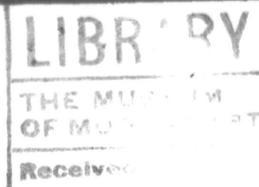


THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

11 WEST 53 STREET, NEW YORK 19, N. Y.

TELEPHONE: CIRCLE 5-8900



500420 - 30

FOR RELEASE FOR SUNDAY PAPERS MAY 7

FOR DAILY PAPERS MAY 10

EDWARD STEICHEN TO BE GIVEN THE FINE ARTS MEDAL AND

A SMALL RETROSPECTIVE EXHIBITION IN WASHINGTON BY

THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS

Edward Steichen, who has just completed 3 years as Director of the Department of Photography of the Museum of Modern Art, will receive the Fine Arts Medal of the American Institute of Architects for ¹⁹⁵⁰~~1949~~, prompted by his "long and distinguished career in the field of photography." This is the first time the award has been made in the field of photography, following the action last year of the directors in adding photography to the group of fine arts eligible for the award. The Fine Arts Medal, established in 1919, is the highest honor the Institute can bestow in those fine arts other than architecture, and is awarded in recognition of distinguished achievement in the arts of painting, sculpture, music, literature, city or regional planning, landscape architecture and, now, photography. It has in past years been awarded to Leopold Stokowski, Diego Rivera, John Marin and Robert Edmond Jones, among others. The presentation to Mr. Steichen will take place on May 10 in Washington, D.C., at the national headquarters of the AIA.

A retrospective exhibition of Mr. Steichen's photographic work since 1897 will be on view in the new gallery of the Institute's office building from May 6 to June 1. The prints, borrowed from museums and private collectors, will include examples of Mr. Steichen's many and varied types of work: romantic subjects, psychological studies of many famous authors and actors, fashion and advertising photos, studies of insects and plant forms.

Mr. Steichen's work with the Museum of Modern Art:

This recognition comes to Mr. Steichen after a long and highly distinguished career in many fields. His current work at the Museum is producing a noteworthy record of service to the art of photography. His conduct of the Department of Photography in the past 3 years and for the future is summed up by his statement: "I stress the importance

OMA. *Franklin*

of photography as an art, as a vital modern means of giving form to ideas. It is the artist in photography who establishes precedents and standards of quality, explores new uses of the medium and becomes the catalytic and fructifying agent in advancing all branches of photography."

Mr. Steichen's policy of "continuous and continually changing exhibitions of live things" has led him to emphasize the many varied new approaches to photography and also to explore and encourage the talents of young photographers. He began with a series of small exhibitions stressing potentialities of contemporary photography in such shows as 3 Young Photographers, Music and Musicians, Four Photographers and Realism in Present Day Photography. Another series illustrated the continuity and inter-relationship between work of the past and present shown by means of "flash-backs" to historical material. These also have served to point up and emphasize the truly new and exploratory work of today. They have included the work of early European photographers as well as American: 50 Photographs by 50 Photographers, Photo Secession Group and Camera Work and Roots of Photography, the pioneer photos of Adamson and Hill and of Julia Margaret Cameron. The recent exhibition of more than 100 photographs just acquired for the collection shows work by the earliest American champion of photography as an art, the famous Alfred Stieglitz, and by his French contemporary, Eugene Atget.

Large exhibitions have been directed along two different lines. The first, In and out of Focus, comprehensively presented the ramifications, skills and differences of concept and scope of modern photography. The Exact Instant, showed how the news photographer became a recorder of historical events, moments and faces. It was related to Steichen's earlier shows, Road to Victory and Power in the Pacific, in that it expressed a specific idea and amplified a given theme.

