Photoshop Disasters

THE INDUSTRY, THE IMAGES AND AN INSIDE LOOK AT WHAT MAKES A DISASTER
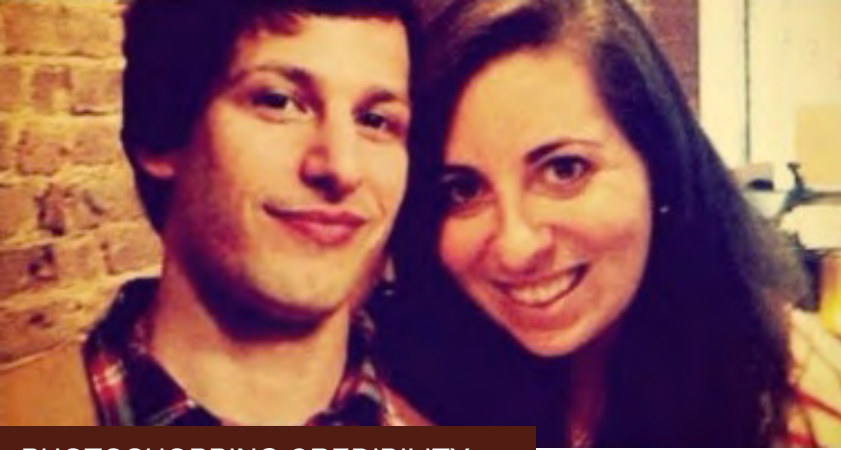
Featuring:

Industry interviews
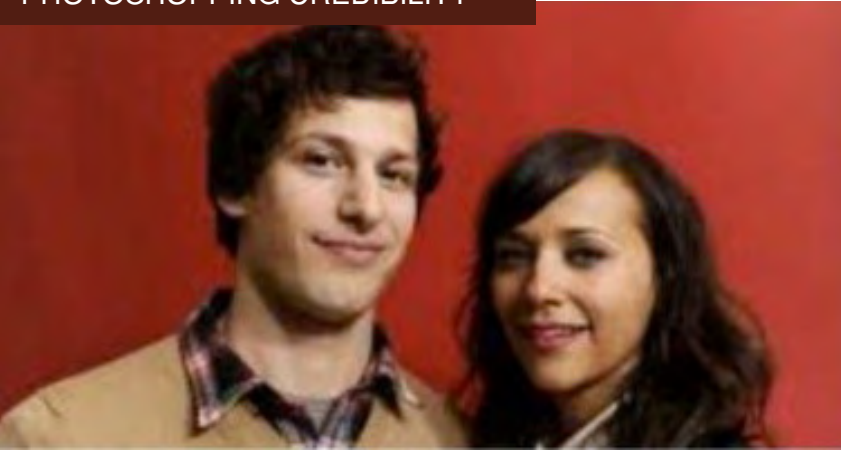
When Photoshop ruins lives

The history of altering photos

BRYCE BLADON

JEFF MCALLISTER

PHOTOSHOP FALLOUT

When a fake is convincing enough to have real consequences

Photoshop is a tool for making the impossible seem possible and the credible seem incredible. Users who abuse this balance have a mark of shame that's hard to hide. Below are some of the best (and/or worst) examples of Photoshop abuse from the past few years - and the price the abuser paid.

Photoshopping Credibility

Shirley Hornstein rubbed digital elbows with everyone. Like that unnamed uncle in family photographs, she seemed to be in the background of every startup, silicon valley venture, and celebrity photo from the past few years. Alleged credit card fraud blossomed into revelations that the photos and connections she claimed were either composites or outright lies.

Result: A suspect Linkdln profile and a lot of free time during the work week.

Faith in Photoshop

Patriarch Kirill I, leader of the Russian Orthodox Church, was wrist-deep in a modern miracle when a picture of the religious leader showed a $30,000 watch reflected on the surface of a table - despite Kirill's bare wrist above it. Kirill denied ever wearing the watch and claimed any photo of him with it was doctored. Then the Russian Church admitted the photo was internally doctored and apologized via their website, promising that the guilty

would be severely punished. Kirill mirrored the punishment sentiment; not so much the apologetic one.

