

19th Century Photograph

In this practical assignment I will write about a photograph taken before the year of 1900. What I think about it, what it gives me and what the picture is telling about the subject, the people, the photographer as well as the time and society.



The photograph I have chosen is taken in 1890 in Australia. It shows the employees of Holland Park slaughter yards of Marshall Road, Holland Park at the front of the slaughter's premises. The photographer is not known, as far as I have searched after him or her's name.

Why did I choose this? Several reasons, actually. The employees are posing in an interesting way. Some of them are just standing or sitting there, kind of casually, while others are drinking beer. The very first look at the picture made me think of a promotional poster for a western series (or a movie) with a larger ensemble cast. In such promotional posters and images things like that may happen. It makes me feel that they are not in front of a camera, while it feels like they are posing at the same time. The photograph also made me think about band photos, and there is a press photo for the Australian band Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds

that actually reminds me of this. I will add that as well at the end of this text.

Well, what does the photography tell me about the subject and the people in it? I think it is to tell us that the employees at this slaughter are friends or have a friendly, casual tone as well as just been co-workers. None of them are posing very stiff-ish, like some upper class family portraits may show us. I get a casual feel. Some of them are also drinking beer, which makes the feeling of friendship and not just employees at the same pace more strong. This could for me - if I did not read about where and when - be a picture of friends spending time together etc.

I also think the photograph are taken during a normal working day. The man to the left in the pictures is only dressed in a vest over his shirt, and his sleeves are pulled up: A symbol which makes you think of someone who is working. Someone who is supposed to

do something.

The image may also say something about the photographer: I think the photographer was a professional photographer who perhaps took a lot of group photographs. Families, employees, weddings, school classes and staff, perhaps? We can't say for sure, because the photographer is unknown, but I get the feeling that he or she is a professional or someone with experience in photographing groups of people. Like a school or corporation photographer nowadays.

The angle is straight towards the subject, and it gives it a semi portrait-ish feel to it, while it still allows the image to feel casual. If the employees were photographed from the side I think it would feel more staged than this image really does. For me this is a great angle to capture all the employees in a position that feels natural.

The photograph has maybe a rather poor quality in the image itself compared to photographs taken today, but I don't think it destroys anything. I think it should be like this, because it gives us a hint of which time it is taken. I have to admit I am not a big fan of old photographs being edited to look like new ones:

They feel forced and non-authentic. A photograph can be a document of its time, and I really do think this is a good document of the time it is taken. Both in the subject and how the image itself turned out.

This is a really interesting photo for me, because it is a document of its time. I love art photography, and when I am taking pictures myself I tend to draw to the more artsy corners, but I am very interested in history and I love watching old photographs.



This is the kind of band photograph which reminded me of the old one. It almost seems like a photographer randomly showed up and shot the band while doing a conversation or a break during recording. Photographer: Cat Stevens (not the singer/songwriter). © Bad Seed Ltd.