The popularity of and growing interest in photography exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art has become apparent both in attendance and in newspaper and magazine coverage. These exhibitions have reached a new museum audience and a surprisingly large one. Press notices have been among the most numerous and generous of any ever accorded the Museum. They appear in news sections, in art columns,

in photography sections of newspapers and as features in a great variety of magazines. While the scope of the shows has always interested the career photographers themselves, Mr. Steichen has attempted in every exhibition to make a point of some element having direct appeal to intelligent amateur photographers, even to the frequent inclusion of the work of unknown amateurs. The photography columnists on newspapers and photographic magazines have been quick to recognize these angles and have given generous co-operation in bringing them to the attention of their readers. Nationwide interest has been stimulated by frequent syndicated service stories circulated throughout the country. This national interest has been further increased by the circulation of many of the exhibitions after their showing in the Museum. Moreover the Photography Department in conjunction with the Museum's Department of Circulating Exhibitions, has assembled special shows exclusively for traveling purposes, including 12 small one-man exhibitions of work by leading United States and European photographers, shows which are available singly or in selected groups.

The Department is also continually active in its service to the public. Publishers, advertisers, students and other interested people use it as a constant source of information and research. Particularly important is the Department's frequent contact with young and new photographers who find this contact stimulating, guiding and encouraging. Throughout the many activities and aspects of the Department, Mr. Steichen constantly aims at an ever wider acceptance and promotion of his major premise that photography is a modern art and as such becomes a potent factor in explaining man to his fellow man and in broadening our understanding of the world we live in.

Biographical information:

Eighteen months after Edward Steichen's birth in 1879 in Luxembourg, his parents came to this country to settle first in Michigan then in Wisconsin. At eighteen years of age he was already actively interested in painting and photography. Even then his interest lay in advanced approaches to both arts; the latter, a new medium in itself and not yet recognized as an art, caused the fight for this recognition for photography to become one of the strongest motivations for most of his ensuing efforts.

His first public recognition came in 1898 when the Philadelphia Photographic Salon accepted several of his prints, one of which is to be included in the Washington showing. American photography at that time was little known in Europe, but Alfred Stieglitz had been vigorously crusading for the establishment of photography as an art in this country since 1885. The first large showing of Steichen's work was included in an exhibition called the New School of American Photography, and arranged by F. Holland Day at the Royal Photographic Society's galleries in London in 1900 and at the Paris Photo Club in 1901. In 1900 he came to New York, meeting Stieglitz, then continued on to Paris and London.

For several years he worked in Paris and had his first one-man show of paintings and photographs at the Maison des Artistes then on the rue Royale in Paris. As a result of attending this exhibition, Maurice Maeterlinck was moved to write an essay on photography in which he said in part: "It is already many years since the sun revealed to us its power to portray objects and beings more quickly and more accurately than can pencil or crayon. It seemed to work only its own way and at its own pleasure. At first man was restricted to making permanent that which the impersonal and unsympathetic light had registered. He had not yet been permitted to imbue it with thought. But today it seems that thought has found a fissure through which to penetrate the mystery of this anonymous force, invade it, subjugate it, animate it, and compel it to say such things as have not yet been said in all the realm of chiaroscuro, of grace, of beauty and of truth."

And in this same year a Belgian critic wrote: "Here is perhaps the most important personality of the Salon.... One finds oneself in the presence of a psychological study carried to a fine point.... One should simply give oneself over to the unique emotion that it evokes, which is simply an emotion of beauty, an emotion of art." Thus, even at this early age, he was already succeeding in his aim to have photography recognized as an art.

Mr. Steichen traveled in Europe photographing writers, painters, sculptors and other artists whose work he found exciting. His photos of George Bernard Shaw, Frederick Watts, Eleanora Duse, Lenbach, Anatole France, Maeterlinck and Rodin among many others are still famous and remain unique as early portraits of these celebrated personalities.

In 1902 Alfred Stieglitz arranged an exhibition at the National Arts Club and announced the organization of the Photo Secession. Steichen, now the only living founder of this historical group, was a leader in its work "to dignify that profession until recently looked upon as a trade." It was he who initiated the plan which led to the establishment of the Photo Secession Galleries in 1905 which later became known as "291" and it was his suggestion that the Galleries should show the other arts as well as photography.

