

ALEXANDRA REYNOLDS (KINGSTON)

## **EADWEARD MUYBRIDGE: DEFINING MODERNITIES**

<1>

I will be writing around one particular example of Art History on the Web: Defining Modernities, an online research resource which concerns the work of 19th century photographer Eadweard Muybridge.

<2>

Muybridge's work most famously photographed motion sequences instantaneously for the first time, something which has been theorised as an attempt to comprehend the rapidly changing experience of time and space during the 19th century by breaking movement into manageable chunks.<sup>1</sup>

<3>

However, a sort of zeitgeist of 19th Century life, Muybridge also recorded some of the other salient features of the social and cultural world in which he lived: photographing the rural idyll, trains and steamships, modern cities and racialised and gendered bodies. Further, using his unique projection device, the Zoöpraxiscope, he also produced early forms of the moving image.

<4>

Defining Modernities, for which I was researcher, was a collaborative project between Kingston University and Kingston Museum in the United Kingdom, and was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council of Great Britain.

<5>

Muybridge is an important figure in Kingston. He was born and died there – bequeathing over 3,000 items to Kingston Museum on the occasion of his death to create one of the three largest Muybridge collections in the world. However, he also travelled extensively throughout his career, working mainly in the United States, but also in Alaska, Canada, Central America and across Europe. This means that not only collections but ideas around Muybridge have been disseminated across the world throughout history.

<6>

The main aim of Defining Modernities was to pull together information on all known collections of Muybridge's work from around the world and situate them in social and historic context according to the global research carried out around his work so far something which has never been done before.

<7>

In terms of our methodology, a local collaboration between Kingston University and Kingston Museum was reflected in a wider global collaboration between Muybridge curators worldwide, something which gave many people a stake in the final web product. This means at the very least, the new content currently presented by Defining Modernities can be used by curatorial stakeholders in the project and disseminated by them to colleagues, hopefully helping produce further networks of knowledge around Muybridge in the future.

<8>

Since its launch at the British Film Institute in May 2010, Defining Modernities has been made an AHRC case study, and has been hailed in a recent Tate Britain exhibition catalogue on Eadweard Muybridge as the future of Muybridge research. However, it is important to point out that this website is only in its first phase of development, and we hope many more exciting incarnations of the project are yet to come.

<9>

In light of this, I would like to give a short overview of the site and the motivations of this project so far, focusing on the collaborative process of its development and the way this shaped current form and content. I will then reflect on what this tells us about the future potentiality of Defining Modernities, and the wider possibilities inherent in using the web for art historical heritage based projects.

The screenshot displays the website's interface. At the top, navigation tabs include 'Home Page', 'Collection Map & Database', 'Muybridge : Image & Context', 'Comparative Timelines', 'Bibliography', and 'Contact Us'. The main title 'Eadweard Muybridge: Defining Modernities' is prominently displayed. Below the title is a search bar with a 'Go' button and a list of categories for alternative searches, such as 'Photographic Material' and 'Publications'. A central feature is a grid of eight sequential images showing a horse and rider in motion, numbered 1 through 8. Below this grid is a descriptive paragraph about the website's collaborative origin and purpose. Further down, three main content sections are visible: 'Comparative Timelines' with a horizontal timeline from 1830 to 1834, 'Muybridge : Image and Context' featuring a collage of various images, and 'Collections Database' with a map of Europe. The footer contains a 'Site Map' with links to 'Introduction', 'Collections Database', and 'Collections Map', a detailed list of topics under 'Muybridge : Image & Context', and a list of links including 'Comparative Timelines', 'Bibliography', 'Contact Us', 'Copyright', and 'Disclaimer'. A 'FOLLOW ME ON twitter' button is also present.

<10>

There are three main elements to Defining Modernities: a database, comparative timelines and a section termed 'Image and Context'. The database provides information on almost 100 public collections of Muybridge's work worldwide. These represent all known public collections at this point, but are growing all the time; often as a result of the website, or through knowledge dissemination stemming from relationships built up with curatorial stakeholders. There are also many private Muybridge collections, which we are hoping to cite in some way on the website in the future. However, a standardised format of content is difficult to effect here as various collectors desire different levels of visibility attached to their material.

<11>

Each entry on the database is listed alphabetically, but can be searched geographically or through object categories. The database was a complex part of the website to create as we had to produce searchable categories across institutional archive systems, each of which had their own descriptions of works. We were also aware of the danger of writing out or mis-citing certain objects or categories simply because of semantic distinctions. Eventually we produced our own system based on the Kingston Museum collection and asked curators to interpret this system where appropriate, so we knew they would be happy with their particular entries.

