



Pandora's Box: Jan Dibbets on Another Photography

Jan Dibbets

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Jan Dibbets' dissenting and unashamedly biased *Pandora's Box* offers nothing less than a reinterpretation of the entire history of art photography, arguing that scientific photography was the realm where the medium's real innovations happened. "Scientific photography encouraged a freer, more outgoing use of the medium," says Dibbets. "The whole problem with photography is that it was invented at the wrong time. As Baudelaire so rightly pointed out, the first photographers were doing their best to imitate artists like Ingres and other 'realists.' All this imitation ... blocked the process of emancipation."

The result of Dibbets' alternative history is some 300 images, with Nicéphore Niépce, Gustave Le Gray, Étienne-Jules Marey and Edward Muybridge rubbing shoulders with photographers less well known but, in Dibbets' view, equally crucial. Their direct descendants are Karl Blossfeldt, Man Ray, Alexander Rodchenko, Alfred Stieglitz, Paul Strand and, more recently, Bruce Nauman. Augmented with quotations from Baudelaire, Le Gray and Alvin Langdon Coburn, Dibbets' book gives a fascinating and fresh take on the history of the medium.

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