Stieglitz' handsome and unusual quarterly, Camera Work, begun in 1902, became the official organ of the Photo Secession. In the following year Charles H. Caffin writing for this publication stated: "Painter as well as photographer, and, what is more, an artist, Edward Steichen, young as he is, has influenced pictorial photography extraordinarily. He has enlarged its horizon for photographers, compelled attention from painters, amazed and delighted connoisseurs.... In Mr. Steichen there is the capacity for something very flattering to American pride, if only American shrewdness will recognize his worth."

During the 15 years of its publication Stieglitz reproduced 60 of Steichen's photographs in Camera Work, including the first reproductions of color photographs in any magazine from original autochrome plates. This was twice the number shown by any other photographer. In addition to reproducing Steichen's photography, Stieglitz later stated in an editorial: "We take this opportunity again to put on record, inasmuch as we believe that Camera Work is making history, our indebtedness to Steichen. The work of '291' could not have been achieved so completely without his active sympathy and constructive co-operation, rendered always in the most unselfish way. It was he who originally brought '291' into touch with Rodin, the recognized master, and with Matisse, at the time that he was regarded as 'The Wildman.' It has been Steichen also who, living in Paris, has constantly been on the watch for talent among young Americans there, and as for example, in the case of Marin, has introduced them to the spirit of '291'. Steichen has embodied that spirit in the most vital and constructive form."

With all these other activities Steichen still continued work on his painting and his photography. In 1903 he exhibited paintings in the Colonial Club in New York. The art critic of the New York Mail and Express wrote: "Six pictures by Edward J. Steichen, including a portrait of Beethoven and landscapes with figures, are as impressive as anything here. The painter...is worth watching." And of his photography a critic wrote in 1905: "One should not say that he recalls Rembrandt but rather, at this rate, that Rembrandt will, in time, remind us of Steichen."

In 1906 he returned to Europe to assemble for exhibition in "291" paintings by Matisse, Brancusi and Cézanne and Rodin drawings, works which had not been shown in this country. As Stieglitz himself said: "This was the real introduction of modern art to America," and for this reason Nelson A. Rockefeller, President of the Museum of Modern Art, stated at the time of Mr. Steichen's appointment as Director of the Museum's Department of Photography that "there is something peculiarly fitting in this affiliation of Steichen with the Museum of Modern Art." In addition to the European artists whose work he brought here, Steichen introduced work by American artists living in Paris, such as John Marin, Max Weber, Arthur Carles, Patrick Bruce, Putnam Brinley and Alfred Maurer who were then unknown in their home country.

Reminiscing at a later date over these events, Gertrude Stein wrote: "There was another funny photographic link. In those days a photographer came to Paris and knew us all. He was Steichen. He had been one of Stieglitz' men and came over very excited about photography. Pretty soon he decided that ordinary painting did not interest him, one could do all that with photography, that is to say that the photographs of pictures looked just like the photographs of real landscapes or of still lives if they were good pictures, and so there must be something else and so he became very interested in modern painting and was one of those who told Stieglitz and the rest of them all about it."

The first world war ended the activities of the Photo Secession, "291" and Camera Work. Steichen was commissioned in the Army, later becoming chief of the Photographic Division of the Air Corps and rising to the rank of Colonel. Here he began pioneer work in the use of aerial photography as an aid to military planning and operations. He was responsible for the Army's adoption of the Akeley camera and financed its production. Later he boosted the adoption of the Fairchild aerial cameras in the same way. Just after his demobilization he was decorated with the Legion of Honor while General "Billy" Mitchell stood at his side.