Search Criteria			
	All Locations ▼	All Categories ▼	<b>FILTER/UPDATE</b>
Collection Name	Location	Details	View
Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences	USA	The Margaret Herrick Library at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, founded in 1928, is...	
Addison Gallery of American Art	USA	The Addison Gallery of American Art is an academic museum attached to the Phillips Academy in Massac...	
American Geographical Society Library, University of Milwaukee	USA	The American Geographical Society Library has been in existence since the late 1850s and has been lo...	
American Museum of Natural History Library	USA	The American Museum of Natural History, founded in 1869, houses a wealth of scientific and cultural ...	
Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library For Yale University Libraries	USA	The Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library at Yale University holds a rich collection of literary p...	
Berkeley, University of California, Bancroft Library	USA	The Bancroft Library is the primary special collections library at the University of California, Ber...	
Bibliothèque Nationale de France	France	The Bibliothèque Nationale de France is France's national Library. Set over 5 separate locations, th...	
Boston Athenæum	USA	The Boston Athenæum is a membership library established in 1807. It has world class special collect...	
Brighton and Hove Museum	United Kingdom	Brighton and Hove Museum is based in the South East of England, and includes a particularly strong c...	
British Library	United Kingdom	The British Library contains well over 150 million items within its holdings. These holdings not onl...	
Brooklyn Museum	USA	The Brooklyn Museum is one of the oldest and largest art museums in the United States. The permanent...	
California Historical Society	USA	The California Historical Society (CHS) aims to 'inspire and empower Californians to make the past a...	
California State Library	USA	The California State Library is a public research facility which has been established for 160 years....	
Canadian Centre for Architecture	Canada	The Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA) was founded in 1979 as a new form of cultural institution...	
Central Pacific Railroad Photographic History Museum	USA	The CPRR virtual museum was launched in 1999. As stated on the website: 'Much of the site's content ...	
Chrysler Museum of Art	USA	The Chrysler Museum of Art holds almost 40,000 objects spanning 5,000 years. The Muybridge colle...	
Cinémathèque euro-régionale Institut Jean Vigo	France	The institute Jean Vigo was founded in 1983 from a 1962 film club, and aims to further the debate be...	
Cincinnati Art Museum	USA	Cincinnati Art Museum houses a permanent collection of over 60,000 works from around the world spann...	

In the detailed view of a given collection, we can currently see a short introduction, past exhibitions, numerical values of various items within a collection and curatorial contact details; as well as rights and reproductions information and public or online accessibility. This is a first step for our database, the next phase hopefully allowing for whole collections complete with details and images to be uploaded.

Kingston Museum and Heritage Service Back to Collections ▶

---

**Short Introduction**

The Kingston Muybridge bequest is one of the largest collections of Muybridge material in the world and holds great historical significance. A native of Kingston upon Thames, Muybridge bequeathed his moving image equipment, lecture slides and other material to Kingston Museum. This bequest included Muybridge's original Zoopraxiscope machine and 68 zoopraxiscope discs, of which 71 remain in the world. Muybridge's binial lantern with which he gave lectures in conjunction with the Zoopraxiscope, also resides within the collection, as do two near identical albums of prints entitled 'Attitudes of Animals in Motion'. Also included in the bequest was a complete 13 panel panorama of San Francisco, thousands of images on glass (Muybridge's lantern slides) and many colotype prints from Animal Locomotion. Another highlight of this bequest is Muybridge's own scrapbook, in which he documents his career through contemporary newspapers cuttings and articles. Since Muybridge's initial bequest, the museum has continued to collect Muybridge material, and is now in possession of many other artifacts besides those of the bequest; such as the research notes of Dr. Robert Bartlett Haas, a Muybridge Biographer and author of the seminal 1976 publication 'Muybridge: Man in Motion'.

**Past Exhibitions**

Publications: Herbert, Stephen et al. ed. Eadweard Muybridge : the Kingston Museum Bequest (Hastings, East Sussex : Projection Box, c2004.) Exhibitions: Special Viewing of original Muybridge photographs, Kingston Museum (UK), 2004. Leaflet: Eadweard Muybridge, printed c.1990, advertising the long-term exhibition set up in Kingston Museum (Surrey) in 1984.

