

CARTE DE VISITE

Featuring André-Adolphe-Eugène Disdéri

Bio

André-Adolphe-Eugène Disdéri (1819 – 1889) was a French photographer. He was originally a daguerreotypist. However, he gained his fame mainly for the patenting his way a photography product called the *carte de visite*. *Carte de visite* (which means visiting card) is a small photographic image that was then mounted on a card.

About CARTE DE VISITE

Back in the 18th century, photographs were used as calling card. What is unique about André's *carte de visite* is that he was able to take up to ten photographs on a single sheet (although only up to eight were proven in practical usage). Through André's *carte de visite*, it enabled the possibility of mass producing these photographs, allowing these *carte de visite* to be brought to the masses. He was able to achieve this by using a camera with four lenses and a sliding plate holder. It was usually made of an albumen print, which was a thin paper photograph mounted on a thicker paper card.



Image Source: <http://www.vintageworks.net/common/detail.php/4096/0/3/297/16/0/12921>

When the *carte de visite* was first introduced, it took a while for it to gain some traction. However, he became an overnight hit and success after he published the Emperor Napoleon III's photos in this format.

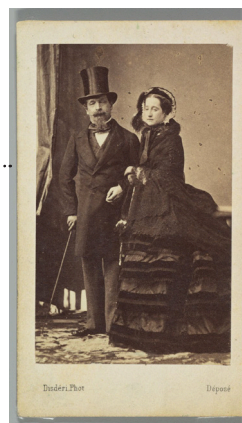
André-Adolphe-Eugène Disdéri, on the other hand, was also a great businessman. Through this technology that was patented by him and his 'luxurious and elegant' photography studio, he sold three to four thousand francs worth of portraits daily. According to Historicalstatistics.org with their Historical currency converter, that is worth over USD8000 in today's terms. According to a German visitor, his studio was well known as the 'Temple of Photography'.

This *carte de visite* got so popular that practically everyone in Paris wanted their portraits taken, and his name was spread all over Europe and even to the United States. It even became a movement on its own called the 'cardomania'. People were not rushing to just have their own portraits taken but also collecting the cards of celebrities and famous people. I would liken to the modern era idea of trading cards.



André-Adolphe-Eugène Disdéri
28 March 1819 – 4 October 1889

Image Source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/55/Andr%C3%A9_Adolphe-Eug%C3%A8ne_Disd%C3%A9ri.jpg



Artist:

André-Adolphe-Eugène Disdéri (French, Paris 1819–1889 Paris)

Person in Photograph:

Charles-Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte (French, Paris 1808–1873 Chislehurst, Kent)

Person in Photograph:

Empress Eugénie de Montijo (French (born Spain), Granada 1826–1920 Madrid)

Date:

ca. 1865

Image Source: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/288741>

Web: <http://monovisions.com/andre-adolphe-eugene-disderi-biography-19th-century-portrait-photographer/>

Web: <http://www.antiquewoodcameras.com/disderi.html>

Book: *The History of Photography: From 1839 to the Present* by Beaumont Newhall

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Why Did I Choose Him?

I first read about him Photography: A Cultural History by Mary Warner Marien. There was always something about taking multiple photos displayed in the same frame that really captures my eyes. The way I look at the *carte de visite* uncut sheet is like watching a film still in stop motion.

Photography to me is all about immortalising that perfect moment in time. The *carte de visite* is akin to capturing eight moments in the same time and space, and there is something very organic about the way this portraiture is shot.

About My interpretation and Photo Series

After discussion with Meridel, it was decided that I would do 4 sets of these uncut *carte de visite*. I love the raw look of the photos itself, so I wanted to keep that look with my photos.

For my shoot itself, I decided to add elements within the photo that had a more contemporary look to it. I framed my subjects in the same style and almost in the same poses as they would back in the 18th century.

André-Adolphe-Eugène Disdéri would always shoot his subjects with a fairly plain backdrop whilst giving them luxurious or well decorated furnitures or ornaments in the photo itself. Instead of being all serious, I got my subjects to have a bit more fun in the photos while still keeping the integrity and spirit of the *carte de visite*.

The end result of these photos were really fun and satisfying to process as I was able to recreate a similar yet contemporary look to my photos. For example, I added a skeleton as part of the decoration as I wanted to make it a little more and quirky. For another, I had furnitures that were totally out of proportion in relation to my subject.

My Workarounds

I am extremely aware that the original *carte de visite* was shot using a single camera that had four lens. However, due to technically (in)capabilities and resources, I decided to use a single camera that would capture image in the same way that the original would. I tried as much as I can to not move the camera at all for each series to keep the authenticity.

Reflection

On first look, this may seem like a simple shoot. However, I realised that it was anything but simple as I really had to consider all of the potential composition and making my subjects look good in each one. It was hard to imagine that he shot all the photos without digital enhancements, making it all the more impressive. It really solidified my personal belief that photographers of the past were really more like master craftsmen and photography is just a medium

Special thanks to Sylvester, Bridgel, Viena and Josiah for being the models!

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