

But first, let's Byron's Company take a selfie



All of us know “how to take a selfie”. With it we can change profile picture on Whatsapp, Facebook, then pick the best one and share it on Instagram to get as many likes as possible.

But let's take a step back, long such as 95 years ago, when in December 1920 on the roof of the Marceau Studio in Fifth Avenue, New York, five mustached photographers decided to take a picture of themselves by themselves.

You can see Joseph Byron holding a heavy Kodak Box Brownie Camera (typical of that century to introduce the concept of the “snapshot”) on the left, with the help of his colleague Ben Falk on the right hand side. In the middle between them you can see Pinie MacDonald, Colonel Merceau and Pop Core.

As a clear sign of experiment, all of the characters of this frame have different face expressions, nobody is posing and all are spontaneous.

The most popular old selfie group was actually the first one shoted at arm's length.

The tone of the printed picture is almost black and white with an increase of the temperature that gives to it a vintage-warm shade, as if you apply the “sepia” filter to your selfie.

In a age were the photographer's figure was seen as an illustrator of the society, of families, as an investigator, a chemist who works in the darkness of his darkroom, the Byron Company decided to go beyond the boundaries of this traditional stereotype and so to introduce a new point of view, which was no longer the wrung eye of one the artists in the viewfinder of the camera, but the one of the camera in itself. The focus was extraordinarily on themselves, so they became the object of their work, emphasizing their self-awareness as artists on the edge.



From another point of view

Actually, they were not the firsts who have shot at themselves. Likely in fact, in October of the 1839, Robert Cornelius, an amateur chemist and photography enthusiast, took an image of himself reflected in a mirror by removing the lens cap for a minute before putting it back and stop the exposure.



“The first light picture ever taken. 1839”

The clear difference between these two selfies is about how the camera was used and how held. For both of the picture the framing is checked by nobody as nobody is looking in through the camera, but the main point is that the Company used their own arms as a tripod to point the lens on themselves and catch the actual situation, instead Cornelius pointed his one to the mirror in front of him to immortalize his reflection.

Philosophically, this creative example could personify the eternal deal about the fine line between the true reality (what actually is showing in that moment) and the appearance of the reality (the idea of something actual, filtered by something different).

Once upon a time, a certain Plato tried to explain this conception in the simplest way was possible for that age: telling a story. The Man of the Cave was watching the shadows “printed” on the wall in front of him of the natural and real things happening and living outside of his prison as reflections of the reality, as Robert Cornelius did in 1839 in front of his mirror.

Unfortunately, Plato did not have Instagram yet, otherwise he could have explained his idea of distorted truth posting a selfie totally modified through the app’s effects, as we all are doing every day.

So.. philosophical metaphors are changing, perhaps?