**Rights & Reproduction Information**

Please see the Museum and Heritage Service website for full details. [More Information](#)

**Online Presence**

[Muybridge Information page](#)

[Information on the permanent exhibition](#)

**Collection Items:**

**Photographic Material**


Prints: 550

Images on Glass: 2534

**Publications**

Books by Muybridge: Various

Books concerning Muybridge: Various



**Address:**  
Kingston Museum, Fairfield Road  
Kingston Upon Thames, KT1 2PS

Local History Room, Room 46, North  
Kingston Centre  
Richmond Road, Kingston Upon Thames,  
KT2 5PE United Kingdom

**Phone:** +44 020 8547 6738

**Website:** [www.kingston.gov.uk](http://www.kingston.gov.uk)

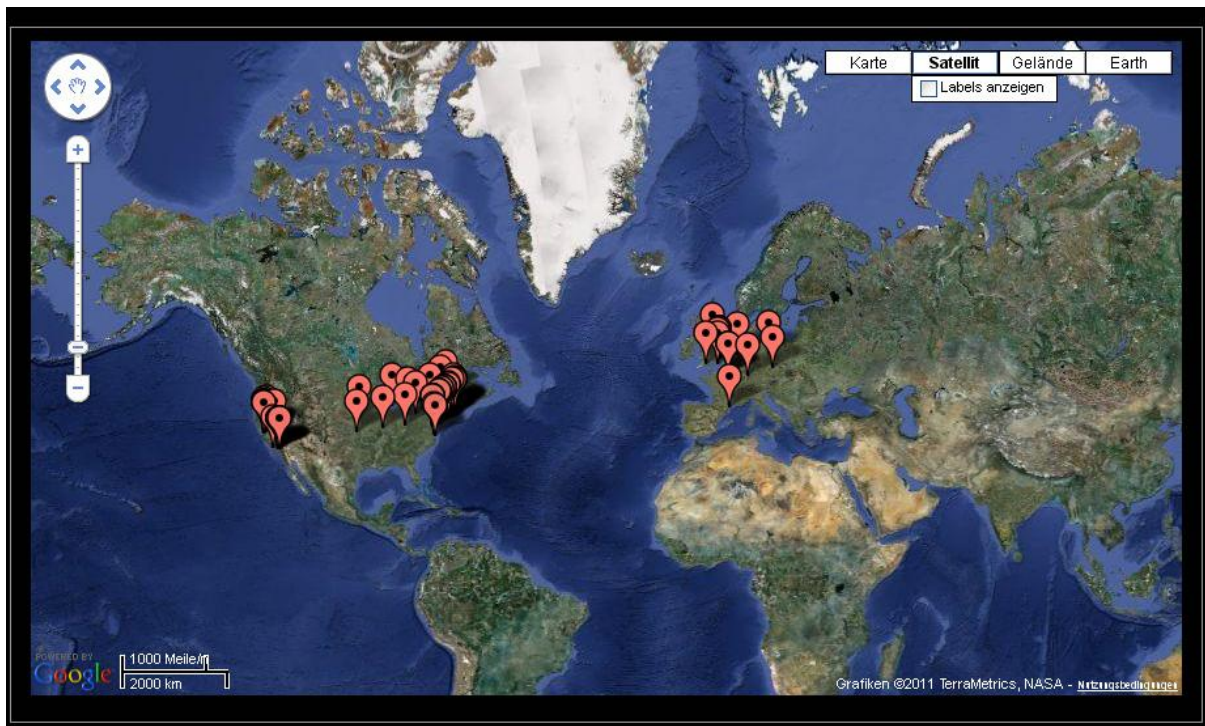
**Email:**  
[kingston.museum@rbk.kingston.gov.uk](mailto:kingston.museum@rbk.kingston.gov.uk)

**Lead Contact:**  
Peta Louise Cook -  
Curator ([Peta\\_cook@rbk.kingston.gov.uk](mailto:Peta_cook@rbk.kingston.gov.uk))

**Opening Hours:**  
Kingston Museum:  
Daily 10.00am to 5.00pm except  
Wednesdays and Sundays.  
Admission Free

Local History Room: Monday, Thursday,  
Friday, 10.00am to 1.00pm; 2.00pm to  
5.00pm  
Tuesday 10.00am to 1.00pm and  
2.00pm to 9.00pm (term time\*) and  
2.00pm to 7.00pm at other times  
Closed on Wednesday, Saturday and  
Sunday  
Term Dates: Autumn: 21 September to  
12 December 2009  
Spring: 11 January to 27 March 2010  
Summer: 26 April to 10 July 2010

It is also possible to view collections spatially, where collections and short explanations of their contents can be seen on a world map; meaning researchers can take in details of collections close to them quickly and easily.

