Scholars have tended to argue that photography empowered a burgeoning middle class of European descent while subjecting members of subjugated classes or ethnicities to new forms of archival control. This scholarship has neglected a crucial shift in pictures that photography historically promised, namely the collapse of the social boundary between makers and viewers. As this lecture will argue, it is via this collapse that photography offered its most fundamental challenge to painting. Although it has become a truism that the cheap realism of photography drove painting to abstraction, a strong case can be made that painterly illusionism faltered because photography had put to rout the social asymmetry on which that illusionism relied.