

THE PHOTO-SECESSION AND CAMERA WORKS

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INTRODUCTION

Photography can be a means of making a simple visual recording or it can be a medium of personal expression through the creative use of camera, light, film, development, and printing.

The importance of photography to the world today is undeniable, and its impact on contemporary art is most obviously and dramatically seen in the photorealism paintings which currently enjoy much publicity and popularity. Another importance of photography and its effect on pictorial art is not new although the phantomlike quality of photorealism is the most explicit manifestation of the artist's dependence on photo images. Since its discovery, photography has been used as an adjunct to painting. It was useful to Ingres and to some of the era's other leading artists as an instant substitute for sketches and detailed studies preparatory to finished paintings.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

1870 Timothy O'Sullivan, 1880, 1890, 1900, 1910, and 1920. What was beginning to occur within photography was rapid and transitional. Photographers such as Timothy O'Sullivan, William Henry Jackson and Eadweard Muybridge were discoverers, frontiersmen, to some degree archaeologists. Photography was a tool to record and prove to all their new found land, places and things. Photography was nothing more than a recording device, used for a study of culture, geography, and science. Although the images produced by these individuals were rather beautiful and exquisitely seen, their intent was far from that which would occur twenty years later. Their work contained both an individual expression and a documented record of their subject - it seems as if they had great sensibility for both their subject and their medium. At times the sensibility within the photographs made them timeless conjuring feelings other than strictly documentations of a place, or thing. We could make similar comparisons to the

work of Eugene Atget. Atget was to document Paris capturing all aspects of this remarkable city, yet the love and passion Atget had for Paris transcended within the photographs emitting to the viewer a remarkable sensibility and vision of a city which continually lived. Even when the subjects seemed abandoned and unpopulated they were haunted by life : yet we have to keep into perspective that the of the images was to be records.

Between 1890 - 1920 a new interest began to occur in photography, the notion of photographs as "artifacts". Photography as a status of an art object arose, veering photography on a new path which really had never been walked upon. This ideal brought a movement known as pictorialism, a term which was generally used for "art photography". The pictorialists believed that a camera image might capture feelings and senses, they were concerned with beauty rather than fact. This notion as you might recall began with the concept of Naturalism : described by Peter Henry Emerson and the soft-focus impressionist vision. This vision was said "to stress formal and atmospheric effects of the image over the subject matter, so that composition and tonal values became the most important element of the photograph. The pictorialists regarded optical sharpness and exact replica to be a limitation of expression and individuality, therefore accepting manipulation as a notion of self-expression.

As industrialization and urbanization proceeded a dramatic expansion in the numbers of photographers resulted. The invention of dry films and hand held cameras created millions of images and millions of photographers, although little artistic merit was seen. The public began to believe that photography was simply a visual record, a tool to record. Photography was now a communicator of public events, social conditions, a tool used to record even reproduce. As photography was being used so often for reproduction, art was also seen more regularly through in publications, making the public far more visually cultured creating emphasis on craft and artistry. Within the diversity of styles that emerged art was essentially concerned with personal vision. Pictorialists articulated a dual role for the medium.

- (1) To be a record on one hand
- (2) To provoke thought, feeling and individuality on the other.

The pictorialists hoped to appeal to collectors of the visual arts for whom aesthetic quality and individuality was important. The pictorialists demonstrated this with unique prints, using non-silver substances such as bicarbonate gelatin, and carbon. This enabled them to control tonalities, introduce highlights and obscure or remove details that seemed to descriptive. Photographs should evoke feeling rather than for its power of description the pictorialists pleaded. Methods used to alter the forms in the

gum, oil, and pigment : fingers, etching tools, stumps, paper type (heavily textured, smooth Japanese), pencils, brushes, scratchers.