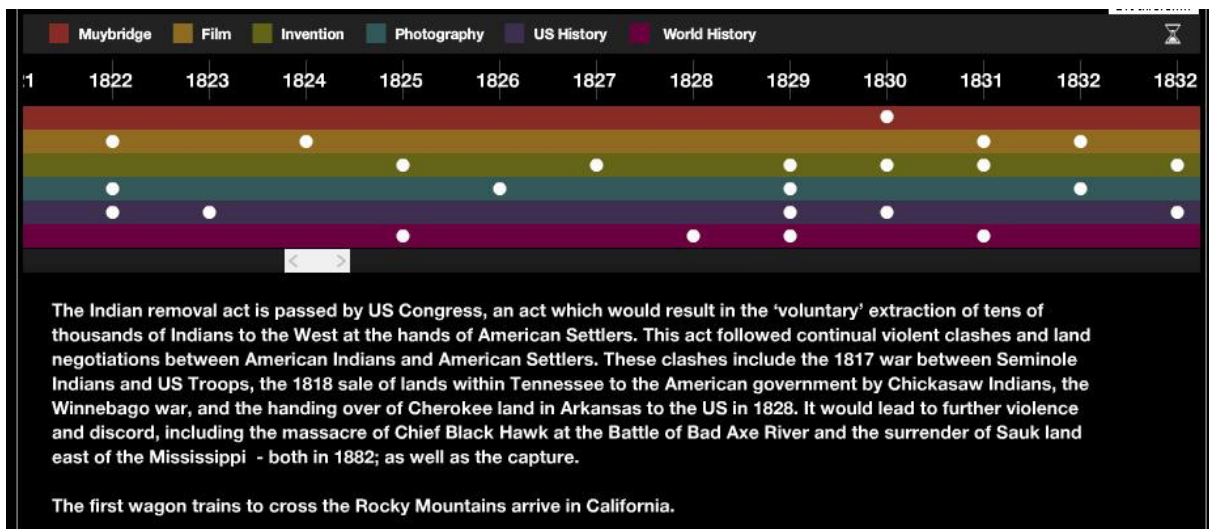


<12>

But we did not want this website to function solely as a database. We also wanted to provide researchers new to the topic with a three dimensional understanding of Muybridge, and help those with an existing interest in his work to build or consolidate context around this knowledge. Taking the point of view that history and heritage is inherently collaborative and generative, and is produced by a myriad mixture of events and cultural voices over time, we wanted to offer an holistic interpretation of Muybridge's work both in its social context and according to the voices of researchers so far.

<13>

We therefore added two extra sections to the website: comparative timelines and ›Image and Context«. The comparative timelines delineate some of the most seismic events of the 19th Century in relation to Muybridge's life. Six timelines represent film, photography, invention, United States and World History, with a biography of Muybridge's work running along the top, a format which allows researchers to make their own minds up about the fluid links between Muybridge's work and the time in which he lived.




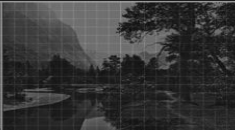

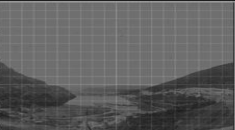

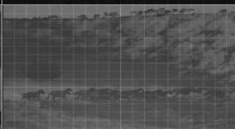


Conversely, the ›Image and Context‹ section of the site offers a more in depth study of Muiybridge's work in cultural context. This area offers eight mini-essays, each examining a different aspect of Muiybridge's work according to current scholarship, accompanied by 50 images from Kingston Museum's Muiybridge collection.

Home Page | Collection Map & Database | **Muiybridge : Image & Context** | Comparative Timelines | Bibliography | Contact Us

## Eadweard Muiybridge: Defining Modernities

Muiybridge : Image & Context

Click on one of the grid squares below to see a selection of images or objects which relate to Muiybridge's biography or a certain body of his work. Within each image portfolio is a commentary giving some ideas about its cultural and historical significance in terms of 19th Century culture and society.

 Introducing Eadweard Muiybridge	 Landscape	 The Modern City	 Transport and Trade
 Foreign Bodies	 Animal in Motion	 Human Figure in Motion	 Zoopraxography

Copyright | Disclaimer | [www.MuiybridgeinKingston.com](http://www.MuiybridgeinKingston.com) | Arts & Humanities Research Council | Kingston University London | Royal Society of Arts

In an overarching sense then, *Defining Modernities* was rooted in local collaboration and knowledge transfer between Kingston Museum and Kingston University. It aimed to produce knowledge transfer collaboratively on a micro-level, and use the results of this to affect a wider network of knowledge from collaborators across the world.

