Photography at MoMA

The evolution of modern art shapes upon the exceptional depth of its collection is told in a new history of photography in the three-volume series Photography at MoMA.

The works of Photography at MoMA, 1920–1960 chart the explosive development of the medium during the height of the modernist period, as photography evolved from a tool of documentation and identification into one of tremendous variety. The result was nothing less than a transformed rapport with the visible world: Walker Evans’s documentary style and Dora Maar’s Surrealist exercises in chance; El Lissitzky’s photomontages and August Sander’s unflinching objectivity; the iconic news images published in the New York Times and Man Ray’s darkroom experiments; Fluxus’s avant-garde approach and automatic approaches learned to shape photography of the world in digital images; and the new forms of expression developed by Margrethe Mather, Lee Miller, Minor White, Aaron Siskind, Berenice Abbott, Gabor Zemplenyi, Margaret Bourke-White, Bill Brandt, Claude Cahun, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Roy DeCarava, Edward Steichen, Georgia O’Keeffe, Walker Evans, Dora Maar, August Sander, Germaine Krull, Dorothea Lange, Gordon Parks, Alexei von Jawlensky, Alfred Stieglitz, Dora Maar, and James Van Der Zee.

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Photography at MoMA

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I am delighted to present the second installment of a three-volume history of photography told through the exceptional collection of The Museum of Modern Art. This volume covers photography from 1920 to 1960, moving backward in time from the volume published in 2015, which considered work from 1960 through the present day. The final volume will begin with the invention of the medium, in 1839, and cover the years up to 1920. Although the Museum’s publications on photography have been—and continue to be—acclaimed and popular, we have never offered an in-depth examination of the photography collection. Only a small percentage of the collection’s more than thirty thousand photographs can be on view at any given moment; this series brings into the discussion a wider array of ideas, tendencies, and trajectories.

The Museum’s holdings of modernist photography are a trove of wonders, with iconic masterpieces and little-known gems. When the Department of Photography was founded, in 1940—the first of its kind in the United States—it was one of the few public repositories for contemporary work of the era, and many of the prints came into the collection shortly after they were made, often through direct contact with the artists. This volume highlights the curators, collectors, and artists who assiduously built a collection of works that—as Alfred H. Barr Jr.’s torpedo continues to jet into the future—we now consider modernist in spirit and practice. I am grateful to Quentin Bajac, The Joel and Anne Ehrenkranz Chief Curator of Photography, who conceived this important set of publications, and to his colleagues in the Department of Photography: Lucy Gallay, Assistant Curator; Roxana Marcoci, Senior Curator; and Sarah Meister, Curator. They have shaped a publication that brings into focus the breadth of the collection and the multiple histories of photography that can be told through it. Their texts, along with essays by Douglas Coupland, Kevin Moore, Drew Sawyer, and Pepper Stetler, elucidate how various works operate in the complex nexus of photographic history, as well as in relation to the larger scope of artwork beyond it.

The continual evolution and enrichment of the Museum’s photography collection would not be possible without many dedicated individuals and entities. As always, I extend my gratitude to the Museum’s Board of Trustees for their unfaltering support. I am deeply thankful to the Committee on Photography for their generous facilitation of numerous acquisitions reproduced in this book, as well as to members of the Department and the Friends of Education. I am also grateful to many individuals who have supported acquisitions or have donated important works of art. I especially thank Peter J. Cohen, Thomas and Susan Dunn, Jo Carole and Ronald S. Lauder, Richard E. Salomon, the family of August Sander, Jon L. Stryker, and Thomas Walther for their significant recent contributions.

I am profoundly grateful to Joel and Anne Ehrenkranz, whose ongoing commitment to this series underscores their longstanding contributions to the Department of Photography and its ambitious program. I am also deeply indebted to David Dechman and Michel Mercure, whose unflagging support of recent acquisitions, and of this publication in particular, have made a permanent impression on the collection’s shape and scope. Nor would this volume be possible without The Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation. To all of them I extend my heartfelt thanks for your belief in this medium, both in the past and for the future.

Finally, I save my deepest appreciation for Robert B. Menschel, whose keen eye and generous heart have blessed the Museum and the Department of Photography with an embarrassment of riches during his forty years of involvement. Robert has given the Department more than five hundred works; this volume contains eighteen photographs acquired thanks to his support. On behalf of the Museum as a whole and the Department of Photography in particular, I salute Robert for his astute vision, unwavering curiosity, and boundless generosity.

