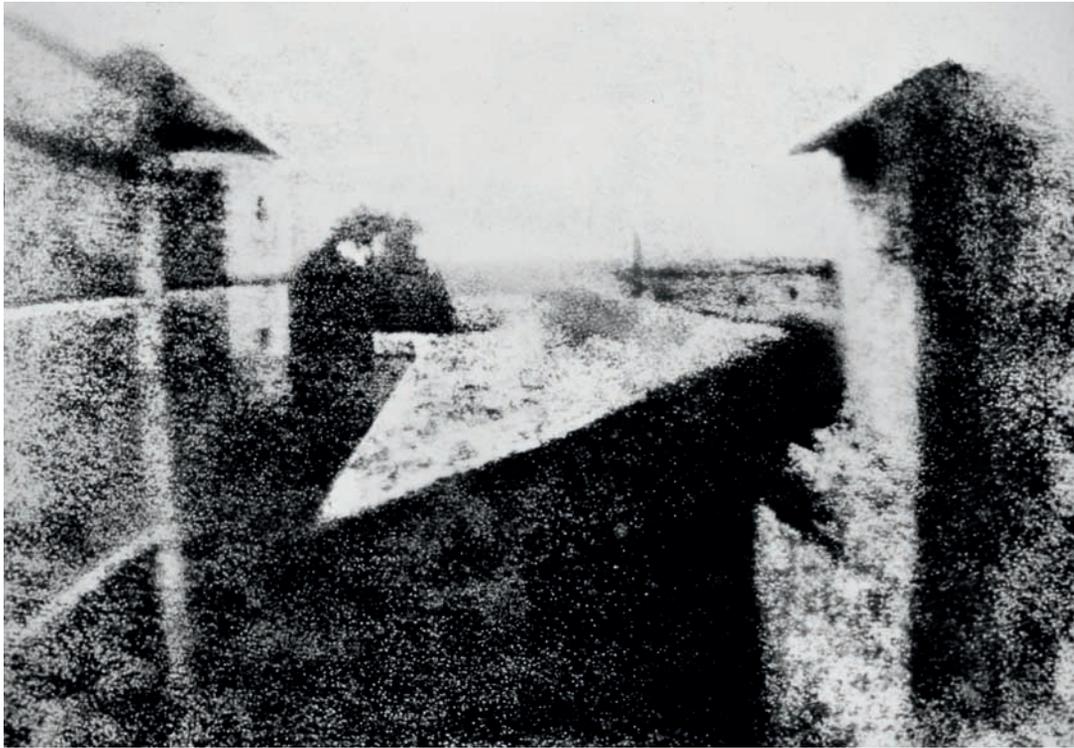
1

THE HISTORY OF NIGHT PHOTOGRAPHY

From Daguerreotype to Digital

Nighttime has been associated with solitude, danger, mystery, and the unknown throughout human history. The night transforms our notion of the world from one of routine certainty to one of mysterious unknowing. The night holds secrets—secrets that may engage our curiosity, shelter us, or frighten us. There are those who seek comfort in the night and those who recoil from it. Brave was the ancestor who stepped outside of the light of the fire circle, for he might never return.

The motif of night was established in Western art long before the advent of photography. Artists as far back as the Flemish painter Hieronymus Bosch played off the instinctive fear of darkness and the night in his masterpiece from 1503, *The Garden of Earthly Delights*. The 16th-century German printmaker Albrecht Dürer and Dutch painter and printer Lucas van Leyden repeatedly invoked night scenes in their work. Aert van der Neer was a 17th-century Dutch painter whose main body of work consisted of moonlit landscapes of his native Netherlands. Rembrandt famously relied on dark tones and deep shadows to evoke powerful emotions in his work, and several of van Gogh's most famous paintings are night scenes. Captivated by the night, van Gogh wrote in a letter to his brother that, "I often think that the night is much more alive and more richly coloured than the day."¹ James McNeill Whistler painted a series of night and twilight scenes entitled *Nocturnes*, and of course Edward Hopper's *Nighthawks*, which conveys a sense of urban isolation and loneliness, is one of the most recognizable paintings of the 20th century. It seems only fitting that photographers should be drawn to the night as well for inspiration. Although painters put down on canvas whatever they see in their mind's eye, the photographer's camera records only what passes before the lens. In the case of the night photographer, the time that passes during the exposure is as important as the light.



Joseph Nicéphore Niépce, "View from the Window at Le Gras," ca 1826–1827

After 10 years of work that began in 1816, Niépce took this image on a pewter plate coated with bitumen of Judea with a camera obscura and an optical device used by artists as a drawing aid. After an exposure of at least 8 hours, Niépce washed the plate with a mixture of white petroleum and oil of lavender, and the result was the first permanent photograph. The image is on permanent display at the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin.

Due to the limited sensitivity of early photographic processes, exposure times were exceedingly long, even in the daytime. The oldest existing photograph, which was taken by Joseph Nicéphore Niépce in 1826 or 1827, is a scene from his window in Le Gras, France. Although it is not a night photograph, the materials he used required an exposure of many hours to record the image on a pewter plate coated with a light-sensitive layer of bitumen of Judea. As the Sun moved across the sky during the long exposure, shadows were recorded on both sides of his house. The first commercially available photographic process was the daguerreotype, and when the process was introduced in 1839, exposure times of 10 minutes or more were required to take a photograph in sunlight. Although exposures were generally reduced to 5–10 seconds within a few years, photographing at night in the weak artificial light of the time or by moonlight was still impossible. The wet-plate collodion process was a tremendous technical advance over the daguerreotype

when it was invented in 1851. However, because collodion plates had to be exposed and developed before the emulsion dried on the plate, the lengthy exposures required at night made nocturnal photography essentially impossible. In 1871, Richard Leach Maddox, an English physician and photographer, proposed combining gelatin with light-sensitive silver nitrate and cadmium bromide to make dry glass plate negatives.² In 1878, Charles Harper Bennett, who was one of the first to produce dry plates, discovered that by heating the emulsion to 90F, it would become dramatically more light sensitive and stable.³ With this advance, plates were soon manufactured in Europe and North America and were widely available by the end of the decade. It was this introduction of the gelatin dry-plate process with its inherently greater sensitivity that once and for all opened the doors to night photography.