<14>

Even by placing a university employed researcher within the museum to produce the project, there was already a meeting of worlds between academic theory and museological practice. This made for an interdisciplinary approach which furthered the social and cultural interpretations of Muybridge's work within the website; now part of the wider network of knowledge shared amongst our stakeholders.

<15>

This was complimented by a further collaboration with Kingston University web team, which helped produce a re-branding of Muybridge and a technical translation of his work in online format. This seemed important on both a local and a global level, as it gave Muybridge's work a contemporary feel in terms of the website's aesthetic, something we tried to reflect in the site content through a dynamic explanation of Muybridge's work which helps site users and stakeholders to see heritage as something which is relevant to today and generative according to current scholarship.

<16>

However, of all the outcomes of the project so far, perhaps most fascinating is the global network of curatorial contributors which has stemmed from the production of our database. Not only does this network mean we are now for the first time a Muybridge community, it also allows Kingston the chance to build strong relationships with many other curatorial stakeholders, creating a buzz around Muybridge and gaining collections information and tips on current research inspired by his work. Contemporary artists, writers and even musicians influenced by Muybridge are now also starting to contact us about their work; another exciting area upon which to build.

<17>

Even so, there are many ways to extend this project in the future, particularly in order to make the most of possibilities inherent to the online nature of the site. Although new dynamic research, knowledge transfer and collaboration around Muybridge are a fundamental premise of our project so far, we are not yet fully exploiting the usefulness of the web to this



end; primarily because the merits of our local collaboration remain to be reflected in the global online nature of the project.

<18>

At present, our site is centralised in Kingston. Only we can add to it, and although we now know there is a public desire to convene and a network forming around our research so far, we have not yet had the chance to write in functions on the site which would allow for researchers and curators to interactively respond to it. Without this interactive functionality, there is a danger of our website masquerading as a book, which particularly in its narrative aspects might help simply produce another art historical canon, too soon if not already out of date.

<19>

To avoid this happening, in the future we would hope to balance out the research carried out so far with many more interactive features of this site. This would help produce a more ›bottom-up‹ format to the project, allowing our website to reflect the many shifting cultural voices and commentaries around Muybridge with immediacy.

<20>

What we would hope to do ideally is to re-focus the site around a new interactive feature: a research map similar to our current collections map, where interested parties with a login could upload their current ideas, images and multimedia, and speak to one another through a blogging facility. This would be particularly interesting when dealing with work such as that of Muybridge, as researchers within this international community represent disciplines as diverse as art, history, film, animation, biology, podiatry, advertising and computer generated imagery.

<21>

We would also aim to rework the narrative elements of the website so that research essays could be commented upon using open source software, thus allowing for research to be constantly updated in the current descriptive areas.

<22>

These sorts of additions to the site would certainly need to be managed, but they would enable the portal to become more than an information source, rather a wellspring of

information, which is more active than passive and can turn knowledge into potentiality; whilst allowing the current interest in Muybridge to grow.

<23>

One well documented problem with the interactive web format is the reticence some members of given networks have in taking part in online forums, and this is something we would hope to address. However we hope that because our curatorial contacts are part of a niche Muybridge research community and have already become stakeholders in the project through their involvement in this site's first incarnation, they might feel they have a personal and professional interest in updating or commenting on the site.

<24>

If Defining Modernities could become interactive and self-supplementing, it seems the site could guarantee itself real lasting value which remains contemporary. It would become a means to produce networks of new knowledge in a growing community of Muybridge scholarship, and therefore a way in which our understanding of history could continue to expand and complexify over time.

<25>

Indeed, it seems this latter point represents the inherent usefulness of the web to heritage. Online projects have the unique capacity to mirror the constant and spontaneous shift of history and the way in which historical figures and their relevance alter with the voices that speak them in any given cultural moment; something which makes heritage ever contemporary and born anew each day. By allowing for this constant and spontaneous growth of historical knowledge to be documented publically, dialogically and with immediacy, the web can be understood as a technology which has the capacity to reflect the fundamental nature of history whilst being truly creative in the Heideggerian sense of the word.

[www.eadweardmuybridge.co.uk](http://www.eadweardmuybridge.co.uk)

### **Author's profile:**

Alexandra Reynolds is a Visiting Research Fellow in the Visual and Material Culture Research Centre at Kingston University, London, UK.

E-Mail: [alexandra.reynolds@kingston.ac.uk](mailto:alexandra.reynolds@kingston.ac.uk)

- 
- 1 Tim Cresswell, *Capturing Mobility: Mobility and Meaning in the Photography of Eadweard Muybridge and Etienne-Jules Marey, On the Move* (New York: Routledge, 2006)