

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
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IMPORTANT GIFTS IN PHOTOGRAPHY ACQUIRED BY MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

An important group of photographs covering a period of seventy-five years in the growth of photography as a pictorial art has recently been acquired by the Museum of Modern Art. A selection of these new acquisitions will be on display on the first floor of the Museum from January 13 through February 15.

Many of the acquisitions are gifts. A group of six photographs by Ansel Adams and two photographs by Dorothea Lange are the gift of the late Albert M. Bender of San Francisco. Ten photographs by Man Ray have been given the Museum by James Thrall Soby. Four platinotypes by Alfred Stieglitz are the gift of Charles Sheeler, the painter. Kurt Baasch, an amateur photographer, has given six of his own photographs. Groups of photographs by Eugene Atget, Walker Evans, L. Moholy-Nagy and Edward Weston have been received from anonymous donors.

Beaumont Newhall, Curator of the Museum's Department of Photography, who announced the recent acquisitions, comments on them as follows:

"Two superb carbon prints of the portraits by Mrs. Julia Margaret Cameron (1814-1879) of Thomas Carlyle and Sir John F. W. Herschel are the earliest in the exhibition. The work of P. H. Emerson (1865-1936) is represented by platinum prints extracted from the album Life and Landscape on the Norfolk Broads (1886) and by the album Pictures of East Anglian Life (1888). So far as is known this is the first time that the photographs of Dr. P. H. Emerson have been exhibited in this country. This little-known photographer was one of the first to consider photography as a pictorial art in its own right. His book Naturalistic Photography (1889) is the first serious esthetic consideration of photography. His work has a surprising modernity in feeling due to the straightforward and sympathetic use of the camera.

"Through the generosity of Charles Sheeler the Museum has acquired four original prints by Alfred Stieglitz, all dating from 1914-15 and relating to the gallery '291' which Stieglitz conducted at that number Fifth Avenue. Two of these, showing the Picasso-Braque and the Brancusi exhibitions, are because of their subject matter of particular interest to students of the development of modern art. These photographs are platinotypes or platinum prints, a now obsolete printing process which in the hands of a sensitive worker yielded a tonal scale with a subtlety unmatched by any other photographic medium. A series of nine modern prints by

Berenice Abbott from original negatives by Eugene Atget (c.1856-1927) in her collection indicates the important contribution made by this early Parisian photographer.

"More recent trends in photography are seen in the experimental photographs by L. Moholy-Nagy and Man Ray. These two photographers simultaneously and independently devised the technique of the Photogram or Rayograph, cameraless photography which is comparable to abstract painting in its relationship to more usual photographic techniques. Early examples of abstract photography are shown together with deliberate distortions achieved by solarization (a partial reversal of shadows), the exploitation of grain as an esthetic control and by choice of unusual view point and camera position.

"A number of photographs by Ansel Adams were presented to the Museum by Albert M. Bender of San Francisco shortly before his death and the Museum has acquired from an anonymous donor a fine example of this West Coast photographer's most recent work, 'Surf Sequence.' This is a series of five photographs taken from a bluff on the California Coast, looking straight down upon the breaking surf. Ten photographs by Edward Weston were purchased from the photographer in Carmel. Six of these were made while he was traveling on a Guggenheim fellowship. Two are from the famous sand dune series of 1936 and two are from his earlier work. Two architectural studies by Walker Evans and two documentary photographs by Dorothea Lange made for the Farm Security Administration complete the display of prints."

In addition to the photographs, three books from the Museum Library will be displayed. These contain reproductions of photographs so fine that they may be considered as original works of art. The first volume of Camera Notes (1897), edited by Alfred Stieglitz, is opened to a photogravure of his early Portrait of Mr. R. - The less known British periodical, Sun Artists, which contains thirty-two photogravures signed by the photographers, is opened to the plate Sunshine and Shower by Frank Sutcliffe (1891). A fine example of modern reproduction of photographs is the folio Sierra Nevada (1938) with brilliant halftones from photographs by Ansel Adams.

All of the photographs and books in this exhibition are available for study in the Museum Library. At the close of the exhibition all of the photographs and books may be seen by interested students. The Museum Collection contains many other prints of similar importance and the Library contains illustrated books with fine reproductions of photographs.