As the pictorialist movements became stronger groups known as secessions began to form : these secessions promoted and strengthened the movement which they preferred, neglecting and sometimes even condemning other movements which were occurring. There were four main or key secessions :

- (1) Wiener-Kamera Klub ... formed in Vienna 1891
- (2) The Linked Ring ... Formed in London 1892
- (3) Photo-Club de Paris ... formed in Paris 1894
- (4) The Photo-Secession ... formed in New York 1902

1. The Linked Ring - London 1892

- First organization formed to advance artistic photography as an independent expressive medium.
- Found in London May 1892 by Alfred Maskell, H.P. Robinson and other photographers who were dissatisfied with the policies of the Royal Photographic Society.
- The primary purpose of the Linked Ring was to establish an Alternative art photography exhibition.
- Its first show was called "The Photographic Salon" in 1893, directed by J. Craig Annan and Frederick H. Evans.
- One was elected to the Linked Ring solely on the basis of artistic quality.

2. The Photo-Club de Paris - Paris 1894

- Photo-Club de Paris founded by Robert Demachy and many other French Pictorialists concerned with similar ideals as in the Linked Ring in London.

THE PHOTO-SECESSION AND PHOTO SECESSIONIST

1. The Photo Secession

a. The Photo-Secession - New York, U. S. A 1902

- The Photo-Secession was founded by Alfred Stieglitz with the help of several other American pictorial photographers.
- The Photo-Secession was an informal organization of pictorial photographers,

primarily American.

- This organization became the worldwide focal point for the finest artistic photography in the first decade of the twentieth century.
- loosely to hold together those Americans devoted to pictorial photography in their endeavor to compel its recognition, not as the handmaiden of art, but as a distinctive medium of individual expression.
- Members included : Edward Steichen, Clarence White, Gertrude Kasebier, Alvin Langdon Coburn, Frank Eugene, Annie Brigman, Alice Boughton, Joseph T. Keiley.
- They showed their work at The Little Gallery of the Photo-Secession, later to be named gallery "291"
- The work was continually published in a publication known as "Camera Works" which was affiliated to the Photo-Secession.
- Making this publication a great source of promotion for these particular pictorialists.
- The Photo-Secession was probably one of the most influential photographic organizations which has risen to this day.

2. Information regarding each of the main Photo-secessionist

a. Alfred Stieglitz

- Alfred Stieglitz knew and attacked everything he ever wanted, he was never afraid always searching and discovering.
- On the evening of Saturday, July 7, 1946 Alfred Stieglitz suffered a heart attack - a week later at 1:30 in the morning of July 13, 1946 he died.
- This was an end and beginning of something new. The man who shaped and helped place photography left us in charge ...
- Unlike other photographers Stieglitz was very informed with European culture (outside influences) one could call him a cosmopolitan ; always informing himself. We can make the comparison to O'Sullivan whom was a frontiersman, not very informed of outside happening's speaking mainly of Europe. Stieglitz on the other hand always stepped outside always reaching beyond.
- What made him so successful was that he fused European heritage with the America frontier spirit.
- Stieglitz bridged the Old World and the New, synthesizing the spirit of American frontierism while borrowing European tradition.
- To some degree he defined the skeleton force of the Avant-Garde.
- I feel he was quite fortunate to be a second generation American of Jewish, German descent, building deep roots in the cultural and intellectual life of

Europe.

Stieglitz anticipated and knew the possibilities and advantages of commercial and cultural success in America.

He received the finest education in New York after his family became rather successful woolen merchants after the civil war.

At the age of seventeen he went to Germany to study engineering in Berlin. He soon turned with a passionate interest to photography. He then enrolled as a student of the noted photochemist Dr. H.W. Vogel offered Stieglitz an outstanding scientific and technical grounding in photography. He always challenged his students, making them think and for accomplishment.

Stieglitz was always noted to be a stubborn perfectionist despising compromise in any form!. "Photography and Stieglitz was a perfect marriage"

His nine-year European experience was a turning point in his life, it was intense, expansive, the cultural life of Europe and Berlin had great impact upon him. Returning to America attempting to infuse spirit in both photography and modern art expression.

From Europe he inherited a set of exacting, high standards of excellence and sophistication. He acquired an aggressive self-confidence necessary to succeed in America. It was American culture and the belief in the possibility of American frontier that pushed him to discard the old and search out the bold, the unique, and the provocative.