A few early photographers experimented with night and low-light photography, and throughout the 19th century photographs were often manipulated to appear as though they were taken at night. In 1840, the American John Draper made the oldest known daguerreotype of the Moon, which required a 20-minute exposure.⁴ From 1849 to 1851, Boston inventor and photographer John Adams Whipple and George Phillips Bond made daguerreotypes of the Moon through a telescope equipped with a clockwork mechanism that moved the telescope in sync with the Earth's rotation. The light-gathering power of the telescope also served to shorten the exposure time. After many attempts, they were able to record details of the Moon's surface for the first time. One of the resulting plates, which was made at the Harvard College Observatory where Bond's father was the director, won a gold medal at the Crystal Palace Exhibition in 1851.⁵

During the 1850s, Thomas Easterly was the first to record lightning strikes on a daguerreotype plate. There were numerous efforts to photograph in low-light conditions with artificial light sources beginning about 1860. The French photographer Félix Nadar photographed the catacombs and sewers below Paris, making about 100 plates between 1861 and 1862. Nadar used both magnesium lamps and electric lights powered by primitive batteries for these photographs, and he employed mannequins to represent workers because of the lengthy exposures.⁶ In 1863, Whipple experimented with electric lights to photograph a fountain on Boston Common at night. He determined that an exposure that would require one-half second in sunlight required 90 seconds by the electric lights.⁷ In April 1865, Charles Piazzi Smyth, Astronomer Royal of Scotland, made use of magnesium wire to photograph the interior passages of the Great Pyramid of Giza.⁸

It wasn't until Paul Martin in London and William Fraser and Alfred Stieglitz in New York began to photograph at night at the very end of the 19th century that anyone produced a significant body of true night images. Beginning in 1895, Martin photographed London street scenes, starting to work just before the last hint of twilight faded away to shorten the lengthy exposures required at night. Martin attracted the attention of passersby who wondered what he could possibly be doing out at night with a camera. The police also took notice and questioned his motives on more



Paul Martin, "A Wet Night on the Embankment," ca 1895–1896

In 1896, Martin received the Royal Photographic Society's Gold Medal for his series of pioneering night photographs entitled "London by Gaslight," which caught the attention of Alfred Stieglitz in New York. Martin recounts in his autobiography, *Victorian Snapshots*, how he was routinely followed by a policeman during his nocturnal photographic exploits.

than one occasion.⁹ To this day, many night photographers find themselves faced with similar experiences.

William Fraser began photographing New York at night about 1896, but there are very few existing prints of his work because he preferred to exhibit his photographs in the form of projected lantern slides. An article in *Scribner's Magazine* from 1897 stated that Fraser "has succeeded in taking some remarkable park and street scenes on snowy and rainy nights [that] show with surprising distinctness and truth, very picturesque and interesting aspects of New York."¹⁰ It was also noted that Fraser took advantage of the "moon's diffused light" for these photographs. The light of the Moon no doubt made more of a contribution to these images than it would if the same scene was photographed today because the nighttime level of artificial illumination was much lower at the end of the 19th century.



William Fraser, "A Wet Night, Columbus Circle," ca 1897–1898

Fraser, along with Alfred Stieglitz in New York and Paul Martin in London, were the photographers who established night photography as a viable and legitimate art form at the end of the 19th century. The image was originally published as a photogravure in Stieglitz's *Camera Notes* in January 1899, which is the source of this reproduction.

Alfred Stieglitz is one of the most important figures in the history of photography, both for his images and for his promotion of photography as an art form. He was perhaps the first person to record recognizable figures in a night photograph, and he used exposures of about 1 minute to photograph New York street scenes in 1897. One can't help but notice that all three of these night photography pioneers chose to photograph in poor weather conditions. Wet pavement, rain, snow, and fog all tend to add drama and atmosphere to night photographs (something that is not lost on contemporary night photographers). They were also no doubt aware that wet surfaces reflect lights in the streets. The image from 1898 reproduced here, "Icy Night," is a perfect example of how foul weather can yield spectacular results, as Stieglitz later wrote about this image:

One night, it snowed very hard. I gazed through a window, wanting to go forth and photograph. I lay in bed trying to figure out how to leave the house without being detected by either my wife or brother.

I put on three layers of underwear, two pairs of trousers, two vests, a winter coat, and Tyrolean cape. I tied on my hat, realizing the wind was blowing a gale, and armed with tripod and camera—the latter a primitive box, with 4 x 5 inch plates—I stole out of the house. The trees on the park side of the avenue were coated with ice. Where the light struck them, they looked like specters.

The gale blew from the northwest. Pointing the camera south, sheltering it from the wind, I focused. There was a tree—ice covered, glistening—and the snow covered sidewalk. Nothing comparable had been photographed before, under such conditions.

My mustache was frozen stiff. My hands were bitter cold in spite of the heavy gloves. The frosty air stung my nose, chin, and ears. It must have been two o'clock in the morning. After nearly an hour's struggle against the wind, I reached home and tiptoed into the house, reaching the third floor without anyone hearing me.

The next day I went to the camera club to develop the plate. The exposure was perfect.¹¹

Stieglitz had been suffering from pneumonia at the time and had been ordered to take care of himself. His success is all the more remarkable in the face of such adversity.

