

PHOTOGRAPHY, WHISTLER'S PORTRAITS, AND THE PUBLIC IMAGE OF THE MALE ARTIST

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During the Victorian era, photography's technological developments and their ready incorporation into systems of mass cultural reproduction were seen by some as fostering an industrial ethos that did not accord with long-established measures of artistic value. John Ruskin's initial appreciation of the daguerreotype's verisimilitude, for example, became tempered over time, as he described photography in *Stones of Venice* (1853) and elsewhere as being best suited for making records of architecture and other visual art. For Ruskin, the medium was too mechanical, while its technological developments were inspired by the issue of cost reduction and, therefore, reinforced factory-models of labour.¹ Photography risked turning painterly genres, such as portraiture, more into an industry than mercantile patronage already had. The newer medium also threatened the dominance of painting on the portrait market, as well as its visual and verbal rhetoric of exclusivity and prestige. By extension, even the image of the male artist as a cultural authority risked emasculation. Nevertheless, many members of the Royal Academy and other established painters recognized the need to amalgamate their identities as artists with the expanding cultural influence of the new technology, including the subject of this article – James McNeill Whistler.²

Nineteenth-century photographers relied extensively on non-objective representational techniques. As Daniel Novak argues, from early in the technology's development, Victorians noted that "photographic defacement and abstraction are not a technological exception to the rule of photographic objectivity" (38). Nevertheless, photography was heavily appreciated throughout the Victorian era for its assumed verisimilitude. The medium's growing importance during this time did not in the end dilute the cultural relevance of painting. If anything, the mass-production technologies and the enhanced commercial networks of which the new medium took advantage can be said to