Stieglitz's own work laid the foundation for almost all that would follow in American photography. His fascination with techniques and processes brought Stieglitz to be the first to accomplish new technical feats such as photographing in ice, rain, snow, and at night - conditions that other photographers felt impossible to feat.

Stieglitz was also the first to use camera to describe in a lucid, direct manner the vitality of the New York streets. He created in the images of New York the idea of consciously capturing what Cartier-Bresson later termed "the decisive moment"

It appeared as if Stieglitz went through some sort of second period, maybe caused by the post-impressionist painters he showed at gallery, 291. The formal, abstract, cubist qualities of the paintings could now be seen in his photographs.. the portraits and even in the city scapes.

Stieglitz's last series of images were psychologically induced portraits (usually of Georgia O'Keeffe), personal landscapes, and a series of cloud images he called "The Equivalents". At this period. Stieglitz explored the straight photograph's internal and metaphorical possibilities. like the equivalence a metaphysical spiritual sense.

His passionate desire for growth and excellence made his work constantly progressive.

- Stieglitz believed in the power of the unmanipulated camera image.
- His elitism and demand for excellences set a standard against which each successive generation of artists has to measure itself. His legacy to American photography is great, probably the most pervasive of any single photographer.

b. Gertrude Kasebier - American 1852 - 1934

- Born in Des Moines Iowa, and raised in Colorado, she attended Moravian College for Women, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.
- At the age of 36 she began to study painting in New York. In 1894 she apprenticed in Germany as a chemist (to learn the technical aspects of photography)
- Her work is usually of natural (though often romantic, sentimental poses).
- Known for her unconventional scenes of mother - child relations and portraits of figures such as Rodin, and Alfred Stieglitz.
- She acquired an impressionistic style influenced by Painters such as Whistler.
- Kasebier reworked her prints to eliminate detail she was concerned less with composition than tonal value.
- She encouraged women, in careers in photography, always encouraging and promoting women in photography.
- 1897 she opened a portrait business. She then opened a studio in 1908 in New Port, Rhode Island where she photographed many of her best known pictorial photographs.
- She became the first American Woman member of the Linked Ring in 1900. In 1902 she became a founding member of the Photo-Secession in New York.
- Alfred Stieglitz admired her work and included several gravures in the first issue of "Camera Works".
- Kasebier eventually broke contact with Stieglitz over the "Straight" photography issue.
- In 1912 she resigned from the Photo-Secession and became founding member with Clarence White, and Woburn of the Pictorial Photographers of America four years later.
- Kasebier retired from professional photography in 1927.
- In 1932 Gertrude Kasebier died at the age of 82.

c. Clarence H. White - American 1871 - 1925

- Born in West Carlisle Ohio, he then moved to Newark Ohio until 1906.
- His early interest in painting was discouraged by his parents, upon high school graduation he became a bookkeeper. He did not begin photography until 1893 at the age of 22.

- Regarded as one of the most influential Pictorial Photographers and teachers of photography.
- Whites work is usually intimate studies of his family and friends, genre scenes, and melancholy portraits. He was known for his skill and use of natural light and quiet attention to detail. His images were usually produced in early morning due to his work schedule.
- He controlled all aspects of his images from costume design to the mounting of his platinum prints.
- He was influenced by Whistler, the early Impressionists, and Japanese art.
- In 1900 Clarence White was elected to the Linked Ring, and then became one of the founding members of the photo - secession in 1902.
- In 1907 he taught his first photo course at Columbia University.
- In 1914 White opened the Clarence H. White school of photography in New York, some of his pupils were : Margaret Bourke-White, Doris Ulmann, Ralph Steiner, Dorothea Lange, Paul Outerbridge Jr.
- White was never able to devote himself to photography full time due to financial obligations.
- He died in 1925 of a heart attack while on tour with photographic students in Mexico.