The preference for photographing in rain, fog, or snow was probably influenced by the pictorialist style that was prevalent at the end of the 19th century. Pictorialist photographers used soft focus and manipulation in their prints to create idealized, romantic images that evoked the impressionist paintings that were popular at the time. Photography had not yet achieved widespread acceptance as an art form, and another decade would pass before photographers had the confidence to present photographs that truly represented the new medium's mechanical potential to convey reality.



Alfred Stieglitz, "Icy Night," 1898

Alfred Stieglitz made this image on a frigid night during a snowstorm in January 1898 after a bout with pneumonia. Stieglitz was particularly proud of this image, and it cemented his interest in night photography. His influence on art and photography in America was enormous, and he is also largely responsible for night photography taking hold in New York at the turn of the last century.

Stieglitz would go on to inspire his colleagues at the New York Camera Club to brave the night with their cameras. These photographers included Alvin Langdon Coburn, Karl Struss, Paul Haviland, W. M. Vander Weyde, and most notably Edward Steichen, who all created significant numbers of night photographs between 1900 and 1910. Although other photographers outside of New York and London most certainly were experimenting with night photography at this time, it is mostly the images of Stieglitz and his colleagues that survive today as a record of these early endeavors. There was some rivalry between club members, particularly Coburn



Edward Steichen, "The Flatiron," 1904

Steichen made numerous variations of this image, and the best three are housed at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Color was added using multiple impressions of gum bichromate over the underlying platinum print. This image of the iconic Flatiron Building in Manhattan is considered one of the masterpieces of pictorialist photography.

and Steichen, and they both made twilight studies of the famous Flatiron Building. Steichen's version is considered one of his masterworks, and he made some truly remarkable gum over platinum prints of this image, three of which are housed at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

Steichen made another significant contribution to the genre with his series of 1908 photographs of Rodin's sculpture of Balzac that were taken entirely by moonlight. Although there had been various other efforts to photograph by moonlight before Steichen, most notably by John Frith of Bermuda, who made moonlit exposures of up to 6 hours in 1887,¹² it is the Balzac photographs that are the best extant examples of early moonlight photographs. Because there was no precedent for determining exposures, Steichen made a series of exposures of varying lengths over 2 nights. He had gone to France to photograph at the invitation of the sculptor himself, who commented that the images would "make the world understand my Balzac through these pictures."¹³ Steichen brought three large prints back to America, which were exhibited at Stieglitz's 291 Gallery in 1909. Steichen made exposures by moonlight, at dusk and dawn, and even one by flash, but the three he exhibited were all taken by the full light of the Moon. Stieglitz was so taken with them that he bought them for himself.¹⁴

Inspired by their better-known contemporaries, many other photographers began to photograph at night shortly after Martin, Fraser, and Stieglitz. There is a remarkable record of the development of style and technique in the photographic journals dating roughly from 1898 to 1916. Writing in response to an 1897 article in *Scribner's Magazine*¹⁵ that praised the night photographs of Stieglitz and Fraser, a Detroit photographer by the name of Edward Van Fleet expressed his desire for recognition of his own night photographs taken from the roof of the Detroit Tribune



Edward Steichen, "Three Views of Balzac," 1908

Steichen traveled to Meudon, France at the invitation of the sculptor Rodin to photograph the plaster model for his Monument to Balzac. Steichen produced numerous moonlight views of the sculpture, working from dusk to dawn one night. These are some of the earliest extant photographs taken entirely by moonlight.

Building in 1896.¹⁶ A photographer by the name of A. H. Blake proposed and organized the Night Photographer's Society of England in 1908.¹⁷ Blake shared his night photography experiences with the American audience in the journal *American Photography* in 1910. Undoubtedly, there were many photographers experimenting with night photography at this time aside from the few who are mentioned here.

The new century brought a significant change in the style and subject matter to many of these photographers' work as the romantic sensibilities of Pictorialism gave way to the more objective and sharply defined aesthetic of Modernism. Beginning around 1910, there was a shift from impressionistic pictorialist images to crisply focused modernist photographs that is evident in the work of each of these photographers. This change seemed to be an appropriate response to advances in technology and changes in attitude that came with the dawn of the 20th century. Although Modernism was well established by 1920, there were those like Adolf Fassbender who employed pictorialist sensitivities well into the 1930s.

Although the photographic record seems to indicate that early night photography was limited to Europe and North America, this was not at all the case. The photo historian Peter Yenne has worked diligently to promote the remarkable photographs of the Vargas Brothers of Arequipa, Peru. Carlos and Miguel Vargas Zaconet opened a commercial photography studio in Arequipa in 1912 after apprenticing with a photographer named Max T. Vargas (no relation). Their timing was incredibly fortunate because Arequipa was just beginning to blossom with newfound prosperity and the influence of European culture and ideas. Their studio flourished, and in addition to their portraiture business, they created a remarkable body of night images through the 1920s. Yenne says that "the influence of Pictorialism is clearly evident in the nocturnes, their most self-consciously artistic work." Yenne surmises that it was advances in photographic technology and the advent of electric light that led to this body of work. In an article accompanying an exhibit of the brothers' work titled *The Vargas Brothers, Pictorialism, and the Nocturnes*, Yenne writes that "taking a cue from the silent screen, they concocted a series of elaborate tableaux using moonlight, lanterns, bonfires, flash powder and street lamps. These theatrical scenes required exposures of up to an hour, and meticulous attention to detail."¹⁸