By the close of the war Steichen had determined to give up painting entirely and devote himself to photography. To be sure that he would not look back, he made a bonfire of all his paintings, so that today the only survivors are those in private collections and in Museums (the Metropolitan Museum, the Toledo Museum and the Luxemburg Museum). Perhaps the last written mention of his paintings before they were destroyed was the dedication to Steichen by his brother-in-law Carl Sandburg of his "Smoke and Steel" published in 1920:

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"Painter of nocturnes and faces, camera engraver
of glints and moments, listener to blue
evening winds and new yellow roses,
dreamer and finder, rider of great
mornings in gardens, valleys,
battles."

The year following the bonfire he spent photographing a cup and saucer, making more than 1,000 negatives of this subject to perfect his realistic technique.

From 1923 to 1938 he was chief photographer for Condé-Nast Publications, Vogue and Vanity Fair, for which he photographed countless people of fame in all professions. He was able to put into practical use his personal approach to photography, and he revolutionized not only magazine photography but also advertising photography for portraiture, theatre, fashion and other illustrative purposes. For an advertising print he received as much as \$1,000.

In 1932 Steichen was commissioned to make photo-murals in the new Radio City movie house which are on the subject of aviation. Of these Henry McBride, art critic of the New York Sun, wrote: "It is disconcerting to a lover of painting to have to admit that a photographer comes nearer than the painters to expressing the feeling of the times, but nothing is to be gained by deceiving oneself." And Edward Alden Jewell of the New York Times wrote: "...photo-murals by Edward Steichen, which tell the story of aviation, represent an achievement quite in advance of anything shown in the photo section of the last season mural show at the Museum of Modern Art. What then was still experimental is now in a position to prove that the medium when handled by a master like Steichen, can be used with fine effect in mural work. The theme is carried round the room in unbroken sequence, and here, for once, is a mural that does not strike one as purely incidental to a larger decorative scheme."

In 1938 Steichen was given a one-man retrospective exhibition of his photography at the Baltimore Museum of Art which showed 150 of his prints. In this year he thought he would retire to his plant breeding in Ridgefield, Conn. Beginning in 1910 in his garden in Voulangis, France, he had established himself as an outstanding plant breeder developing new races and types of hybrid delphiniums. In this field of activity he is mentioned by some authorities in the same class with Luther Burbank. The Museum of Modern Art in showing these delphiniums in 1936 held the only one-man flower exhibition in any art museum, featuring plant breeding as a creative art.

Late in 1941 war again brought him into service and away from his delphiniums and retirement, this time as Lieutenant Commander, to organize and direct a special Naval aviation photographic unit. In 1943 he was in combat service in the Pacific aboard the U.S.S. Lexington when it was torpedoed in action. In 1945 he rose to the rank of Captain, and Navy Secretary James Forrestal gave him command of all Navy combat photography and made him organizer and director of the Navy Photographic Institute. After the Armistice he was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal.

During the second world war he also collaborated with the Museum of Modern Art, assembling the now famed exhibition, Road to Victory for which Carl Sandburg wrote text and captions in 1942, and in 1944 the exhibition Power in the Pacific, both shown in the Museum of Modern Art and then widely circulated in the United States, South America and Europe. He also supervised the photography of one of the war's greatest films, the United States Navy's The Fighting Lady. Along with these activities he selected the photographs for most of the U.S. Camera Annuals from 1937 until 1947. In the latter year he was appointed Director of the Museum's Department of Photography.

Jacob Deschin in his recent book Say It with Your Camera has written: "Steichen must be considered chiefly as the symbol and the hope of all forward-looking photographers who would like to see camera work placed on the high level in public opinion now enjoyed by other arts. Steichen is, in effect, the articulate representative of a body of progressive thinkers that is growing ever larger in this country and his series of shows [in the Museum of Modern Art] is one of the most significant contributions to photographic advancement in many years." Charles Sheeler, painter and photographer, has paid a unique tribute to Steichen as "the greatest master of the lens" in his characterization of him as "a big hearth fire before which we all come and warm ourselves."