d. Joseph T. Keiley - American 1869 - 1914

- Keiley was born in Brooklyn of well - to - do parents.
- After studying at Columbia University, he received a law degree to later enter partnership with Henry M. Haviland in Wall Street. He started photography as a amateur in mid - 1880's.
- Was Known as Stieglitz's most faithful assistant in the early phases of the start to change American photography. He worked as a critic, historian, and collaborator in the hanging of exhibitions.
- Stieglitz asked Keiley to help as an editorial associate just after founding Camera Notes.
- Most of Keiley's work was portraits of young women.
- Known for his images of the American Indians and theatrical characters.
- He was truly the quiet and effective force behind the scenes, he often wrote and edited for Camera Works - always articulating and promoting the trends and currents in progressive photography.
- In 1914 kidney disease claimed his life.
- It is often said that Joseph Keiley would have been the best person qualified to write the history of the Photo - Secession.
- Joseph Keiley was known as : "A dreamer of fine dreams who woke to do friendly deeds".

e. Edward Steichen : American 1879 - 1973

- Edward Jean Steichen was born in Luxembourg. His family came to the U.S.A in 1881 and settled in Michigan, in 1889 they eventually moved to Milwaukee.
- At 15 Steichen began a 4 year lithography apprenticeship.
- 1895 he began photography yet continued his career as a painter for the next 20 years.
- He worked in Black and white and Color. His subhexts ranging from portraits, landscapes, fashion and advertising photography.
- His early work was a true mastery of soft - focus pictorialism.
- 1901 Steichen was elected to the linked Ring, in 1902 he became a founding member of the photo-Secession and designed the cover of the journal : Camera works
- Photographer, and curator - Steichen is one of the most prominent figure in 20th century photography.
- After the first world war he worked primarily in the "Straight" photography mode. with a highly developed sense of design.
- He was a curator at New york's Museum of Modern Art for 15 years, up untill the family of man exhibition between 1947 - 1962.
- Steichen was also a very important contributor in setting up gallery 291 in New york.
- In 1906 he returned to Euro (paris) where he was responsible for selecting work to be exhibited by Stieglitz. Steichen chose and sent the work of : John Martin, Picasso, Matisse, Brancusi, Cezanne, Rodin.
- He commanded the photographic division of the Army Expeditionary Forces in world war I.
- Steichen published for Vogue, and Vanity Fair.
- In 1945 he was placed in command of all combat photography and was discharged in 1946 with rank of Captain. During the war Steichen organized " The road to victory" and "Power in the Pacific" exhibitions for the Museum of Modern Art in New york.
- At the M.O.M.A Steichen Put together 50 shows including the " Family of Man "
- In 1967 Steichen wrote : Today I am no longer concerned with photography as an art form. I believe it is potentially the best medium for explaining man to himself and his fellow man "
- In 1973 in West Redding Connecticut Steichen died, just before turning 94 years old.

f. Frank Eugene - American 1865 - 1936

- Frank Eugene enjoyed a position within the Photo - Secession, along side Alfred

Stieglitz and the other pictorialists.

- His work was heavily manipulated, usually portraits and figure images.
- He usually worked over them with pencils, etching needles, and pen - and - ink. It appeared as if he attempted to make the photographic image appear to emerge from out of the hand manipulated surroundings. Similar to a sculptor leaving his unfinished stone around a polished figure.
- Frank Eugene was trained in painting and etching. He studied at the City College of New York and the Royal Bavarian Academic of Fine Arts in Munich.
- His interest in photography brought him in contact with the Stieglitz circle, where he became a founding member of the Photo - Secession.
- In 1936 Frank Eugene Passed away.