The collection would not be the same without his resolute belief that these works should ultimately be placed in the public trust.
To delve into the archives of the Department of Photography at The Museum of Modern Art inevitably brings to mind this line by L. P. Hartley: In the past the habits, laws, customs, and manners are not those of today. Thus it is a place where one may write to Marcel Duchamp to see if he knows “Man Ray’s real name” (which Duchamp did not appear to know, quite reasonably suggesting that the petitioner ask him directly), where a young Robert Frank introduced himself in a 1950 letter to the director of the department as someone “making a living as a fashion photographer,” far from the image we have of him today, where Beaumont Newhall (fig. 1), the department’s first curator, and Ansel Adams (fig. 2) came up with the idea, which now seems very strange, of reprinting an image by László Moholy-Nagy for an exhibition, feeling as they did that the original proof in their possession was too blurred (after trying it, they changed their minds, having decided that the print no longer resembled a Moholy-Nagy work at all);4 where, under the catchy exhibition title American Photographs at $10, the department, like a commercial gallery, printed and sold images by Adams, Berenice Abbott, Walker Evans (fig. 3), Helen Levitt, Moholy-Nagy, Arnold Newman, Charles Sheeler, Brett Weston, and Edward Weston (the exhibition, which opened three days before the attack on Pearl Harbor, did not see much success). It was a time, finally, when, according to legend, a young Evans hung his solo exhibition by himself, in 1938, in a single night, armed with a bottle of whiskey and a screwdriver, in the company of two friends who were members of the Museum but without the curator in charge. Another era with other customs and other comportments! These examples are not meant to generate nostalgia for bygone times but simply to remind us that historians must adjust their frames of reference to avoid judging yesterday with the mind of today. As John Szarkowski, the director of the department from 1962 to 1991, pointed out when asked to compare himself with his predecessor, Edward Steichen, “We held the same job at very different times, which means that it was not really the same job” (fig. 4).5 Which is another way of saying that times change and, with them, the contexts, methods, problems, and the solutions that are brought to them.

The Museum of Modern Art’s recognition of photography as an artistic practice was almost a family affair—meeting of young art historians all educated at Harvard (Alfred H. Barr, Jr., Newhall, Lincoln Kirstein [fig. 6], Julian Levy), wealthy collectors and Museum trustees (David McAlpin [fig. 7], James Thrall Soby), and a handful of photographers. Among those men it was those who could today be described as “modern”—that is, members of the two generations that came of age in the first half of the twentieth century—who played a major role in the blossoming of the institution’s photographic plans and in fact were its motivating force. That they were is explained in part by the dynamics of the photography world in the United States during the birth of the department, in 1940, as Barr, the first director of MoMA, himself emphasized. “Another important factor is the tendency on the part of the public to identify art with painting and sculpture—two fields in which America is not yet, I am afraid, quite the equal of France; but in other fields—the film, architecture and photography, for instance, the United States would seem to be the equal or superior of any other country.”6 While what we call “modern” in painting and sculpture was defined by MoMA in its first twenty-five years as an essentially European phenomenon, in the field of photography the modern was closely linked, on the other hand, to the United States. Barr saw the enthusiastic promotion of an American photography as a way of responding to critics who accused the institution of being too European, and the major figures of the particularly fertile American scene—Adams, Evans, Steichen, and Alfred Stieglitz (fig. 5)—represented the cardinal points that guided the institution along its path between 1930 and 1960. The first entry of modern photography into MoMA’s program occurs explicitly under the banner of American art; Matisse by American Painters and Photographers, organized in the spring of 1932, set out to define American artistic identity starting with the mural, a form of popular art then experiencing a full revival. It was followed in November 1932 by Walker Evans: Photographs of 19th Century Houses; in 1938 by Walker Evans, American Photographs, and then in 1939 by Seven American Photographers and Charles Sheeler, a retrospective. Only Photography, 1839–1927, a great historical exhibition in 1937, diverged from this strictly American perspective. Behind the mural exhibition was Kirstein, who, like Barr, had studied with the art historian Paul Sachs, one of the seven founding Trustees of the Museum. He had already solicited work by Evans for the journal Hound & Hound, which he had founded with Varian Fry in 1927, and had also

1. The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there.


Modern Photography at MoMA

Quentin Bajac

...modernist photography, for the Harvard Society for Contemporary Art, which he had also cofounded. After he was made director of exhibitions of the Museum, he also assumed, in the early 1930s, an unofficial advisory role for its photographic program; the medium was still so new for museums that it did not warrant its own curator. He was assisted by Levy, a wealthy real estate developer’s son who had just opened a midtown gallery and was trying with difficulty to sensitize a new public to photography (sticking closely, moreover, to MoMA’s exhibition program), and by Thomas Marby, Levy’s former assistant, who was the Museum’s executive director.

