



Eadweard Muybridge (Kingston upon Thames 1830 - Kingston upon Thames 1904)

Nude descending a staircase, 1887

plate 133 from "Animal Locomotion." Collotype
229 x 311 mm

with Muybridge's letterpress credit, series title, plate number, copyright, and date on the two-toned sheet recto, and with a W.R. Miles, Muybridge Collection hand stamp, with item number, in ink, on verso. 1887

Artist description:

The reason why Muybridge made his first 'animal locomotion' photographic series is of more than anecdotal value. Leland Stanford, the former governor of California, had bet that a horse at gallop would at certain moments have all four feet off the ground. In 1877 Stanford won his wager, supported by Muybridge's series successfully capturing a horse's gallop in detail. Because these photos were so different to prior representations of galloping horses, disbelief on the part of the public was considerable. Muybridge mounted the photographs on a rotating disc to show that the pictures indeed demonstrated natural movement. When, in a subsequent stage, he started projecting the photographs with a zoopraxiscope device, this process can be seen as a forerunner to film. His original didactic purpose – a visual atlas for artists – seems a century-on to live again in the repetitive, 'objective' photographs of Bernd and Hilla Becher and their students, which immediately acquired the status of art works. The fact that Muybridge's photographs are also now considered as art, has perhaps more to do with the playful nature of that forgotten bet than with the decisive strides he made in the development of photography as handmaiden to science.