g. Alvin Langdon Coburn - British 1882-1966

- Coburn was born in Boston in 1882, he became interested in photography as a child making his first attempts at age 8.
- Photographer, inspired by English vorticist movement in painting, similar to cubism.
- F. Holland Day a distant relative met Coburn in 1898 and convinced him to take up photography full time. Day then took Coburn to England to assist him in organizing the New American School Exhibition.
- He returned to the U.S.A in 1901 heavily influenced by Whistler he felt that photography gave him results with an edge too hard. Therefore he experimented with the soft focus techniques sometimes using a pinhole rather than a lens.
- In 1903 he was elected to the Linked Ring and became a founding member of the photo-secession.
- In 1912 he made a series of photographs from tops of skyscraper, pointing down he eliminated the horizon line, therefore creating a flattened perspective, abstract view which really was new to photography.
- Mid way through his career (1917) he began to make the first known examples of purely abstract photographs, which he called Vortographs.
- They were to create aesthetic response with patterns that do not represent identifiable objects but exist only to reveal their own, unique abstract qualities.
- A lot of his earlier work was platinum overlaying gum over the surface.
- In 1917 he showed his first Vectograph, here he used a kaleid-oscope like mirror attachment in the front of the lens. Hence breaking the subject into series of non-representational planes.
- Alvin Langdon Coburn died in 1966 at the age of 84.
- Leaving behind a new vision and some of the most wonderful photographs of the photo-Secession.

CAMERA WORKS

1. Camera Works

Camera Works was generally considered to be the finest American art magazine of the first half of the twentieth century. Edited and published by Alfred Stieglitz, this publication stood only on the highest quality possible. Camera Works was a quarterly publication of 50 issues which appeared between 1903-1917, and usually never on schedule. Alfred Stieglitz spared no effort or expense especially in the quality of the reproductions, making this one of its strongest attributes. Each issue of camera works had a major portfolio composed of hand pulled photographs tipped-in by hand on colored mounts. The care attended in this publication was incredible - Stieglitz individually inspected each gravure sheet, hand spotting dust marks or other imperfections. The gravure plates were made from the photographers original negatives, this partially accounts for why the quality was so outstanding. Some believe that the reproductions in the magazine surpassed their original prints. For some the photogravures were actually considered finished art and rightfully so they were absolutely exquisite.

The work of all the photo-Secession photographers was published at various times, making this a very influential source for distribution of their work along with other European photographers. The work of Julia Margaret Cameron and Hill and Adamson for example, received their first American publication in Camera Works. As did the paintings of Picasso, Braque, Rodin, O'Keeffe, Henri Toulouse-Lautrec and many other modern artists. Camera Works did not only consist of images, but also criticism, reviews, articles, and technical information and newly discovered products or processes.

Camera Works began with 647 subscribers, and 1000 copies of each issue were printed always ; the extra 353 were given to donators and contributors to the magazine as payment. In 1917 Alfred Stieglitz wearily terminated the magazine and gallery 291 due mainly to the lack of funding. What began to occur was that the list of paying subscribers dropped to a low 37 individuals, making it rather difficult to fund the publication. Subscribers were said to be angry - due to the fact that painting dominated the pages of the publication. The individuals more than the painting, therefor turning them off of this particular publication. During Camera Works fifteen year life, this publication had expressed and helped define the transition from : soft focus, atmospheric Pictorialism, to the beginnings of "modernism", it powerfully directed realism that came to be called. "straight photography".

a. Gallery 291

In 1907 Alfred Stieglitz, with the help and enthusiasm of Steichen began to promote the most progressive photography painting and sculpture. The start of the very important Little Gallery of the Photo-Secession at 291 Fifth avenue in New York. The space consisted of three rooms, the largest being 15x17 feet. Even in such a confined space Stieglitz and Steichen introduced the most avant garde painting and sculpture that America had seen. August Rodin, Pablo Picasso, Paul Cezanne, George Braque, Henry Matisse, John Marin, Constantin Brancusi, Max Weber, Georgia O'Keeffe.

When the association of American Painters and Sculptors decided to hold a great international exhibition of contemporary painting and sculpture, "The Armory Show" the organizing committee consulted Stiglitz, although he did not actively participate. One can recognize through this request how important and influential Stieglitz, Steichen, and the whole Photo-Secession, Camera Works, and gallery 291 association was even to other mediums. In 1917 the organization dissolved after a final exhibition at the Albright Art Gallery in Buffalo, New York.

As time progressed so did the art and artists, the upcoming progressive artists were working for a new aesthetic base. Architects were designing skyscrapers that expressed the nature of the steel skeleton rather than imitating classical masonry structures. Sculptors were using texture of chiseled marble for its own sake not trying to smoothen it. Painters felt free of the need to produce representational imagery.

