

hysteria - les planches du Dr. Charcot à la Salpêtrière



/// vernissage mercredi 12 mars 2014 de 18h à 21h
exposition du jeudi 13 mars au samedi 10 mai 2014

Baudoin Lebon Gallery shows the 47 plates of Salpêtrière's photography department, 30 years after their presentation at Texbraun Gallery in 1984. These pictures, revealed at that time as part of the "From anxiety to ecstasy" exhibition, depict the physical symptoms of hysteria.

Around 1880, medical science starts making most of technical progress in the photography area: like Muybridge, successive images represent progressive deformation on limbs and faces, and instantaneousness allows capturing the body tension on the height of physical crisis. Submissive patients are "invited" to pose in a special setting: Professor Charcot prompts real hysterical crises for the needs of the taking shots. Does this meticulous staging give an artistic aspect to these scientific images?

Today's representation of oddness aspects of humankind renews itself through contemporary artistic photography. We will exhibit Joel-Peter Witkin, Roger Ballen and Les Krims work arts: these artists' creations match Salpêtrière plates, first of all from a plastic point of view but also because of patients' intense presence.



Albert Londe, document du service photographique de la Salpêtrière, 1893

Doctor Charcot's Salpêtrière plates

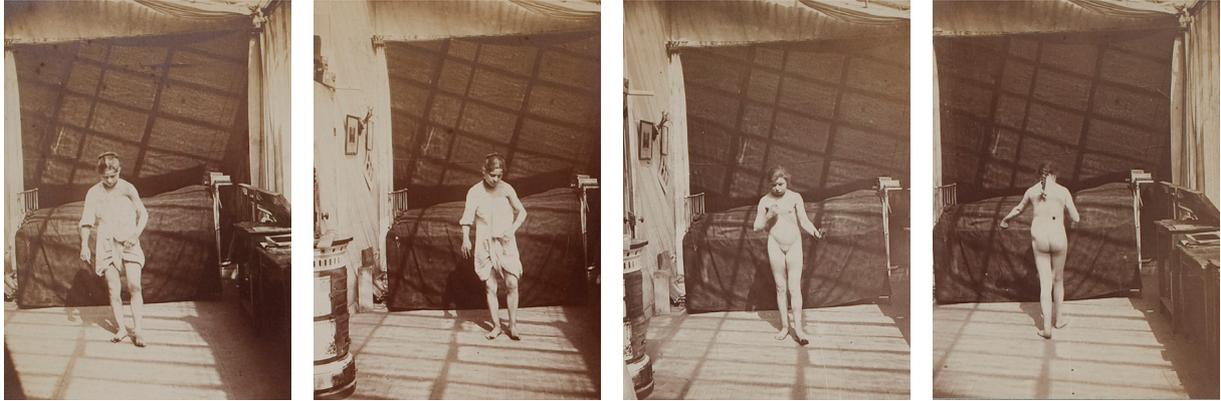
Since 1869, "la Salpêtrière" doctors and researchers use photography to illustrate their researches. Aware of these method huge possibilities, the hospital creates a photography department in 1882 under the supervision of photographer Albert Londe.

Original prints exhibited are a product of this department's collection. Some of them have been published at "Nouvelle Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière" (1888 – 1918), founded by Paul Richer, known for his medical drawings, Gilles de la Tourette and Albert Londe, and managed by Jean-Martin Charcot. This journal follow on from « Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière » (1875 – 1879) and « Revue photographique des Hôpitaux de Paris » (1869 – 1872).

Photography achieves great success in hospital environments: it guarantees true images and, consequently, making a diagnosis is easier.