In contrast to the theatrically staged images of the Vargas Brothers, some photographers photographed at night for journalistic or documentary purposes. Lewis Hine was a sociologist who worked as a photographer traveling the country for the National Child Labor Committee (NCLC) during a 10-year period beginning in 1907. Hine documented the cruel conditions of child labor in factories and children who worked in the streets selling newspapers and as messengers. Unlike the pictorialist photographers, Hine was not concerned with making art, but instead with recording working conditions to aid the NCLC in its aim of ending child labor in America. That he made many of these photographs at night was only incidental to the fact that children were being



Carlos and Miguel Vargas, "Bridge in San Lazaro," Arequipa, Peru, ca 1926

The Vargas Brothers had a successful portrait studio in Arequipa from 1912 through the 1920s, but by night they produced a remarkable series of nocturnes that combined the use of moonlight, street lighting, and flash powder. Relatively unknown outside of Peru, the brothers were true pioneers of night photography, using light painting and staging photographs at night before anyone else.

forced to work late into the night. Most of Hine's night images are portraits of children working in factories, as *newsies*, or as messengers, and were primarily lit with flash powder.

Jessie Tarbox Beals is generally known as the first woman news photographer, but she was also the first woman night photographer. Beals lived from 1870 to 1942, which made her a close contemporary of Alfred Stieglitz. Although Stieglitz left a larger legacy, Beals was a remarkable woman whose drive and spirit enabled her to succeed in a challenging profession against significant odds. There is barely any mention of night photography in her papers, nor in her 1978 biography, written by Alexander Alland, but there is plenty of photographic evidence. The archive of her work at Harvard University's Schlesinger Library contains well over 100 prints of nocturnal images that span her photographic career. Beals photographed New York at night at the same time as Stieglitz and the other pictorialists, and although she was aware of Stieglitz and his 291 Gallery, there is

no evidence that they associated with each other. Beals took many night views of the pavilions of the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair, houses lit by gaslight in Boston's Beacon Hill neighborhood, and later the mission-style architecture of Santa Barbara after she moved to California in the 1920s. Throughout her career, Beals worked with an 8×10 view camera, even at night. A large view camera is cumbersome even in the daytime, and it is exceedingly difficult to work with at night. Many night photographers shifted to smaller format cameras as they became available.

The documentary work of Lewis Hine and the more commercial work of Jessie Tarbox Beals are somewhat anomalous examples of night photography put to more practical uses, but like the pictorialists before them, most of the night work to follow would belong to the worlds of art and illustration. The Hungarian André Kertesz began photographing at night around 1914 in Budapest. He moved to Paris in 1925, where he continued to make night photographs. A fellow Hungarian



Lewis Hine, "A Midnight Crap Game," Providence, 1912

Hine was a social worker who tirelessly documented child labor practices in the United States at the beginning of the 20th century. Hine was not interested in night photography itself, but he often photographed at night, generally using flash to illuminate the young newsboys and messengers who worked through the night.



Jessie Tarbox Beals, "El Paseo Building," Santa Barbara, ca 1928–1929

Beals is best known as the first woman news photographer, but she is also the first woman to have photographed extensively at night. She was primarily a journalist and commercial photographer, and she worked all her life to compete in a world where women were generally not wanted. Beginning at the World's Fair in 1904 and continuing throughout her career, Beals made many night views, mainly with a large format view camera.

painter named Gyula Halász, who also lived in Paris, was introduced to photography by Kertész one night in December 1929 as they wandered the streets of Paris. Halász, who would later change his name to Brassai, would go on to become the most influential night photographer of his generation, and perhaps of all time. Paris in the 1930s was a magnet for artists and writers, and Brassai lived and worked among many of the most important artists of the 20th century. He counted Picasso, Dalí, Giacometti, Matisse, and the writer Henry Miller as his friends. It was Miller who gave him the nickname The Eye of Paris.

Brassai's photographs are an indelible record of the dark underbelly of Paris nightlife at the time of the Great Depression. Within 2 years of taking up photography, Brassai had accumulated a large series of nocturnal photographs of Parisian street scenes and images from brothels, opium dens, bars, theaters, and cabarets. Much of this work was published in 1932 as *Paris de Nuit*,¹⁹ which was the first monograph of night photographs ever published. Decency standards of the time did not allow for many of his interior views depicting scenes of nudity and overt sexuality to be published, and this work was not widely known until the publication of *Le Paris Secret des Années Trente*²⁰ in 1976. The subjects of Brassai's photographs were certainly aware that they were being photographed because his style was bold and direct, and he generally had their cooperation. Brassai often used magnesium flash powder to light his interiors, which led Picasso to nickname him The Terrorist²¹ because of its explosive qualities.

The publication of *Paris de Nuit* was a milestone not only because it was the first of its kind, nor simply because it was sumptuously printed in photogravure, but because of the remarkable influence it had on contemporary photographers of the time. The English photographer Bill Brandt met Brassai in Paris about the time *Paris de Nuit* was published, and Brassai's influence on the Englishman's work was profound. Brandt's motivation is uncertain, but he recreated one of Brassai's photographs of prostitutes using his wife, Eva, as a model and placing her outside of a Chinese restaurant in Hamburg's red light district in 1932.²²

Brassai's revealing pictures confirmed people's expectations of Parisian nightlife, but Brandt's more surrealist vision transformed the ordinary into something mysterious and uncertain. Brandt had assisted for the great surrealist photographer Man Ray in Paris in 1930, and this experience also shaped his artistic vision. Brandt's book *A Night in London*²³ was published in 1938 by Arts et Métiers Graphiques, the same company that had published Brassai's *Paris de Nuit* a few years earlier. Although *A Night in London* was clearly inspired by Brassai's work, Brandt's style and working methods were distinctly his own. Brassai's subjects were the people he met in his nocturnal wanderings, but Brandt took the novel approach of employing his friends and family as models to create his nighttime scenes. Additionally, several of the photographs from *A Night in London* were actually daytime images printed darker than usual to look like night scenes. Brandt had no qualms about using any available technique to achieve his expressive ends.

