Louis's Love of Light

Arts, Perseverance, Creativity

At a young age Louis became fascinated by light, above all else. From staring at a flame to playing with its effects, he explored light's many mysteries. As an adult, he studied further and went on to design theatre scenography, enchanting audiences across Paris. But he still wanted to...

8 min   8+

A little more than two-hundred years ago, in a tiny village in France, there lived a boy **named Louis**. Back then, which was not so very long ago, there were no cars or even electric light bulbs.

Young Louis was a curious fellow. The things he liked doing were quite different from the things other children his age liked to do. While they enjoyed frolicking in the forest, climbing trees and playing outdoor games, Louis preferred to stare at the flame of a kerosene lamp, his eyes wide with astonishment at the shadows it created **on the wall** — which looked like dancing animals.

In the winter, while his friends were ice-skating on the frozen river, Louis was writing and drawing with feather quill pens dipped in ink.

One day, a nomadic theatre troupe visited the city and Louis attended the performance. The painted scenery attracted Louis much more than the actors or the play itself.

After the show finished, he rushed home, took some old pieces of cloth from a trunk in the shed, and painted some imagery on them, similar to what he'd seen in the theatre. Every evening thereafter he would rehearse his puppet shows, using his designs **as the scenery**. But these shows were held in a corner where no one could see him. He was a rather modest boy.

When Louis grew up, he didn't think twice about what he wanted to do for a living. He said goodbye to his parents and headed directly to Paris to train as a scenic artist, painting backdrops and stage sets for the theatre.

It wasn't long before the teacher noticed how talented Louis was. As soon as the young man had learned the basics of the craft, he began to accompany

the master, serving as his assistant.

Louis was a fast learner. What fascinated him most was 'light', and most especially, how to **play with it**. He would cover a lamp with a dark blue cloth to create the illusion of a deep-dark night. Or he'd use candles to evoke the brightness of midday. He combined his scenery and lighting effects in a particular way. The spectators could hardly believe the incredible atmosphere that was created on stage.

"You're the lord of light, Louis," people would tell him, amazed by his work. "Light obeys you!"

Louis would just smile.

News of his skill and imagination soon spread **throughout the city**. His talents were now in high demand, and Louis's name became known in Paris. As a result, he was extremely busy — when he wasn't working in the theatre, he was painting. Every person of importance wanted to have their portrait painted by Louis.

One night, as he was heading to bed after a demanding day of work, he thought to himself, half-awake: I wonder if there's an easy way to capture a moment. What if I really could **master light**?

Louis couldn't stop thinking about this. Whenever he had any free time, he would lock himself in his atelier to study the possibilities. He was sure there was another way to capture a moment beyond what a painted picture could provide.

His mind was full of wonderment. If he could just capture... light. And do so in an instant! Not over time, like painting a portrait, which could take weeks. Louis spent every extra minute in the studio, researching and testing **various techniques**. It took a lot of time, but he didn't give up.

And finally, one evening, in a dim street in Paris, the sound of someone crying out in joy burst through the silence of the night. After years of experimenting with light, materials and chemicals, Louis had achieved

success.

An image emerged on a silver plate. Louis repeated the experiment a few times to be sure he wasn't mistaken. Each time, a picture of what was right in front of him appeared in mirror-image on the plate.

"I've **tamed light**!" he shouted in excitement. "I've captured the flight of light!"

The precursor of modern photography was born. Soon, people started calling an image of this kind a 'daguerreotype' in honour of this very man, Louis Daguerre.

His invention was **truly revolutionary**. Family portraits were no longer only for nobles and wealthy burghers. Thanks to Louis, anyone could be immortalised on paper. All they had to do was to strike a pose for a short time in a special studio.

There were now long queues of people patiently awaiting their turn, keen to have a daguerreotype portrait of themselves and their loved ones. Everyone was in awe of how light could indeed capture reality.

By now, Louis had almost no time left for painting. With enthusiasm, he decided to introduce others to the secret of his new artform so that they could practise it as well. This revolutionary technology swiftly floated across the French border, and Louis became famous **around the world**.

Through dedication and exercising his imagination, Louis had become one of the greatest and most respected inventors of his time.

If you ever happen to visit Paris, you may wish to venture into the charming Rue Daguerre while on a stroll. There you can spare a thought for Louis, remembering the boy who loved light and managed to **capture its flight**.

This tale is based on a true story. In the first half of the 19th century, Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre invented the daguerreotype, the forerunner of modern photography.