Result: Kirill won the Silver Shoe Award, given in Russia for the dubious achievement in show business. He was embroiled in a pair of other (non Photoshop-related) controversies, but continues to lead the Russian Church. It is a religion of forgiveness, after all.

Cheap Chinese Forgery
The government of the Huili County in China's Sichuan province was caught posting a doctored photo of officials inspecting a highway. Besides being obtusely retouched, it was also completely unnecessary. There were plenty of real photos of the officials doing what they said they were doing.

Result: Government officials were quick to apologize and utilized social media as a

way to mend credibility and undo the damage. Though they do blame the photographer for stitching two photos together, it's interesting how quickly they (otherwise) accepted responsibility and tried to make amends. Ignoring all these lessons, an equally abhorrent Photoshop surfaced the next year in the Yuhang District, when an otherwise innocuous landscaping project announcement featured floating officials and a leg that turned into a shrub.

SHADOW OF THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

A (wine) Stain on Science's Record

An anonymous tip in 2008 drew attention to irregular results from University of Connecticut professor Dipak K. Das' research into the health benefits of resveratrol, an ingredient in red wine. The three-year investigation published its results in early 2012 and revealed 145 instances of fabricated results - most involving the manipulation of images.

Result: Eleven science journals that had published Das' work were informed and the professor now faces dismissal proceedings. The Health Center has frozen all research in his lab and has refused him the federal grants he was awarded.

Shadow of the Associated Press

Freelance photographer Miguel Tovar removed his shadow from a photo taken at a soccer match in Argentina by cloning dust from one part of the picture to another.

Result: Santiago Lyon, The Director of Photography at the Associated Press, sent a memo to all members of staff regarding the incident. Of particular note to Tovar: "There is no indication that Tovar's other images were manipulated. However, we have severed all relations with Tovar and removed him from assignment. He will not work for the AP again in any capacity. In addition, we have removed all of his images from AP Images, our commercial photo licens-ing division, and its website."
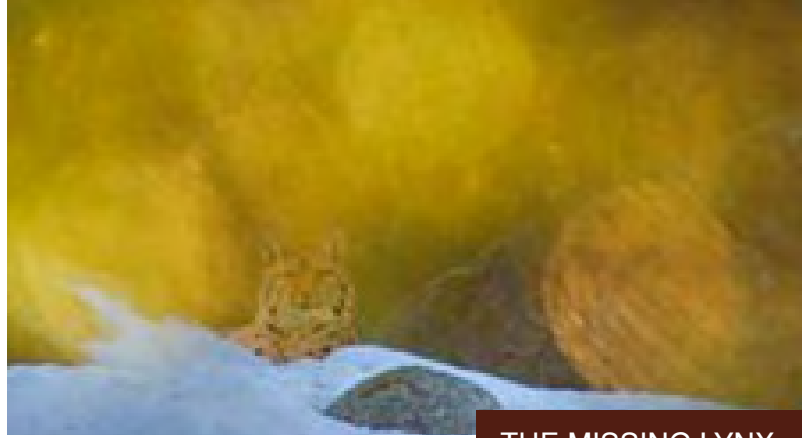
The Missing Lynx

Terje Hellesö won Sweden's Environmental Protection Agency's Nature Photographer of the Year award for his photos. Most of his subjects are endangered animals and (obviously) difficult to find in the wild. The rarest of his subjects, a lynx with a winter coat in July, was the catalyst for Hellesö's eventual downfall. He initially denied allegations of touching up photos, but later admitted that "just a few of the lynx pictures" were tampered with.

Result: More than 100 manipulated images were discovered and the stories around them were found to be fabricated. Hellesö was reported

for fraud when a fake image of a raccoon dog, combined with Hellesö's fictional account, resulted in resources being wasted in pursuit of the animal.

You Can't Spell Regret without Egret

The Sacramento Bee suspended award-winning photojournalist Bryan Patrick when a photo of an egret with a frog in its mouth was discovered to be a composite. Two more cases surfaced, and though the changes all appeared to be for aesthetic reasons, they were judged to be ethically out of line.

Result: Patrick was fired. President of the National Press Photographers Association stated: "If he's willing to move a couple of egrets around, if he's willing to jazz up flames to make a photo more exciting, how do we know there aren't more?