Two English contemporaries of Bill Brandt who were also inspired by the work of Brassai were Harold Burdekin and John Morrison. Although they are virtually unknown today, Burdekin and Morrison produced a body of spectacular nocturnal images of London that were published as *London Night* in 1934, little more than a year after Brassai's book. Like *Paris de Nuit*, *London Night* was also printed in photogravure but with blue, rather than black, pigment. The quiet alleyways and dark corners of London portrayed in these photographs are completely unpopulated and were mostly shot on foggy nights. The moody atmosphere and timeless stillness of these images makes them among the most memorable of the genre.²⁴

At about the same time, a young photographer by the name of Volkmar Wentzel was working as a darkroom technician for National Geographic in Washington, D.C. Wentzel had also been inspired by Brassai's night work and photographed America's capital at night during the mid- to late 1930s. Like many of the photographs of his contemporaries, Wentzel's night photographs of Washington landmarks and architecture were shot mainly on foggy nights. Wentzel would go on to have a long career as a National Geographic photographer, and his night images of Washington were not published until 1992 in *Washington by Night*.

The bombing raids of World War II left much of Europe dark at night between 1939 and 1942. The darkened city skylines made for unusual opportunities for night photographers at this time, and two photographers in particular made the most of them. The bombing raids usually took place at night, when German planes could fly over enemy territory under the cover of darkness. Bill Brandt, who had photographed London at night earlier in the 1930s, was confronted with a very different city with the lights extinguished and inhabitants hiding in the underground subway tunnels for shelter. The full moon provided illumination for Brandt's photographs, and also just enough light for the German bombers to navigate.²⁵ The danger level was highest on these full moon nights, and Brandt found the streets of London silent and completely deserted as he photographed the dark city. Although Brandt's blackout photos were shot for *Lilliput* magazine in Britain and *Life* magazine in the United States,²⁶ Brandt's biographer, Paul Delany, suggests that these images had a deeper and more personal meaning for the photographer, comparing them to de Chirico's visionary surrealist city. Brandt was compelled by the appearance of the city illuminated only by moonlight and the city's apparent withdrawal into concealment.²⁷

Margaret Bourke-White also worked for *Life* magazine and photographed London during the blackouts of 1939. In the spring of 1941, she was sent to Russia by her editor at *Life*, and she was the only foreign journalist in Moscow when the German bombers arrived. With the tacit approval of the U.S. Embassy in Moscow, she was allowed to stay after almost all other foreigners had left, and at one point she even photographed Stalin after months of attempts to gain access to him. She initially photographed the bombing of Moscow from the roof of the U.S. Embassy because the Russian blackout wardens at her hotel forced everyone underground during the raids. Later, she set up multiple cameras on the balcony of her hotel room (which faced the Kremlin and Red

