

IN FOCUS

ELECTRIC!

The ubiquity of electricity has greatly impacted built and natural environments as well as the rhythm of our days and our experience of darkness. Although we often take electricity for granted until we are temporarily without it, photographers have long been attentive to its effects, capturing both excitement and concern about the electrical forces that energize our lives. Drawn from the Getty Museum's permanent collection, this exhibition highlights historic photographs that register the allure of artificial illumination and more recent photographs that express unease about life tethered to the grid.



The J. Paul Getty Museum

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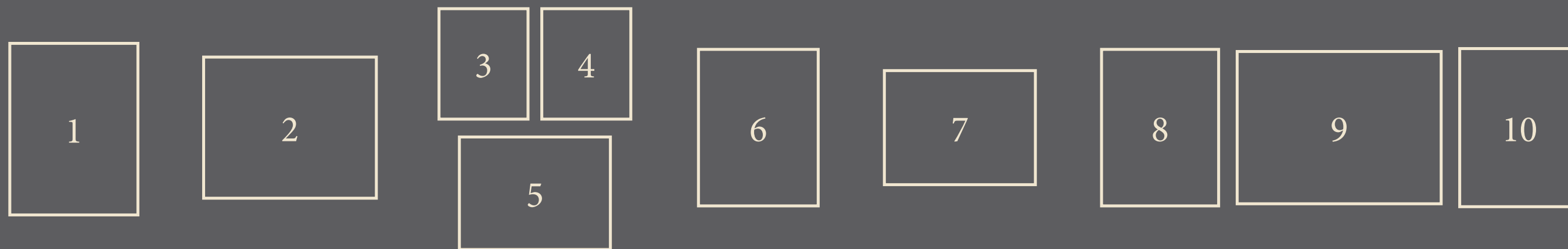
DARKNESS MADE LIGHT

In the sky above great cities, on clear nights, is a pale, wide-spreading glow. From a distance of many miles it may be seen. . . . It is the reflection of millions of small lights—the glow of the city’s contest with darkness. . . . It is not until the centers of the city’s night life are reached, that you find the real triumphs of the lights. Here they have routed night.

—J. Herbert Welch, “How Great Cities Fight Darkness: The Problem of Turning Night into Day,”
The Technical World Magazine (October 1905)

Photographers have frequently been entranced by artificial illumination. Early photographers marveled at the vistas made visible by electric light. Nadar dragged a rudimentary battery below the streets of Paris to document the catacombs, while others became enamored of the radiance of electric streetlights that began to replace the yellow flicker of gas lamps in urban centers. Many modern artists pictured widespread access to electricity as a beacon of progress. Contemporary photographers such as Robert Adams, however, have made images that convey wariness about the encroachment of light pollution in the landscape.





1. **The Catacombs of Paris**

1861

Nadar (Gaspard Félix Tournachon)