"Illnesses like epilepsy, hysteron-epilepsy and hysteria, which are characterized by transient state, are better studied through photography: it allows keeping the exact image of these states that cannot be examined by direct observation"

(Albert Londe, La photographie médicale. Application aux sciences médicales et physiologiques, 1893)



Albert Londe, document du service photographique de la Salpêtrière, 1893

Charcot practice kindles general misunderstanding. In those days his Tuesday lessons were accused of being “theatrical exhibitions”. Nowadays, some people speak of “spectacle” (George Didi-Huberman, *Invention de l’hystérie. Charcot et l’iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière*, 1982). Apparently, Freud, who assisted to his lessons and translated them into German, wasn’t shocked by the Salpêtrière practices. It’s not about taking sides for or against Charcot; it’s about the presentation of these plates and artistic, scientific, philosophical questions that are raised by them.



Albert Londe, document du service photographique de la Salpêtrière, 1893

Charcot fabricated, in the strongest meaning of the verb, hysteria, in order to control the symptoms. From whence the arsenal of the Salpêtrière, photographs included : hysteria can at last be seen, be read, be classified. Such as the « attack of hysteria in a man » dating from 1885, showing a véritable anthropomorphic alphabet. These bodies, rebellious in appearance, can become docile machines Under the effect of the master’s voice, voice which controls with a finger and a glance, sometimes even with a wand. One therefore goes from savage absence of an attack to a domesticated absence, that of hypnosis. Even more amazing, the attack itself becomes a contrôlable moment, thanks to the photography atelier of the Salpêtrière : the patient was brought to the studio so that his symptoms could be captured, in the same way that today a hospitalized patient is x-rayed. In this way it was possible to provoke a cataleptic state with an unexpected gong, while the photographer focused his camera for a supposed portrait.

(Claude Léger, « De l’hystérie » in : *De l’angoisse à l’extase*, Galerie Texbraun, 1984)



Albert Londe, document du service photographique de la Salpêtrière, 1893

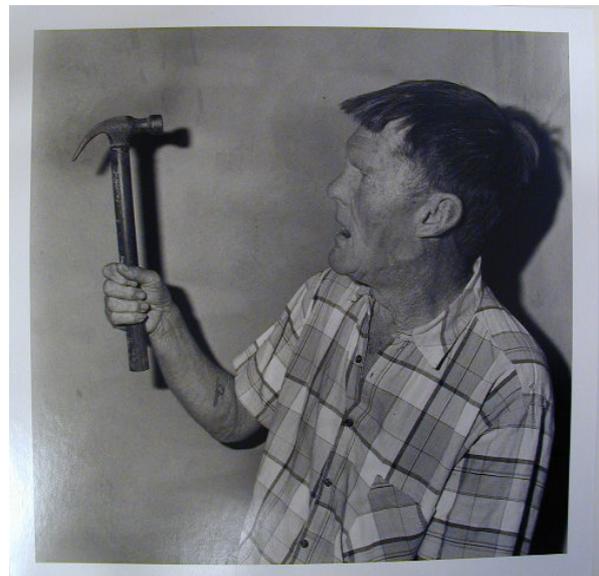
Joel-Peter Witkin, Roger Ballen and Les Krims

We have chosen to exhibit Joel-Peter Witkin's art works at the same time as "La Salpêtrière" plates because the same staging characterize both works, even if they have two different goals. Just like a set designer, Witkin gathers up the objects of a meticulous setting where the model will pose. There is a fascination or at least an intense attraction to these deformed bodies and distinctive features. In portraits made by Witkin, some of these features remind of medical instruments or the furniture that we can find at a hospital. In both cases, a deep sorrow haunts photographed beings.

"Hysteria" is a complex concept and it doesn't have the same meaning that it had in 1880. Hard to limit, this word refers inevitably to insanity. We've chosen to exhibit 2 Roger Ballen's work arts that are, in our opinion, a contemporary image of human insanity. Even when the model isn't a lunatic himself, the image is created in such a way as to show a character absolutely mad.



Roger Ballen, Scrap collector holding globe, 1998



Roger Ballen, Herman with hammer, 1999

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Joel-Peter Witkin, Bad Student, 2007



Les Krims, Human being as a piece of sculpture (screaming man fiction), 1970



Les Krims, sans titre, 1974