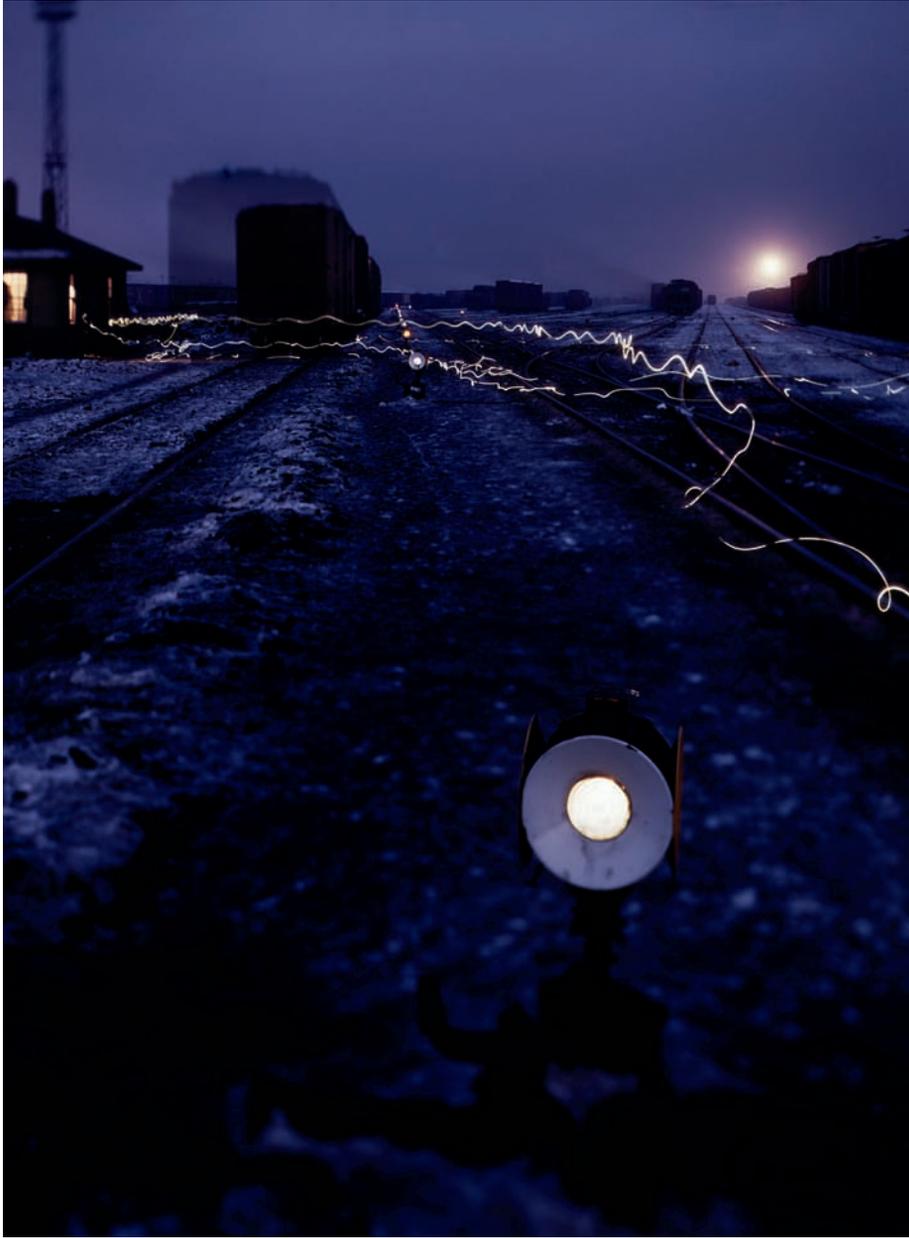


Margaret Bourke-White, "Central Moscow with Antiaircraft Gunners," 1941

Margaret Bourke-White was one of the only foreign journalists in Moscow when war broke out between Germany and Russia in 1941. She photographed the nightly bombing raids, initially from the roof of the U.S. Embassy and later from her hotel room balcony, which overlooked Red Square. Bourke-White worked with several cameras simultaneously, the number determined by the intensity of the bombing.

Square) when the raids began, then rushed to the underground shelters. After the all clear was given, she returned to close the shutters and develop the film in her bathroom. Bourke-White wrote, "To me, the severity of a raid was determined by whether it was a two camera, a three camera, or a four camera night."²⁸

Jack Delano was hired in 1940 as a photographer for the Farm Security Administration and later worked for the Office of War Information, where he documented the Atcheson, Topeka & Santa Fe wartime rail service between Chicago and Los Angeles in 1943.²⁹ Delano used early 4×5 transparency film for his nighttime rail yard photographs. In addition to being some of the earliest color night photographs, this work is interesting for the trails of light left by the lanterns of the



Jack Delano, "Departure Yard at C&NW Rail Road," Chicago, 1942

Jack Delano worked as a Farm Security Administration photographer and later for the Office of War Information when this photograph was taken in 1942. This image was shot on 4 x 5 inch Kodachrome transparency film and is part of a series of night and twilight rail yard images.

rail yard workers as they walked through his photographs during the long exposures. Delano's photographs are now in the collection of the Library of Congress.

There is a long tradition of nighttime railroad photography in America that began with Delano in 1943 and continued into the 1980s with a trio of photographers who called themselves *Rails After Dark*. America has had a fascination with trains and railroads since the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869, and trains have long been a photographic subject as well. Images of the last operating steam railroad in America were taken by O. Winston Link from 1955 to 1960 and are some of the best-known night photographs ever taken. Link was a New York industrial photographer with a passion for steam trains, and he spent 5 years documenting the Norfolk and Western Railway before it switched to diesel engines. Link used his commercial photography experience to orchestrate (with the cooperation of the railway) images using elaborate lighting setups with custom-made flashbulb reflectors and multiple cameras. Link's images are remarkable not only for the complex lighting he employed, but also in the way that he showed the trains in the context of small towns along the railroad, frequently with people going about their lives with the trains passing in the background. Link's photographs preserve the last years of an important part of American history, and they are an indelible record of life in small towns along the rails in mid-20th-century America.

Although Link is better known than other train photographers, many others photographed trains and rail yards in the second half of the 20th century. Among them were Robert Hale, Richard Steinheimer, Jim Shaughnessy, Philip Hastings, Mel Patrick, and Ted Benson, who all took significant night photographs of trains after 1950. These men were as much railroad enthusiasts as photographers, and their images are mostly known from the pages of the magazines *Vintage Rails* and *Trains*. Hale and Steinheimer began photographing trains at night around 1949—several years before Link—and Benson and Patrick, in particular, were inspired by Link's work.³⁰

In 1951, Alfonso Sánchez García was commissioned to produce photographs of Madrid to promote the city as a safe and normal place. Spain was trying to repair its tarnished image after the Spanish Civil War and associations with the Axis powers in World War II. Alfonso's romantic night views of the old quarter of Madrid were published as photogravures in a book titled *Rincones del Viejo Madrid: Nocturnos (Corners of Old Madrid: Nocturnes)*. According to photo historian Gerardo F. Kurtz, this project was unusual because of the lavish nature of the publication at a time when Spain was still reeling from civil war and economic isolation after Franco seized power. Each of the 41 images has a description of the location where the photo was taken in both Spanish and English. It's doubtful that the book made much of an impact on international relations with Spain, and although García is one of the more important Spanish photographers of the time, he is not widely known for this work.



Richard Steinheimer, "Southern Pacific #4194 'Tehachapi' Night Train 55 at Glendale Station," Glendale, CA, 1950

Steinheimer was one of a number of highly dedicated train photographers who often shot at night from the 1950s through the 1980s but are generally less well-known than O. Winston Link. See Jeff Brouws and Ed Delvers's outstanding book, *Starlight on the Rails*, for more about Steinheimer and his contemporaries.

There are surprisingly few substantial bodies of night photography from the 1960s, but one notable exception is the work of the late William Gedney. He photographed at night throughout his career, which spanned from the late 1950s to the mid-1980s. Most of Gedney's night works are part of larger bodies of images. Major projects included documenting communities in Kentucky, Brooklyn, India, and San Francisco. Gedney's formal architectural studies of quiet neighborhoods at night provide stark contrast to his daytime record of the human condition. It is tempting to say that people were too preoccupied with other things in the 1960s to photograph at night, but just as San Francisco was the epicenter of the counterculture revolution, it also became a nexus for much of the more prominent night photography that would emerge in the following decade.