If he is willing to move a couple of egrets around, if he's willing to jazz up flames to make a photo more exciting, how do we know there aren't more? … How do we trust the work?

WELLNESS CAFE

1.

MICROSOFT USA

2.

MICROSOFT POLAND

WHEN TO SHOP VS. WHEN TO STOP

There is no arguing the joy of a well-doctored photo. Airbrushed abs, lustrous lips, and patties that glisten amidst the embrace of two well-puffed buns - these are things we've become used to seeing on a daily basis. But in a world where picturesque realities are little more than a few brush-strokes and filters away, it's easy for the well-intentioned photo-shopper to go too far.

1. An oddly angled limb alters your photograph's composition and/or is unflattering to the subject. So you tweak arm placement and bend the elbow. Maybe the hips are off and the feet are in an unnatural pose. As time passes, human anatomy seem more like a guideline than a rule.

STOP: Shortly after the doctored image leaks online, your model receives a recruitment call from Cirque de Soleil for 10 times your production budget.

2. A few unsightly blemishes ruin an otherwise stellar portrait. An acne scar and a few unkempt hairs are smoothed away. The realization that you can correct mother nature's mistakes fills you with a sense of power.

STOP: When you realize, historically, such "photographic blemishes" have included everything from politically polarizing figures to ethnic minorities.

3. That family photo would be perfect, if only dad hadn't been forced to work late on Christmas Eve. While we're at it, wouldn't it be great if Grandpa never died? And if Spot were wearing a tiny sequined suit?

STOP: When you ask yourself "What if Aunt Peggy was actually Nicki Minaj?

4. Your shoot requires a location that's unavailable due to limitations in budget or time. Maybe there's not quite enough snow on the ground, or the Eiffel Tower fades into fog. Speaking of skylines, wouldn't these Dockers sell better if that was New York in the background? The sky is the limit!

STOP: Those limitations also include space, time, gravity, or other binding forces of science and logic.

K-MART

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PHOTOSHOP
SOME ETHICS IN

Over the years, photo alteration has made leaps and bounds in usability and capability. Still, clarity on what is and isn't right remains difficult to distinguish. Legislation and civic movements have made equal strides to bring ethics up to speed with technology.
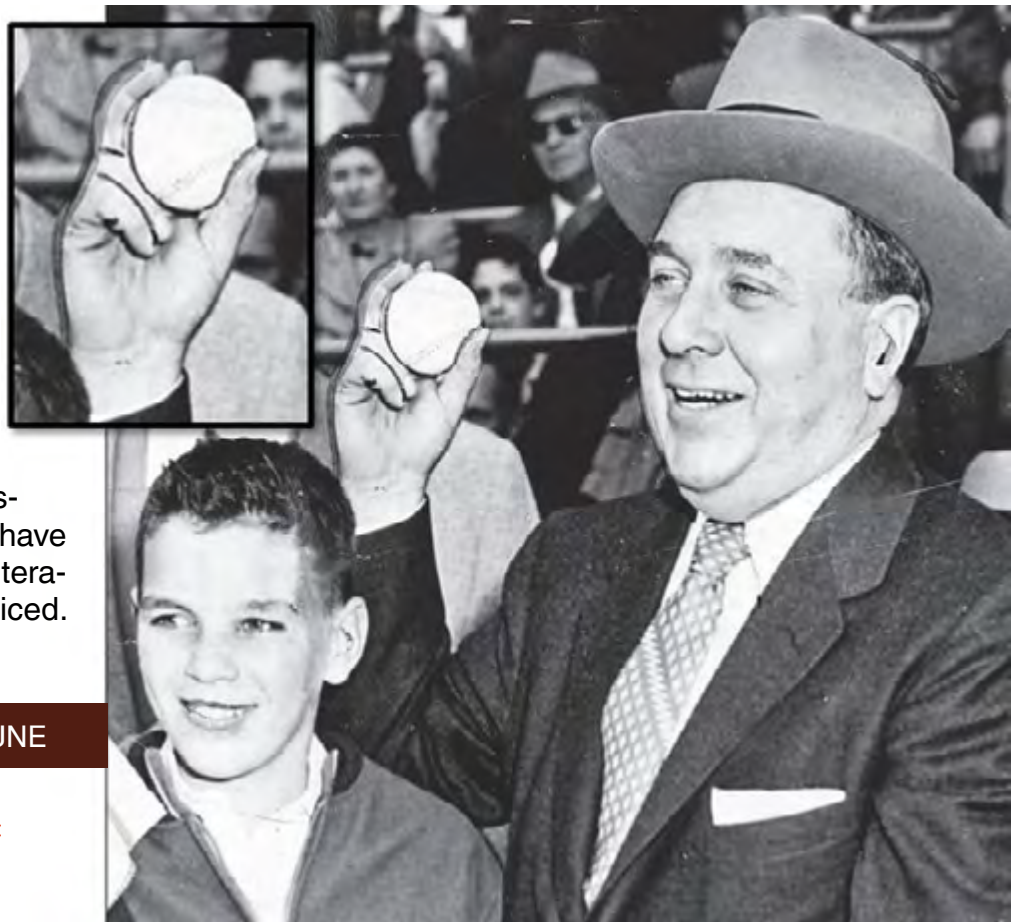
The 52-Year-Old Photobomb