French, 1820–1910

Albumen silver print

84.XM.436.468

2. **The Glow of Night—
New York**

1897

Alfred Stieglitz

American, 1864–1946

Photogravure

84.XM.1038.2

3. **Theatre at Night,
New York City**

1909

Paul B. Haviland

American, 1880–1950

Gelatin silver print

84.XM.167.1

4. **Neon Signs**

1930s

Jaromír Funke

Czech, 1896–1945

Gelatin silver print

84.XM.148.70

5. **A Night View of Broadway
Looking North from 45th
Street**

1923

**New York Edison Company
Photographic Bureau**

American, active 1901–36

Gelatin silver print

84.XM.239.68

6. **Paris Street at Night**

1925–26

André Kertész

American, born Hungary, 1894–1985

Gelatin silver print

86.XM.706.15

7. **Stockholm**

1937

Andreas Feininger

American, born France, 1906–1999

Gelatin silver print

Gift of the Estate of Gertrud E. (Wysse) Feininger

2011.43.5

8. **Blackout in London,
Street in a Bombed Area**

1941

Bill Brandt

British, 1904–1983

Gelatin silver print

84.XP.208.14

9. **New York**

1949

Val Telberg

American, born Russia, 1910–1995

Gelatin silver print

84.XM.228.17

10. **Boulder County, Colorado**

1984

Robert Adams

American, born 1937

Gelatin silver print

2003.482.8



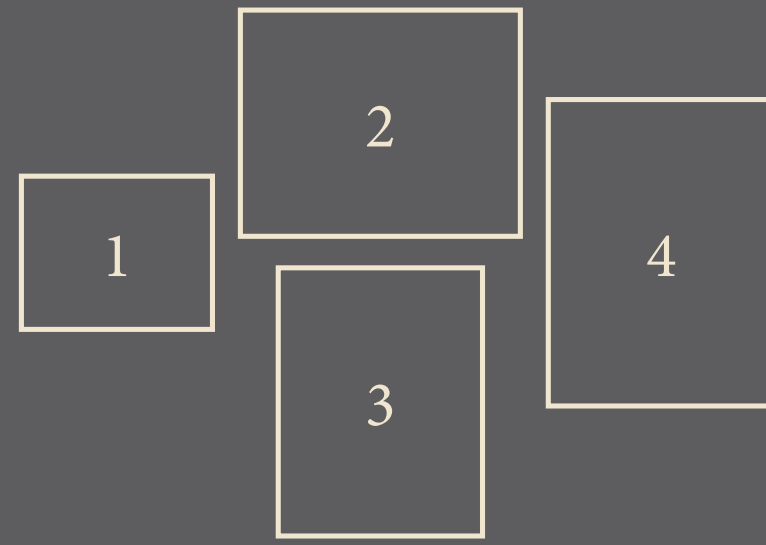
LIGHTBULB MOMENTS

The impossibilities of yesterday become the accepted facts of today.

—L. Frank Baum, *The Master Key: An Electrical Fairy Tale* (Bowen-Merrill, 1901)

Lightbulbs are often emblematic of innovation. Indeed, the jolt of a great idea is sometimes symbolized by a glowing bulb above a character's head. The recent phasing out of incandescent lighting in favor of new designs has brought greater attention to the types of illumination that are commonplace in our lives. Similarly, electrical inventions of the twentieth century prompted photographers of that era to document lighting they regularly or unexpectedly encountered. Some, such as Václav Chochola and Jaroslav Rössler, made intimate images of the lamps that played a crucial role in their profession.





1. **110th Street Station,
Twilight, New York City**

1911

Karl F. Struss

American, 1886–1981

Platinum print

84.XM.168.3

2. **Light Fixture**

About 1925

Jaromír Funke

Czech, 1896–1945

Gelatin silver print

84.XM.148.86

3. **Lightbulb**

About 1930

Květoslav Trojna

Czech, active 1930s

Gelatin silver print

84.XP.147.24

4. **Sundown**

1935–40

Osamu Shiihara

Japanese, 1905–1974

Gelatin silver print

2008.58.1

5. **Pure Energy and
Neurotic Man**

1940–41

Barbara Morgan

American, 1900–1992

Gelatin silver print

95.XM.75.1

6. **Reflector III**

1947

Václav Chochola

Czech, 1923–2005

Gelatin silver print

2009.98

7. **Lightbulbs**

About 1938

Fred G. Korth

American, born Germany, 1902–1983

Gelatin silver print

86.XM.13.13

8. **Self-Portrait, Paris**

About 1931–32

Jaroslav Rössler

Czech, 1902–1990

Gelatin silver print

84.XM.146.17



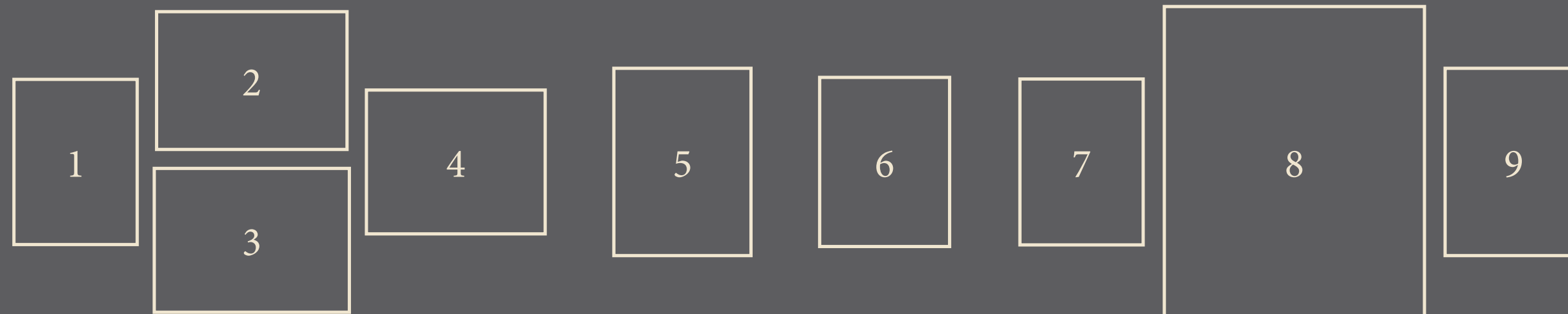
HARDWIRED

What are we going to do with our wires? This is a question that every thoughtful man has asked himself.

