MODALITIES OF PORTRAITURE AT NIPPUR

SETTING THE SCENE
From 1889-1900, John Henry Haynes meticulously photographed the excavation of the ancient Mesopotamian site of Nippur. This was a hostile territory, Haynes worked in a barren land, devoid of modern conveniences, and rife with local unrest. His work documents ancient architectural forms and artifacts as they were uncovered by a large native workforce. The expedition team largely left him to his own devices, leaving him as their solitary representative on the site for extended periods of time. Through the lens of his camera, Haynes developed strategies for coping with a situation that can only be described as extreme. Portraiture became his salvation.

MEMENTO
Amidst the danger and hostility, Haynes developed relationships deemed worthy of photographic remembrance, as these informal family portraits attest. These are not formal documents destined for a meticulous archive of the expedition. These are images for personal, emotional use.

MULTIPLE TEMPORALITIES
The mimetic relationship between the human figures and the ancient material effectively fuses their respective existences into one unstable temporality. Formal juxtaposition equates them. Photographed apart, this affinity would be lost. By virtue of the flat photographic surface the local population is endowed with the same status as the artifacts.

ORDER AMID CHAOS
Stiff bodies rigidly aligned with complimentary artifacts and architecture, exude an overwhelming discipline of compositional balance. The camera gives Haynes a space to enact disciplinary order within a chaotic and uncertain environment. Behind the lens, he is in full control.