The 1950s were a magical time when you could smoke indoors, hit your kids, and doctor newspaper photos all without batting an eyelash.

The Chicago Tribune was questioned by an online reader after it featured an archived photo of former Mayor Richard Daley. An ink line highlighting the edge of Daley's hand was apparent to anyone not suffering from cataracts. In the 1950s, the Tribune explained, Spotone ink was applied to in-print photographs to help particular details stand out. The loss of the original negative was likely not seen as a very big hit for the newspaper; after all, they still had the published photo. However, how obtuse the alteration appears today illustrates how eagle-eyed readers have become and how much subtler alterations need to be to slink by unnoticed.

VIA CHICAGO TRIBUNE

14-Year-Old Overturns Seventeen Magazine

Back in my day, teenage girls enjoyed boy bands and fluffy things. Today, teenage girls have sex, do drugs, and bring down companies that portray an unrealistic body image at a much earlier age.

TEEN VOGUE FEATURES ZOOEY DESCHANEL

In a matter of days, Julia Bluhm's online petition tallied 84,000 signatures demanding Seventeen Magazine "Give girls images of real girls!" The initial demands were fairly modest. Bluhm wanted "Seventeen Magazine to commit to printing one unaltered -- real -- photo spread per month. I want to see regular girls that look like me in a magazine that's supposed to be for me."

In response, editor-in-chief Ann Shoket exceeded expectations and signed a pact to "never change girls' body or face shapes" and to feature "only real girls and models who are healthy." The resulting commitment was a feature article in the next issue.

The success of the petition pushed a similar movement lead by Carina Cruz (16-years-old) and Emma Stydahar (17-years-old) against Teen Vogue. The petition closed with over 50,000 signatures and upon delivery of the petition to Teen Vogue offices, the two girls were encouraged to learn more about the magazine and were handed a free copy of the latest issue (they were already subscribers).

Ruins of the Photoshop Age

There's an interesting commentary at work when someone lambasts people who alter photos and then are caught doing the act they decry. It only gets more interesting when they shift their position a few pixels to the right due to the overwhelming evidence of their guilt. If someone lies about lying, they're probably not the most reliable source of information. And if they claim it's a result of being a fine-artist, they are likely something of an ass.

EDGAR MARTINS

In a 2008 interview with ARTmostfierce, Portuguese photographer Edgar Martins stated: "When I photograph I don't do any post production to the images, either in the darkroom or digitally, because it erodes the process. So I respect the essence of these spaces."

Just over a year later, Martin's photo essay "Ruins of the Second Gilded Age" was published in the Sunday edition of the New York Times Magazine. Within 24 hours, internet commenter's discovered that some of the images were altered, despite the accompanying text claiming that the photos were a result of 'long exposures but without digital manipulation.'

As a result of the gaffe, Martins' past photos were digitally combed over and more affronts came to light. Several images from Martins' other work "The Diminishing Present" were clearly mirrored and had small details added to the mirrored half to mask the indiscretion.

Martins stated via his site that there was "a clear misunderstanding concerning the values and rights associated to the creative process which made a renown[ed] publication like The New York Times Magazine, commission a fine-artist, such as myself, to depict a very specific view of reality without taking all the necessary measures to ensure that I was aware of its journalistic parameters and limits."