—Nelson W. Perry, “What are we going to do with our wires?” *Electricity: A Popular Electrical and Financial Journal* (February 1892)

As reliance on electricity expanded, so did the wiring needed to maintain the flow of current. Cities became overrun with cables crisscrossing the sky. Although darkness was no longer an impediment to nightlife, the capacity for constant illumination also gave rise to longer working hours and environmental concerns. Many photographers in the twentieth century began to focus more intensively on the elements and impact of electrical infrastructure. Several of the photographs on this wall call attention to the human and industrial costs of an increasingly wired society. In contrast, Man Ray’s 1931 image of a light-switch cord encircling the globe was commissioned by a French electric company as part of a promotional campaign to convince consumers to invest in electricity for home use.





1. **Heart of the Turbine**

Negative, 1920s; print, 1930

Lewis W. Hine

American, 1874–1940

Gelatin silver print

84.XM.470.8

2. **Mt. Fuji from a Train,
Near Fujinomiya**

1955

Gen Otsuka

Japanese, 1912–1992

Gelatin silver print

Gift of Masako Otsuka

2014.91.8

3. **Electric Company Basement**

1930s

André Kertész

American, born Hungary, 1894–1985

Gelatin silver print

86.XM.706.39

4. **Telephone Wires, Prague**

1922–23

Jaroslav Rössler

Czech, 1902–1990

Gelatin silver print

84.XM.146.13

5. **High Voltage, Berlin**

1930s

Martin Munkácsi

American, born Hungary, 1896–1963

Gelatin silver print

84.XM.203.26

6. **The World**

1931

From the portfolio *Électricité*

Man Ray

(**Emmanuel Radnitsky**)

American, 1890–1976

Photogravure

84.XM.1000.104

7. **Switches and Sockets,
Munich**

1933

Willy Zielke

Polish, 1902–1989

Gelatin silver print

84.XM.907.17

8. **disCONNEXION #a5**

2005

Danwen Xing

Chinese, born 1967

Chromogenic print

2010.29.2

9. **Park City, Utah**

1979

Lewis Baltz

American, 1945–2014

Gelatin silver print

Gift of Professors Joseph and Elaine Monsen

92.XM.55.3



ELECTRICAL EXPERIMENTATION

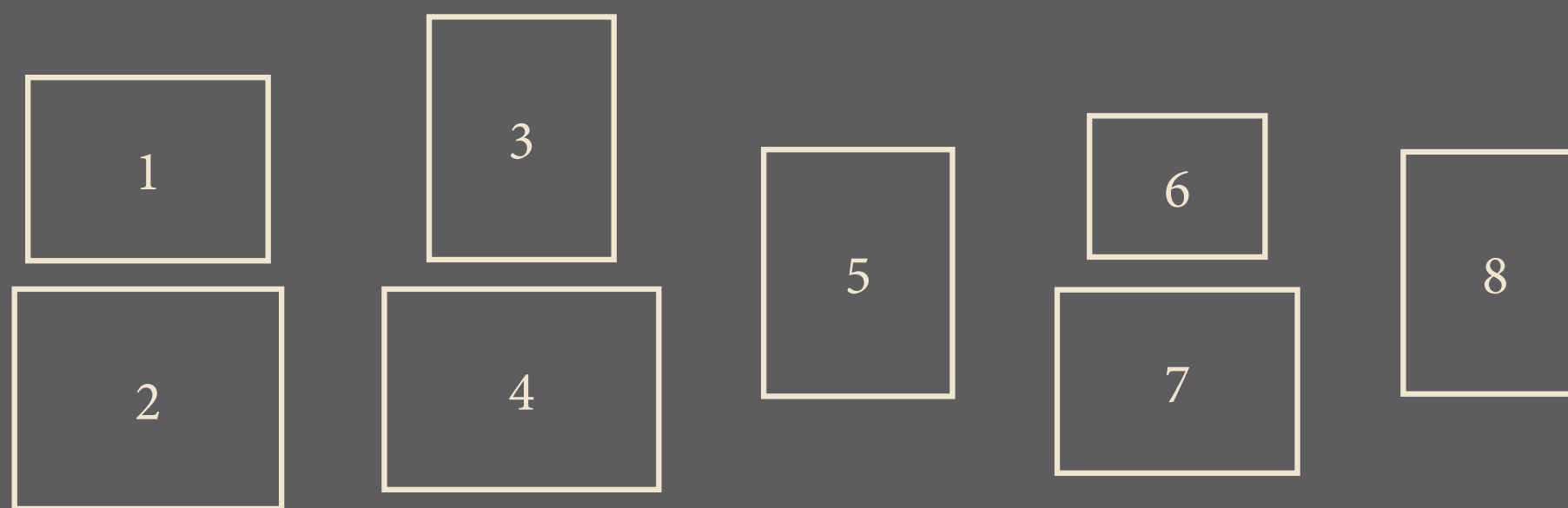
Great are the powers of electricity. . . . It makes millionaires. . . . It hides in the air. It creeps into every living thing. . . . Energy begets energy.

