

The Museum of Modern Art

11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019 Tel. 956-6100 Cable: Modernart

NO. 16
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact:
Linda Gordon (212) 956-2648
William Grant (212) 956-7504

Steichen: The Master Prints 1895-1914. By Dennis Longwell. 180 pages, 73 illustrations (6 in color). \$35.00 clothbound. Published by The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Distributed to the trade by New York Graphic Society, Boston.

Steichen: The Master Prints 1895-1914, by Dennis Longwell, has recently been published by The Museum of Modern Art in conjunction with the current Edward Steichen exhibition. The essay and 73 illustrations examine Steichen's rare and beautiful prints made before the First World War and relate them to the important tradition of European Symbolism--the source of their inspiration.

The surviving photographs printed by Steichen at the turn of the century are works of unparalleled richness in the history of the medium. These transcendent compositions on paper present sumptuous surfaces and subtle color tones and shadings that confound the usual preconception of what a photograph looks like. Steichen produced these masterworks through a variety of enormously time-consuming printing techniques, some of them now almost forgotten. These early original prints are few in number--less than one hundred--and a significant portion exist only in a unique print. In this volume, 73 of the early photographs are meticulously reproduced to recreate as precisely as possible the look and the effect of Steichen's own master prints.

Steichen: The Master Prints 1895-1914 charts a critical appreciation of these works and appraises their meaning for the history of photography, considering them in the context of the collaboration between Steichen and Alfred Stieglitz that changed the direction of modern art in America. Dennis Longwell sets forth the formative influences on Steichen and explores for

49

the first time the relationship between the early prints and the dominant art movement of the late 19th century, Symbolism. In Mr. Longwell's view, Symbolism rather than Impressionism shaped the basic aesthetic that permeated the creative efforts of Steichen and other members of the "Photo-Secession" directed by Stieglitz. In the light of a close reading of letters and other documents, Mr. Longwell re-examines the Secessionist movement and suggests that, in American photography, Steichen's master prints form the basis of a Symbolist tradition that has remained vital up to the present day.

During much of the period from 1895 to 1914, Steichen lived in France, absorbing the new aesthetic of European modernism and acting as "messenger" between the artistic and intellectual worlds of Paris and his friends in New York. The works reproduced in this book were created during a time of personal growth, hard work, and youthful enthusiasm.

Dennis Longwell, Assistant Curator, Department of Photography at The Museum of Modern Art, also directed the exhibition STEICHEN: THE MASTER PRINTS 1895-1914, which is on view at the Museum through March 28, 1978.