Not addressed were the past comments from Martins (and the essay accompanying "Ruins of the Gilded Age") stating that he didn't use Photoshop, that he abhorred Photoshop, and that post-production destroys the artistic process. But honestly, who's going to notice?

Israel Gets Real

Literally the only story about Israel over the past year that doesn't involve an explosion.

There have been a variety of talks from a variety of countries about the ethics and issues stemming from the use of Photoshop. However, on March 2012, Israel became the first country to require advertisements to disclose when a photograph had been digitally altered . Israel also requires a minimum measurement on the body mass index (BMI) for models in an effort to promote positive body images in the media and to combat eating disorders.

"
*When I photograph I don't do any post production to the images... it erodes the process.***"**

"[e]ditors later confronted the photographer and determined that most of the images did not wholly reflect the reality they purported to show"

EDGAR MARTINS

PHOTOSHOP &
THE FEMALE FIGURE

The most common victim of the Photoshop disaster

Post-production is a polarizing topic in the photography business. There are those who embrace the infinite possibilities promised by digital manipulation programs. There are others who believe the simplicity of sliders make it far too easy for dishonesty slip into an otherwise factual medium. Shawn Daniel McLeod, a Calgary-based photographer with a flair for dark subject matter, falls into the former camp.

McLeod first experimented with photography back in the days of film. Sick of butting heads with the technology of the time, McLeod moved into graphic design, where he felt the tools of the trade gave him more creative control. Years later, photo manipulation software caught up to his artistic ambitions. McLeod now specializes in female fashion photography. His shots are painstakingly staged and heavily polished. While most people associate Photoshop with a post-production catchall for any mistakes on set, McLeod considers it structural component of his work.

Photoshop Disasters spoke to McLeod about the role of post-production in his craft. Of particular interest is the way he handles the female figure—one of the most frequent victims of the photoshop disaster.

How would you describe your niche in the photography world?

Creative fashion for alternative girls. Fashion and beauty is my forte. I like to offer my professionalism to girls with tattoos, piercings, pink-hair and that kind of stuff. I find they haven't received enough publicity in the big fashion market.

How much of your photography involves post-production?

All of my work.

To what extent?

I mainly use Photoshop for cleaning things up and moving things around. I do dabble in adding extra effects or things in the background, but right now I mostly use it for cleaning up clothing or taking things out of the picture that change the composition. Say someone's arm is in the wrong position—I might move the arm. Or I'll change the lighting on a particular part of the body in order to change to focus of the image.

How comfortable are you with manipulating a model's body?

Personally, I don't go too far. I don't like to make the skin look too Photoshopped or too smooth. I remove blemishes, but I tend to leave some of the scars that really set the personality of the person. I don't even go over

[those manipulations] with the model.

When I do a shoot, I'll sit down with the model immediately after and go through all the photos then and there. They might see a picture and be like: "Oh my god, I look crazy or my arm looks fat. Can you do something about that?"
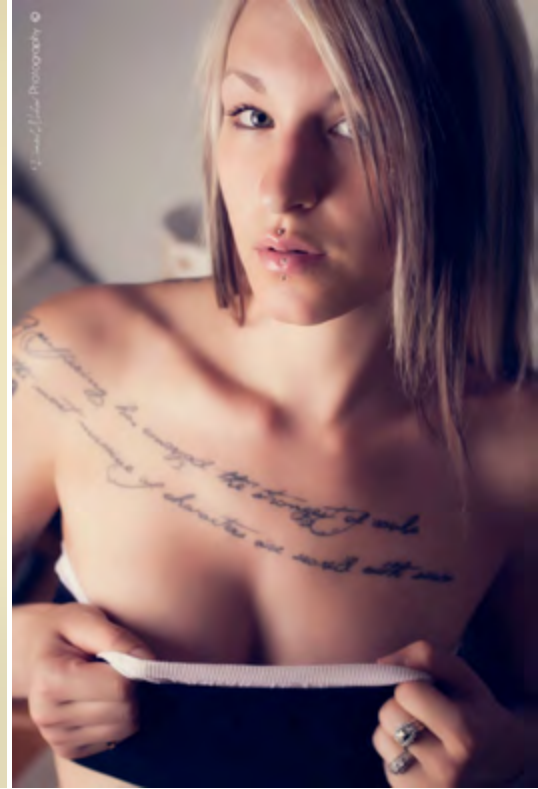
Of course I can.

