



Robert Cornelius, self-portrait; believed to be the earliest extant American portrait photo; 1839. Original in the Daguerreotype Collection and the Marian S. Carson Collection (Gift of Marian S. Carson, 1996) of the [Library of Congress](#).

## ROBERT

“Daguerre announced his invention of a photographic method to the French Academy of Sciences in August 1839. That October, a young Philadelphian, Robert Cornelius, working out of doors to take advantage of the light, made this head-and-shoulders self-portrait using a box fitted with a lens from an opera glass.” —Carol Johnson, “Photographic Material,” by Carol Johnson in *Gathering History: the Marian S. Carson Collection of Americana* (Washington, DC: The Library of Congress, 1999: 100.

I have heard you,  
Mr. Emerson. We  
have had enough  
of divas and counts,  
aristocrats  
and establishments.  
And so I turn this glass  
around and watch  
that gleam of light  
in me. If I must  
cock my head  
from its aim, still  
I dare a power  
new in nature  
with direct eyes  
despite the wind  
and the time  
for in this lens  
I create  
my self.