In addition to Gedney, Arthur Ollman, Jerry Burchard, Richard Misrach, and Steve Harper all made significant contributions to the genre from the early 1970s through the mid-1990s. Burchard began photographing at night in the late 1950s while documenting an artist colony in San Francisco. His style was free and loose, and he used mostly fast film and relatively short, handheld exposures, often standing on one foot—a technique he employed while photographing at rock concerts where the vibrations from the speakers and people dancing precluded the use of a tripod. By the late 1960s, Burchard began applying the same techniques to shooting landscapes at night. Ollman began photographing at night in 1966 after being involved with theater in college. He was drawn to photograph subjects that were isolated by localized light sources, similar to the way that emphasis is placed on actors and sets on the stage with spotlights.³¹ Ollman switched to color in the mid-1970s, when Kodak released the first 400 speed color negative film. He was attracted to the way the notorious San Francisco fog absorbed and blended the various colors of different artificial light sources at night. Like Burchard, Misrach also began his career as a night photographer with a documentary project, photographing the subculture of Telegraph



Arthur Ollman, "My House," 1977

Ollman shot at night in black and white starting in the late 1960s. The introduction of Kodacolor 400 35 mm film in 1976 provided the impetus for Ollman to begin working with color film at night.

Avenue in Berkeley in the mid-1970s in black and white on 35 mm film. Misrach decided to abandon sociopolitical documentary work and began photographing cacti in the California desert, combining long exposures with open flash to bring attention to the foreground subjects. He would use this same approach to photograph Stonehenge before switching to 8×10 format and color negative film toward the end of the 1970s. Misrach has continued to photograph at night throughout his career.



Richard Misrach, "Stonehenge #4," 1976

Richard Misrach has photographed at night throughout his career, beginning with a documentary project of homeless people in Berkeley, California in 1974. This image was originally printed on long-obsolete Agfa paper that produced a wide range of colors using a split toning technique. Shortly after creating this series of work, Misrach switched to the 8×10 view camera and color negative film. He was one of the first artists to produce large-scale photographic color prints.



Steve Harper, "Self, Sutro Baths Ruins," 1979

Steve Harper says that this image "represents the universality of all things—I, the blanket, the fog and the sea are all the same substance."³³ Harper developed and taught the first college-level class on night photography at the Academy of Art College in San Francisco in 1979. He inspired a generation of night photographers (including the author) and was an important part of the vibrant night photography scene in the Bay Area from the 1970s through the 1990s.

Harper began his photographic career in front of the camera as a model for the Ford Agency in New York in the 1960s. After moving to California, he began teaching at the Academy of Art College in 1979, where he developed and taught the first college-level class on the subject of night photography. He taught this course for 12 years and mentored a new generation of night photographers, ensuring the continuation of the rich tradition of night photography in the Bay Area. Camaraderie and community were always important to Harper, and his students continued to photograph and exhibit together long after the classes were over.³² Among Harper's more notable students were Tim Baskerville, founder of The Nocturnes, an organization that promotes night photography in the Bay Area, and Tom Paiva, a commercial and industrial night photographer based in Los Angeles. Harper's own images often included figures, sometimes his students, but often himself. Of the image reproduced here, Harper says, "I identify this image with the universality of all things—the way the ocean, the sky and I appear to have morphed into the same molecular elements."³³

Although the bulk of night photography activity shifted from the East Coast to the West Coast after World War II, there were still photographers on the East Coast working at night, like George Tice, who made many night photographs of his native New Jersey throughout the 1970s. Undoubtedly, his best-known image is “Petit’s Mobil Station, Cherry Hill, NJ,” 1974. Tice says that the water tower looming above the gas station reminded him of Lincoln Cathedral rising above the town in F. H. Evans’s 1898 photograph “Lincoln Cathedral: From the Castle.” This 2-minute exposure on 8×10 inch Tri-X film actually required about 10 minutes to make because Tice had to cover the lens whenever cars passed in front of the camera. This technique of repeatedly covering the lens to block the lights of passing cars requires diligence



George Tice, “Petit’s Mobil Station,” Cherry Hill, NJ, 1974

George Tice’s iconic image of a water tower looming over a gas station in New Jersey is probably his best-known work. Throughout the 1970s, Tice photographed twilight and night scenes of his native New Jersey on 8 × 10 black and white film. Original gelatin silver prints of this image have unbelievably rich shadow detail and luminous highlights.