Has a model asked you to do something that you've had to refuse?

Nope. If they want something, it's totally up to them. It's as much their picture as it is mine. I want to create something that we're both going to be really proud of.

"It's as much their picture as it is mine."

How would you define a Photoshop Disaster in your line of work?

Over cloning. If the clone tool is used improperly it can remove texture. You can see smooth dots all over the face where there were blemishes. Also, manipulating the shape of the body itself with the liquefy tool. I've seen people overdo the waist. There are instance out there were people just don't see it right.

Do you think that has to do with the amount of heavily altered imagery we see in magazines and advertisements? Even when Photoshop isn't the main culprit, we're constantly subjected to unrealistic body images? Are we becoming desensitized to the natural human form?

It very well could be. In many cases [the mistakes] comes out as someone trying to create their idea of beauty. The tabloids and media have tainted a lot of people's idea of what that it.

In the runway industry, they use 14- or 15-year old girls as the perfect image of beauty. You have to be 90 pounds in order to be on the runway. Other girls see this. When they do a shoot with a photographer, sometimes they're the ones asking for the crazy manipulations.

What's your idea of beauty?

The type of girls I shoot are very creative and individual. I like girls with alternative style because they're more comfortable with their personal appearance. There's something that I find inherently attractive about that.

Who are some Photoshop artists that you admire?

There's a group on Facebook called Dark Beauty Magazine. The work that people do on there is insane. The way they use Photoshop for manipulating backgrounds, light, texture, and skin tone makes me want to just grab someone out of the hallway and start taking pictures of them and make art.

images and interview courtesy of

SHAWN DANIEL MCLEOD

PROTO-SHOP

A BRIEF HISTORY OF

PHOTO MANIPULATION

S hoddy photo-manipulation is as old as photo-manipulation itself—which, of course, is as old as photography. Humanity's ability to invent is exceeded only by its drive to muck it up in attempts to improve on it. When photography as we know was introduced by France in 1839, people were quick to point out the medium's many shortcomings. It wasn't enough to be able to replicate reality with the click of a button—consumers wanted to replicate the reality they wanted to see.

Proto-shop and the Birth of Photography:

The first cameras were not without technological limitations. Early devices failed to reproduce forms and textures with the same detail as the human eye. The photographic emulsions of the time were disproportionately sensitive to certain colours including blues and violets, which would often lead to blotchy, blown out skies.

Landscape photographers were among the first proto-shoppers. They christened the art of cut and paste photography. which, for the record, involved far more hardship than a simple Command-X and Command-V. A common trick of the industry was to combine two separate negatives—one for the land, the other for the sky—into one pristinely exposed land-

scape.

The trend caught on with postcard photographers, who would produce picturesque views by manually cutting away any unwanted elements in the natural topography. Many postcards from the turn of the century have little correlation to the actual locales in which they were shot. The cut-and-paste trend peaked with portrait photographers, who avoided the complications of busy group shots by inviting clients into the studio separately and then pasting the figures together to form a final, immaculate composition.

Before the camera was a decade old, post-production had become as important to commercial photography as the art of taking photos itself.

Alternate Realities: Art and Politics

In the late 1850s, artistic douche-baggery began to brew in Europe under the guise of the Expressionist movement. From the Expressionist perspective, the mechanical function of the camera and the factuality of the raw photograph ruled out the medium as a legitimate art form. Desperate to fit in with the trends of the time, photographers were under pressure to break away from the faithful reproduction of reality the camera was once lauded for. Elaborate staging, soft-focus lenses and multiple exposures all entered the photographers arsenal. These tools are responsible for the dreamlike aesthetic that dominates portraits of the era.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, many took advantage of photography's status as an 'honest' medium. Under Joseph Stalin, the Soviet Union produced several examples of doctored photographs meant to misconstrue historical events—some more believable than others. Political artists like John Heartfield and Alexandr Zhitomoirsky drew from the traditions of the political caricature to create satirically doctored political photos. Photography became an effective vehicle of political propaganda and as a pair of World Wars rocked the century, the line between honest satire and deliberate deception began to blur.

