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# THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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## EDWARD STEICHEN APPOINTED HEAD OF PHOTOGRAPHY

### AT MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Nelson A. Rockefeller, President of the Museum of Modern Art, announces the appointment of Edward Steichen as Director of the Museum's Department of Photography. The appointment becomes effective immediately and Mr. Steichen, who for the past year has been in frequent consultation with Museum officials in discussions of plans for greatly enlarging the scope of the Department, will begin at once to put some of these plans into operation.

In announcing the appointment Mr. Rockefeller said:

"It is very gratifying to the Trustees of the Museum and to me personally to have Mr. Steichen's acceptance of the Directorship of the Museum's Department of Photography. No one could bring greater achievement, experience, and enthusiasm to the position. Without question he is today America's foremost figure in the field of photography and for almost five decades--from his first photographic exhibition in London in 1901 at the age of 22 to his magnificent record in World War II as a USNR Captain in charge of Naval Aviation Photography--he has been one of photography's most vitalizing leaders.

"There is something peculiarly fitting in this affiliation of Steichen with the Museum of Modern Art. In the early part of this century it was he who suggested to Stieglitz the original idea for the Photo-Secession Gallery, later to become the famous "291," cradle of modern art in America. He worked with Stieglitz to bring it into being, and two years later brought back with him from Paris a selection of Rodin drawings and works by Matisse which were exhibited at the Gallery and of which Stieglitz himself said: 'This was the real introduction of modern art to America.'

"Now, nearly half a century later, Steichen, the young photographer who was so instrumental in bringing modern art to America, joins with the Museum of Modern Art to bring to as wide a public as possible the best work being done in photography throughout the world, and to employ it creatively as a means of interpretation in major Museum exhibitions where photography is not the theme but the medium through which great achievements and great moments are graphically presented.

"In Steichen we have the ideal organizer and director of such exhibitions for he combines within himself the vitality and imagination usually associated with youth and the tempered judgment that comes only from experience. I am particularly pleased that the enlarged program for the Department, headed by Mr. Steichen, has the endorsement and support of the photographic industry."

Under Mr. Steichen's leadership the Photography Department will encourage the development of outstanding activities in the various fields of photography and give recognition to achievements in the art; bring together the best contemporary work in the various phases of creative photography in this country and abroad; edit and organize international exhibitions for showings at the Museum. It will further disseminate this material here and abroad through the Museum's publications and circulating exhibitions.

The first large exhibition planned by the Department, to be given during the winter of 1948, will be Great News Photographs, which will include the history of news photography. Before the end of 1948 the Museum plans to present a major thematic exhibition on the order of Road to Victory involving the use of enormous photomurals and dramatic installation. Organized and directed by Mr. Steichen, the exhibition will have as its theme: "Photography in the Service of Science in War and Peace."

Exhibitions planned for the next two or three years include the work of young American photographers who stress the documentary approach; an international exhibition of new directions and tendencies which will include abstract and non-representational photography and transcendentalism in photography.

In discussing the plan for the Department, Mr. Steichen said:

"Photography is a potent factor in increasing our knowledge and shaping our concept and understanding of contemporary life. I believe its influence cannot be over-stressed. Reportedly practiced by twenty million people in the United States, it reaches and touches almost the entire population--a potential art form capable of giving us a creative record of the people made by the people. The sensitivity of photography as a medium, together with its almost universal use, makes it an instrument that responds readily to the fertilizing influence of ideas.

"This was demonstrated during the war by our Navy combat photography. We started there with a handful of fine photographers who became experts not only in using the lens but in photographing with mind and heart. They took photographs--marvelous photographs--of the boredom, the agony and stark tragedy of sudden death and mutilation, as well as the dramatic and spectacular images of embattled machines. The achievements of that handful spread and directly influenced and inspired four thousand Navy photographers. Through the unifying collaboration of thousands of photographers the overall photographic history of World War II presents an epic pictorial record of humanity at war.

"I hope to attain that same sense of unity through peace-time photographers, that in the end we shall have a picture of America: the warm sweetness of its homes, the greatness of its industries, the productivity of its farms, the vastness of its natural resources, the sweep of its landscape, its big cities, its small towns and, above all, the faces of the people.

"I stress the importance of photography as an art, as a vital modern means of giving form to ideas. It is the artist in photography who beyond his own creative achievement establishes standards, produces new influences and new uses of the medium in all human endeavor, whether it be in the service of science, education or communication."

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Air-minded and camera-minded, Edward Steichen has performed a unique service for his country in the two world wars that have spanned our troubled times. In World War I, as a Colonel serving under General Billy Mitchell in the A.E.F., he was made chief of the photographic section of the Army Air Forces and, at the end of the war, received the red ribbon of the French Legion of Honor and a special citation from General Pershing for exceptionally meritorious service. In World War II, as a Captain in the U.S. Naval Reserve, he was put in command of all Naval combat photography and shortly after VJ-Day received the Distinguished Service Medal.

Mr. Steichen has directed two large exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art. In the Spring of 1942 the Navy assigned him to assemble Road to Victory: A Procession of Photographs of the Nation at War. Carl Sandburg, Mr. Steichen's brother-in-law, wrote the text for this outstanding exhibition for which the Museum removed all the interior

walls of its second floor in order to make room for the special installation and the large photographic murals, one of which was forty feet in length. After the exhibition closed at the Museum it was sent on a tour of the country and, in several smaller versions, was shown in England, South America, and Honolulu. In January 1945, Mr. Steichen directed Power in the Pacific: Battle Photographs of our Navy in Action on the Sea and in the Sky.

Mr. Steichen's first exhibition at the Museum, however, was exceedingly unwarlike. In 1936 the Museum gave him probably the only one-man flower exhibition ever held in any Museum--an exhibition of new races of giant delphiniums Mr. Steichen had been developing through three decades.

Edward Steichen was born in Hancock, Michigan, in 1879, and received his schooling in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He showed early evidence of strongly marked artistic and scientific-mechanical qualities, an unusual combination no doubt responsible for his later success as a master photographer. He was also a painter, but in 1898 after his paintings had been refused exhibition in the Chicago Art Institute, all the photographs he sent to the Philadelphia Photographic Salon were accepted. That marked the beginning of public recognition of his genius with the lens, which steadily rose until he became probably the most noted photographer in the world.

At the beginning of this century Steichen brought his camera and paint brushes to New York. The next year an exhibition of his photographs was held in London and he soon followed them abroad, traveling over Europe photographing and making friends of the great people of the day. He returned to New York and made that city his headquarters until he entered our air service in the first World War. He was in the first group of American air corps sent to France and during the second battle of the Marne was made chief of the Photographic Division. The clarity and detail demanded by aerial work gave him a new concept of photography and, in 1920, he gave up painting to devote all his time to the other art.

When the second World War broke out in 1939, Steichen had retired from the active practice of photography and was devoting his life to the development of new races of delphinium. The attack on Pearl Harbor, however, put a stop to his peaceful pursuit of flower-breeding. He again applied for active service in the Army but was refused because of his age. He was then offered a Lieutenant Commandership by the Navy and was invited to organize and direct a special Naval aviation photographic unit. That unit later shot the film sequences used in The Fighting Lady, the great motion picture of aerial combat in the Pacific. In November and December 1943 Captain Steichen was in combat service in the Pacific aboard the aircraft carrier the U.S.S. Lexington, which was torpedoed in action. Early in 1945 the Navy placed Captain Steichen in command of all Navy combat photography and made him director and organizer of the Navy Photographic Institute.