



## About the exhibition

The exhibition is divided into four themes inspired by Notman's boldness as a businessman, his networking proficiency, and his qualities as an artist and builder.

A Scot by birth, William Notman left his home country for Canada in 1856 at the age of 30. His family's haberdashery business had fallen on hard times. Accompanied by his wife and children, and confident of a brighter future, he arrived in Montréal, a dynamic and flourishing city. Notman quickly learned the importance of establishing a network of influential men, and soon connected with an elite group who helped propel his success. He went on to secure a commission to photograph the construction of the Victoria Bridge, an extraordinary engineering project and a structure that played a strategic role in the economic growth of Montréal. A selection of his photographs in a maple box was given to Albert Edward, Prince of Wales, who inaugurated the bridge in 1860. The phrase "Photographer to the Queen" then appeared in the firm's promotional material. Notman also produced an album offered by the City of Montréal to Paris in 1878 as diplomatic gesture. Visitors to the exhibition will be invited to peruse a virtual copy of this work.

An artist at heart — he later founded the Art Association of Montréal with a group of businessmen — Notman saw photography as an art form, not a widely held view at the time. The artistic value of photography would not be acknowledged until the 20th century. Notman's photos are an integral part of his body of work and provide a necessary and uncensored portrait of the social and political realities of their time.

Notman broke down the barriers between photography and painting with his painted photographs, composites and studied staging. His approach opened the door to the creative manipulation of photographic images, preparing the ground for the ideas and uses that would come to define 20th century photography. For Notman, photography was a new way to express one's individual and collective identity. He actively contributed to democratizing the portrait, photographing everyday people along with celebrities, members of First Nations, trappers and voyageurs.

Notman never hesitated to apply state-of-the-art photographic processes, a reflection of his ability to anticipate future developments in the field. Examples include stereography, which allowed photographs to be viewed in three dimensions, and composite, the precursor of Photoshop. He was constantly innovating, and in doing so he helped

advance the creation of technologies that enabled images to be widely replicated and circulated. Through the publication of his works — he was a leader in publishing photography books — he shared his vision and promoted photography as a fine art. His tireless efforts in this area marked the beginning of the widespread dissemination of images. They also helped forge the modern-day bond between the print world and visual culture. He was a regular participant in international competitions and world's fairs, winning a number of awards over the course of his career.

Notman's advanced management methods and astute communication skills made him known far and wide. A true entrepreneur, he managed his firm with a deft hand. In 1872, he operated 26 franchised studios in Canada and the United States. Upon his death, the Notman Studio, renamed Wm. Notman & Son in 1882, continued to do business under the management of his sons, William McFarlane Notman and Charles Frederick Notman, until 1935.