In photography the critics began praising photographs that used the straight approach—devoid of any manipulation what so ever. The surge away from pictorialism began and photography was not forced to emulate surface textures made by other medium.

In 1904 the Japanese-iron, German-educate American art critic Sadakichi Hartmann wrote some very important articles regarding photography's intentions. Sadakichi Hartman condemned gum printing, glycerine process, and handwork on negatives and prints. He pleaded that photography should rely on :

- (1) your Camera
- (2) your Eye
- (3) On good taste and knowledge of composition

He said compose the picture which you intend to take so well that the negative will be absolutely perfect and in need of no or but slight manipulation. Sadakichi stated that brush marks interfere with the natural qualities of the photographic techniques.

Photography was being turned in a whirl pool which could not stop or slow it self down. photography was changing and transforming from one extreme to another in a very short time. One of the most perfect examples of an artist whom was on the extreme end of pictorialism was paul strand, a photographer noted for his "straight photography" approach. Stieglitz once said that, Strand's work is brutally direct, pure and devoid of trickery. It was in striking contrast to much of the work of the photographic aesthetics returned to the traditional straight approach. Paul Strand saw

things in a very different way than most, he once said that the photographer's problem is to see clearly the limitations and at the same time the potential qualities of the medium. In 1923 lecturing to students he made a plea for craftsmanship and told them of the need to free photography from the domination of painting.

I believe this was the beginning of a new and vibrant vision, "Pure" and "Straight"

CONCLUSION

The photographic medium is a unique visual arts media. It is not only a powerful means of accurately capturing and preserving visual information, but it also has significantly affected our entire contemporary visual environment. It has changed the way in which we, as individuals, define our own realities, and has created its own new form of reality—a reality that relies heavily upon the supposed truthfulness and believability that is inherent within the photographic processes themselves.

In today's complex society, the viewing audience is literally bombarded by millions upon millions of visual images that are based within the photographic processes. Even with the seeming over saturation of visual stimulation, the individual photographic image still exercises its magical power to intrigue, and at times even to mesmerize, its viewing audience.

Throughout its history, the photographic medium has struggled to gain a greater legitimacy and acceptance as an important member of the visual arts. After a multitude of technological innovations and a tremendous amount of visual experimentation, the contemporary photographic image has emerged as a powerful, multifaceted visual arts form. The potentials of this medium have expanded far beyond the possibilities presented by its initial role as an accurate tool for documentation. While the photograph's ability to accurately record visual information remains as one of the most important cornerstones of the medium, the contemporary photographic image can now encompass many new and diverse possibilities. These new visual possibilities can be exercised across a broad spectrum of visual arts applications. The photographic image is capable of being transformed, manipulated, and even totally reconstructed to become an entirely new form of fabricated reality.

Realism was all-important in nineteenth century painting when photography was first discovered by Frenchman Joseph Nicéphore. It is important to realize that the ideal of painting at this time was realism and this made photography a threat because, in terms of literal descriptions of reality, images produced by hand simply were no competition for the precise record of reality rendered by the camera. Photography produced images more convincing in reality and more richly detailed than painters could produce manually even with months of efforts. It provided a wealth and

authenticity of visual information never before possible.

Some of painters use of photography in relation to their painting than any other painter of the nineteenth century. Eakins made a careful distinction between photography and photographic studies which posed the question of which were ends and which were means to ends. Few of the artists contemporary to Eakins wouldn't between photography and photographic studies which posed the question of which were ends and which were means to ends. Few of the artists contemporary to Eakins wouldn't admit using phonographs and scorned it as a device beneath their dignity. There is a close relationship between Eakins phonographs and his paintings.

It is clear that for Eakins as for many artists and photographers in history, photography was a means of analysis and of extending the eye and hand as tools to grasp the reality of a particular moment or place. This power of recording objects that are in an attitude, mood, or configuration for only an instant, gives photography a power of resurrection greater than painting or drawing because a photography tells us exactly how it was.

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