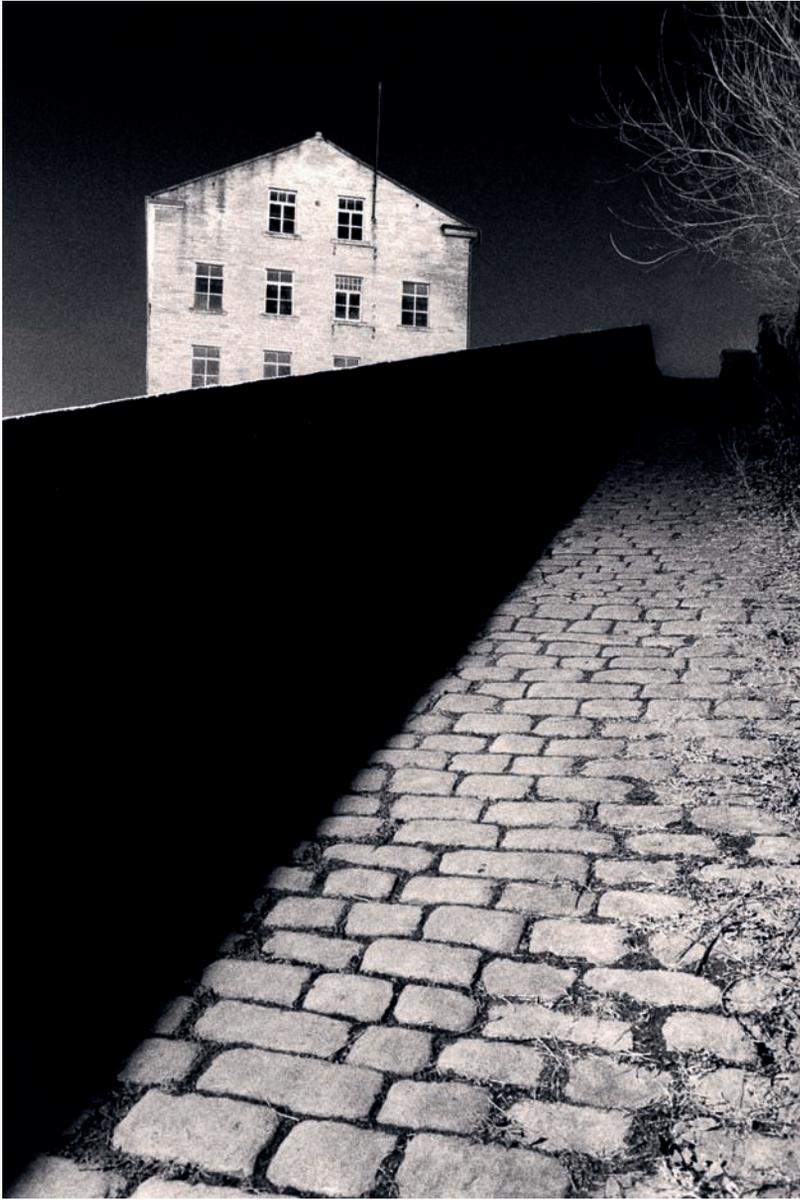
and patience, but it has been successfully employed by photographers dating as far back as Paul Martin in 1896.³⁴

In 1979, photographer Jan Staller published a book of color night and twilight photographs taken in the industrial wastelands around New York City. The photographs are notable for the surreal nature of the subject matter and the unusual colors created in the darkroom when Staller color corrected for the various industrial light sources in the scenes he photographed. Staller's prints could only be balanced for a single light source, but the scenes he photographed were often lit by multiple sources. Many of his images have intense red or purple skies.

Unquestionably, the most prolific night photographer of the second half of the 20th century is Michael Kenna. In the mid-1980s, Kenna retraced the footsteps of his countryman Bill Brandt, who had documented the industrial cities and mill towns of northern England in the 1930s. Although most of Brandt's work from this series was shot during daylight hours, his prints are dark and contrasty, such that many of the images almost look as if they were taken at night. This in turn influenced Kenna's decision to photograph some of the same sites at night nearly 50 years later. Kenna's work gained a wider audience after the publication of his photographs of Ratcliffe Power Station in Nottinghamshire, also in the industrial north of England. A great traveler, Kenna would go on to photograph extensively in France, Japan, and many other locations, often at the intersection of the man-made and natural worlds. Kenna says, "The underlying subject matter is the relationship, confrontation, and/or juxtaposition, between the landscape ... and the human fingerprint, the traces that we leave, the structures, buildings and stories."³⁵ Kenna tries to create work that is timeless noting that "the images could be created in the day or at night, today or a year ago."³⁶ Kenna continues to be one of the most prolific and successful landscape photographers working today.

To date, there have been at least four significant group exhibits of night photography in the United States. The largest and most ambitious was curated by Keith F. Davis from the Hallmark Photographic Collection. *Night Light, A Survey of Twentieth Century Night Photography* opened at the Nelson Atkins Museum of Art in January 1989 and was subsequently shown at 10 art museums across the country, closing at the Museum of Photographic Arts in San Diego in 1991. The printed catalog of Davis's exhibit was the starting point for the research in this chapter.

In 1991, photographer Tim Baskerville curated a group exhibit of night photographs at Gallery Sanchez in San Francisco entitled *The Nocturnes*, which eventually became the basis of the organization of the same name. In 2003, the Williams College Museum of Art presented an exhibit of contemporary night photographs called *Wait Until Dark* from a private collection. In 2007, the Three Columns Gallery at Harvard University premiered an exhibit titled *Darkness Darkness*, curated by the author of this book, that showcased the work of 34 contemporary night photographers and was subsequently presented in several different venues.



Michael Kenna, "Bill Brandt's Snicket," Halifax, Yorkshire, England, 1986

Early in his career, the English photographer Michael Kenna retraced the footsteps of his countryman Bill Brandt to photograph the mill towns of northern England. Brandt made a similar daytime view of this scene in 1937. In Brandt's version, most of the tones are reversed from Kenna's night view—the building is dark and the sky is light.

Advances in night photography have paralleled advances in photographic technology for the last hundred years, and as night photography has become increasingly more accessible, an ever-increasing number of photographers engage in the practice on a regular, rather than occasional or experimental, basis. Major improvements in both color and black and white films in the 1980s and 1990s, the rapid development of digital photography during the last 15 years, and the explosion of photography's popularity in general have made photographing at night almost a routine endeavor. Although police and security guards still seem to be overly suspicious of night photographers, the general public no longer finds it so strange to see photographers with cameras on tripods after dark. The Web has also made the work of night photographers available to a broader audience than ever before. The Nocturnes organization has had a Web presence (www.thenocturnes.com) since 1996, and in its early years it routinely received comments from night photographers around the world who were surprised and pleased to discover that they were not the only ones photographing after dark.³⁷ A quick search on the photo-sharing Web site Flickr, or simply a look at the *O. Winston Links* page on The Nocturnes Web site, will show that there are literally thousands of people around the world who have discovered the magic of night photography. It seems appropriate, therefore, to end this history of night photography here and share more recent images by contemporary photographers in the other chapters of this book.