

# Cornelia Parker

## One Day This Glass Will Break

A Hayward Gallery Touring exhibition from Southbank Centre, London

Cornelia Parker is one of Britain's leading contemporary artists. Best known for large-scale installation and sculpture, her diverse practice also includes drawing, photography, film and printmaking. This exhibition brings together 20 of the artist's prints from three different series: *Fox Talbot's Articles of Glass* (2017); *One Day This Glass Will Break* (2015) and *Thirty Pieces of Silver (Exposed)* (2015). Each series arose from the artist's recent experiments at Thumbprint Editions, a printmaking studio in London, where the artist 'went on an adventure' with the master printmaker, investigating the possibilities of photogravure.

Photogravure is a printmaking process developed in the 1850s that produces etchings with the tone and detail of a photograph through the exposure of a photographic positive film onto a copper plate. During her experiments in printmaking Parker modified this technique by replacing photographic film with three-dimensional objects, in the manner of a 'photogenic drawing' – or photogram – developed by 19th century photographic pioneer William Henry Fox Talbot. Through her combination of two early photographic techniques, Parker created a unique, hybrid form of printmaking.

The discovery that she could capture the shadows cast by objects placed directly onto the chemically treated printing plate and exposed to ultraviolet light generated *Spent Bulb Exposed By A Live One*, the first print in Parker's experimental series *One Day This Glass Will Break*. This exhibition includes eight prints from this series – each one a spectral still life that captures the shadows of translucent objects, including a tower of glasses, a shattered light bulb and melting ice cubes.

For her most recent series, *Fox Talbot's Articles of Glass*, Parker has made use of glassware originally belonging to Talbot that appears in his early famous photograph *Articles of Glass* (c. 1844). Leaving many of the museum labels untouched, Parker has arranged the items in informal compositions. The high lead content of early glassware, which makes it less translucent than contemporary glass, has resulted in prints with strong shadows and rich, sumptuous tones.

The print *Coffee Pot Hit With a Monkey Wrench* (2016) and two works from a third series, *Thirty Pieces of Silver (Exposed)* (2015), were made using photographic glass negatives of antique silverware. The negatives, which Parker discovered in a market 25 years ago, were made in the 1960s and detail the contents of a Spinks auction catalogue. Parker placed each negative on the photogravure plate still in its protective Glassine envelope. In the resulting prints, the creases and tears of the semi-opaque Glassine are clearly visible, reminding us that each of these negatives is a three-dimensional object in its own right.

Organised by Antonia Shaw, Assistant Curator, Hayward Gallery Touring  
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# Cornelia Parker and William Henry Fox Talbot: A Longstanding Influence

Cornelia Parker first encountered the early photographic experiments of William Henry Fox Talbot as a student in the 1970s. Since then, the work of this photographic pioneer has been a major influence on her practice. Parker's interest in transformative processes, the physical and historic properties of objects, polarities and mortality found an affinity with Talbot's investigations. Over the last 30 years the artist has made a number of works that are either informed by or offer a direct response to his experiments.



Cornelia Parker, *Another Matter*, 1993  
Water, wine, glass vessels, glass shelves. Installation in 20 windows, Grassi Museum, Leipzig. © the artist, 2017. Image courtesy the artist and Frith Street Gallery, London. Photo: Cornelia Parker.

For *Another Matter* (1993), an installation at the Grassi Museum of Applied Arts in Leipzig, Germany, Parker installed shelves in the windows of a room in the museum and lined up glass vessels in a composition that mirrored Talbot's early print, *Articles of Glass* (c.1844). The vessels on the top shelves contained red wine, while those on the shelf below contained a diluted version. The items on the bottom shelf contained only water. Throughout the exhibition, the work grew mouldy, changed colour and finally evaporated, offering a commentary on the relationship of photography to mortality and death.

Parker has had one of Talbot's early photographs of silverware pinned to her studio wall for many years. This image informed several

of her works, not least the seminal *30 Pieces of Silver* (1988–89), which consists of over a thousand pieces of found silverware, flattened by a steam roller and suspended from the ceiling by wires, so that they hang just a few inches from the floor. The complex and unstable chemical processes involved in photography have influenced works such as *The Collected Death of Images* (1996), while for a recent commission for Trinity Hall, Cambridge, *Thirty Pieces of Silver (Minus One)* (2017), she restaged an early photograph of Talbot's using their silverware.



Cornelia Parker, *Thirty Pieces of Silver*, 1988-89  
Silver and copper wire. © the artist. Image courtesy and © Tate, London 2017

Cornelia Parker (b.1956, Cheshire, England) was the official artist of the 2017 British general election. In 2016, she exhibited *Transitional Object (Psychobarn)*, an installation based on the mansion from Alfred Hitchcock's film *Psycho*, on the roof of the Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art, New York. She was appointed an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) in 2010 and was elected a member of the Royal Academy in 2009.

# William Henry Fox Talbot: Photographic Pioneer



W.H. Fox Talbot, *The Pencil of Nature*  
part 1 (London 1844), plate IV, separate print:  
Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, MS. WHF Talbot fotogr. 4.

William Henry Fox Talbot (1800–1877) was an English inventor, scientist and early pioneer of photography.

While on his honeymoon in 1833, Talbot had become frustrated at his inability to faithfully sketch the picturesque Lake Como, Italy, despite using a camera lucida to aid his draughtsmanship. The camera lucida is an optical tool that refracts light using a glass prism, generating a ghostly image that merges the scene in front with the paper beneath it, enabling an artist to draw an accurate outline. This experience reminded Talbot of his earlier trials with the camera obscura – a proto-photographic device predating the camera lucida that projects an image onto a flat surface by passing light through a lens. Musing on

the impermanent images these devices create, Talbot began to imagine a way that he could fix these illusive ‘fairy pictures’.

Returning home in 1834, Talbot started his photographic experiments. Discovering that paper became light sensitive when coated with washes of table salt and silver nitrate, he was able to make some of the first ever photograms by laying an opaque object onto treated paper and exposing it to sunlight. Areas covered by the object remained white, while those exposed to light turned dark, resulting in an inverted silhouette. Talbot termed these experiments ‘photogenic drawings’ or sciagraphs, literally ‘drawing with shadows’.

Talbot continued to search for a method that would generate a true representation of life, and by the end of 1835 had invented the negative, which allowed for multiple positive prints to be generated from a single image – a major milestone in the history of photography. The images that Talbot took over the next nine years were included in *The Pencil of Nature* (1844–46), the first commercial publication illustrated with original photographs. The first edition of this publication featured Talbot’s *Articles of Glass* (c. 1844), the work that inspired Parker’s recent series of prints.

By 1850 Talbot was exploring printing photographic images with ink. He dedicated the last 25 years of his life to developing this technique. Talbot’s research gave rise to the printmaking process photogravure, which was refined in 1879 by the Czech designer and printer Karl Klíč, resulting in the Talbot-Klíč Dust Grain Photogravure, which is still in use today.