Around the same time, many of the techniques once reserved for professionals became major focal points of popular science and photography journals. Darkroom hobbyism reached a mainstream audience and novelty photography became both a mass-produced commercial industry and a popular pastime among

the affluent. Trick photography emerged for both malicious and entertainment purposes. Illusionists used long exposures to create ghostly figures and poltergeists. Novelty portraiture became an industry in it's own right. Popular novelty portraits of the time include tiny men in bottles, or "polypose" pictures where the subject appears to interact with his own double.

Photography in the Media

Among the technological advancements of the early 1900's came the perfection of halftone printing and thus the regular use of photographs in newspapers and magazines. As photographs began to replace cartoons, the limitations of the medium became increasingly apparent. The most cumbersome: actually requiring the reporter to visit the scene he was meant to be reporting on. With the standards of photojournalism still in flux, some reporters began to stylize particular scenes to increase the drama. Others simply staged scenes.

By the 1930, photography had become the standard for print advertizing. In an industry centered on altering the consumer's perspective, the credibility of a photograph made it a very powerful tool. The oversized burgers and undersized models that define the advertisement industry find their origins in this era. The photographic medium that was once plagued by its promise of veracity had become all the more powerful for it.

And so it goes…

Not much has changed in the ongoing tug-of-war between journalistic and fine-arts photography. Some believe the camera's merit lies in its ability to convey straight, unbiased snapshots of reality; others believe it's the role of the photographer to apply his own perspective in pursuit of a higher truth. The means through which either of these agendas are accomplished— through in-camera tricks or through the tools of post-production—are also hotly debated issues.

What has changed is technology. Two particularly pertinent

In an industry centered on altering the consumer's perspective, the credibility of a photograph made it a very powerful tool.

events have shaped the way we interact with photography. The first came with the democratization of camera with the emergence of the Kodak #1 in 1888. The second came one century later as photo-doctoring software—including the Photoshop series, released by Adobe Systems in 1990—was put in the hands of the masses

With the explosion of consumer-level digital cameras in the late 1990's, both tools have become household standards. And while conversation on what constitutes the 'proper' treatment of the photo is continuously in flux, one thing is certain: the evolution of the industry is no longer limited to the influence of professionals. It's up to us to choose the way we document our world.
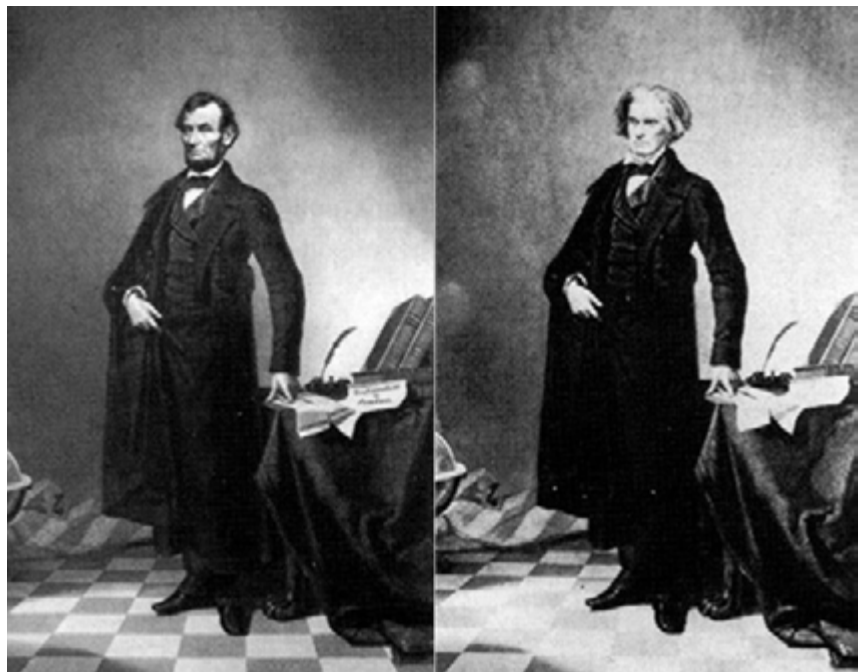
> **It's up to us to choose the way we document our world."**

THANKS FOR READING!

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