—“Magnificent Power Celebration Banquet,” *Buffalo Morning Express* (January 1897)

Scientists experimented with electricity long before it was harnessed for everyday use. By the 1840s, electrical tests were conducted by researchers engaged in photographic investigations. Some scientific uses of electricity have been provocative, as in the case of Guillaume-Benjamin Duchenne’s experiments administering electric shocks to elicit a variety of facial expressions in his subjects. Other applications—such as the use of electrically generated flash photography to capture instantaneous action—furthered scientific discovery.

Many electrical devices made their public debut at world’s fairs. The Electrical Building at the 1893 Columbian Exposition showcased generators of all sorts, household appliances run on electricity, and General Electric’s “Tower of Light,” visible in the center of the photograph included here. The eighty-two-foot-high structure mesmerized visitors with eighteen thousand flashing bulbs.





1. **And Then There Was Sound**

1920s

George Watson

American, 1892–1977

Gelatin silver print

2001.65.15

2. **Study on How Men Walk,
Man Wired with Lights,
Walter Reed Hospital,
Washington, D.C.**

1946

Gjon Mili

American, born Albania, 1904–1984

Gelatin silver print

Gift of Nina and Leo Pircher

2009.138.9

3. **Testing Synchronized
Flash Powder**

1920

George Watson

American, 1892–1977

Gelatin silver print

2001.65.1

4. **Rubber Balloon Broken
by a Bullet**

1960

Harold Edgerton

American, 1903–1990

Gelatin silver print

Gift of Gus and Arlette Kayafas

93.XM.3.2

5. **Lightning Show**

1895

Unknown Maker

Gelatin silver print

84.XP.452.4

6. **Vying with the Aurora
Borealis—Spectacular
Electrical Display, Panama-
Pacific International
Exposition, San Francisco**

1915

Keystone View Company

Active 1890s–1940s

Gelatin silver print

84.XC.729.153

7. **View of Electric Building,
World's Columbian
Exposition, Chicago**

1893

Unknown Maker

Albumen silver print

84.XM.1473.36

8. **Plate from the Book
*Mécanisme de la
Physionomie Humaine*
(The Mechanism of
Human Physiognomy)**

1876 edition

**Guillaume-Benjamin
Duchenne**

French, 1806–1875

Albumen silver print

84.XB.1342.2.34



After Electric Dress A Positive 4

Negatives, 2001; prints, 2002

Kunié Sugiura

Japanese, born 1942

Gelatin silver prints, toned

After Electric Dress reenacts a 1956 performance by the Japanese avant-garde artist Atsuko Tanaka. The lightbulbs strung together in the original event evoked the energy of technological advance even as they buzzed with the potential shock of close contact. Whereas the earlier performance used industrial lights, Sugiura wrapped her model in bulbs more commonly used as household decoration. Yet her image similarly renders electricity as a force of both empowerment and annihilation.

Purchased with funds provided by the Photographs Council

2015.3

LEFT TO RIGHT:

Maquettes/Light #4913

Maquettes/Light #5121

Maquettes/Light #5806

Prints, 1995; light boxes produced later

Naoya Hatakeyama

Japanese, born 1958

Gelatin silver prints in light boxes

2011.16.1-3



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