

Anne Barros, *The Female Gaze*

Discipline: Photography

A photograph may be defined as an object that, by the use of light, captures a record of a person, object, or scene. The use of silver in early photographic processes (i.e. silver nitrate) has added another dimension to this candlestick commemorating 150 years of Canadian women photographers – both silver and light are doubly connoted.

Since the beginnings of photography, women were involved with both its practical aspects – the bulky camera, the dark room laden with chemicals, and also with the more aesthetic concerns of choosing subjects, lighting, capturing emotions and finally manipulating the image as an art object. Their photographic images, whether from century-old glass plates or recent digital printouts, reflect the women and their worlds. Selfies are not a recent invention. Mattie Gunterman used a trip hose device to photograph herself with rifle, dog, and camera case in 1898. Barbara Astman, in 1994, used a Polaroid camera for her close-up images. Domestic scenes, like dishes in the sink, have been natural to women photographers. Similarly popular have been photographs of other women and friends, like those taken by Geraldine Moodie, Millie Gamble, and Laura Jones. Karen Hermeston sought adventure by joining the Canadian Women's Army Corps during World War II. For Mary Pocock, travel and architecture were colourful sources of inspiration in the 1990s.

Ultimately, photography was a form of self-expression for these women. When hung out to dry, their photographs give us the female gaze, perhaps more looking than nurturing, more self-affirming than previously thought, more playful, more heroic.

ETCHED PHOTOGRAPHS

1. Mattie Gunterman (1872-1945)
Self-portrait with rifle and dog Nero, 1898
Permission of Special Collections, 604.331.3776
Vancouver Public Library
2. Geraldine Moody (1854-1945)
Moody photographed landscapes and people often while accompanying her husband in fieldwork in the Arctic.
Portrait of Inuit woman, c. 1904
Library and Archives Canada
3. Margaret Watkin (1884-1969)
Professional photographer specializing in advertising, 1919
4. Millie Gamble (1887-1986)
Going to Call on the Bride, nd
Amateur photographer who documented everyday life in Prince Edward Island c. 1905

5. Elizabeth Hay Turnbull and Constance Mary Turnbull at Banff, 1910
Courtesy of Laura Brandon
6. Karen Hermeston, 1940s
From Englehart, Ontario, Sgt. Karen Hermeston, CWAC, was the first woman
photographer in the Canadian Army during World War II. It is not known who
took this photograph of Hermeston.
Canada. Department of National Defence, Library and Archives Canada
7. Laura Jones
Photograph of youths, 1970s
Permission of Laura Jones
8. Mary Pocock (1952-2004)
Bacchus Vesuvius Pompeii Series, 1990
Permission of Marcus Schubert
9. Barbara Astman
Study for Seeing, 1994
Two Polaroid images
Permission of Barbara Astman