Kirsten focused on Evans to champion the generation of American modern photography. Stieglitz, at the time art photographer’s major representative in the United States, kept his distance from MoMA and its exhibition program, which he considered too European. Evans was a self-taught American in his subjects and preoccupations, but he was influenced in his approach by modern European photography; his documentary and ordinary aesthetic appeared to be a perfect meeting point between MoMA’s European tropism and the American art that Kirsten wanted to define and promote. In the 1930s Evans was everywhere in MoMA’s emerging program: two solo exhibitions, in 1933 and 1938; a catalogue (American Photographers) in 1938; a commission for a portfolio of the Museum’s collection of African art, in 1935; and a gift to the Museum from Kirsten himself of one hundred images, in 1933 and 1934. No other photographer received as much attention during this period.

This situation was fundamentally changed by the arrival at MoMA, in 1935, of Newhall. An art historian and another former student of Sachs, Newhall was hired as a librarian and became the Museum’s unofficial photographer, with a darkroom set up in a men’s bathroom near the administrative offices. With the support of Barr—whose aesthetic tastes had never coincided with those of Kirsten—Newhall soon asserted himself as the Museum’s real photography specialist. In 1937 he took over the organization of an exhibition to celebrate photography’s centenary, and in 1940, when the Department of Photography was created, he became its first curator. He was determined to define photography as an art form, and he was not particularly interested in the ordinariness on display in Evans’s documentary style; in fact his relationship with Evans was one of pronounced difficulty to sensitize a new public to photography (sticking closely, moreover, to MoMA’s exhibition program), and in 1940, when the Department of Photography was created, he became its first curator. He was determined to define photography as an art form, and he was not particularly interested in the ordinariness on display in Evans’s documentary style; in fact his relationship with Evans was one of pronounced cordiality. Evans had agreed to do the American Photographs exhibition only on the condition that he could hang the show himself, without Newhall present. Newhall, with his wife, Nancy, inaugurated an era marked by Stieglitz’s conception of photography as a spiritual and artistic medium. Fascinated by the man and his work, the Newhalls persistently solicited his approval and managed to mitigate, although not completely dissolve, his mistrust of the institution; the same Stieglitz who in 1936 flatly refused Newhall’s proposal to join the advisory committee for the centenary exhibition, benevolently declared the department’s inaugural exhibition, Sixty Photographs, “sincere and fine.” This rapprochement was consecrated, four years after Stieglitz’s death, in 1950, by a gift from his wife, Georgia O’Keeffe, in the form of fifty-two prints representing every stage of his career.

The principal actor in this reconciliation was another photographer: Adams. Sociable and ambitious with friends and acquaintances among the great older photographers, from Steichen to Weston, and a protégé of Stieglitz who exhibited at An American Place in 1915, Adams speculated about what a future photography department might look like in a practical handbook called Making a Photograph. What is required above all else is a number of centralized institutions which combine competent instruction in theory and practice with library and museum features. Repositories of the most significant photography, past and contemporary, are sorely needed. The understanding of photography as a form of art implies much more than a knowledge of physics and chemistry and a superficial education in the aspects of painting and other media. It is necessary to study photography itself—to interpret the medium in its own terms and within its own limitations.

After meeting the Newhalls at the inauguration of the Museum’s new building, Adams became a crucial voice in the dialogue concerning the department’s creation, thanks to the support of McKim. McKim—an investment banker, collector of photographs, and habitué of Stieglitz’s gallery, as well as a nephew of Nelson Rockefeller, MoMA’s president from 1939 to 1941, and a Trustee himself—agreed to preside over the department’s advisory committee only if Adams became its vice-president.

During the Newhall-Adams years the department distanced itself from Evans. Adams, too, resisted his work, although he continued to promote American straight photography, beginning with Sixty Photographs, which...
was primarily devoted to it.3 Asked in 1944 by the critic and journalist Elizabeth McCausland about the kind of photography he favored, Newhall, who was a man with multiple interests, nevertheless made no secret of his preferences: 4

I appreciate all the uses of photography but feel the peak of personal satisfaction in the Stieglitz Equivalents, Paul Strand’s close up studies of nature, Edward Weston’s landscapes, Ansel Adams’s Yosemite work as against his FSA, Evans, [Dorothea] Lange. Right now I years for the positive, and so much “documentary” is negative and, to me depressing. The fact that so many of my brilliant photographers became cynical of America and recorded the negative side of our culture seems to me as significant as the blight of surrealism.5

This exhibition policy would be reflected in the Museum’s acquisitions, especially thanks to a major donation, made between 1939 and 1941 by Alfred Bender, a collector and defender (and patron) of Adams, of more than a hundred prints for the West Coast members of the group 6.

Straight photography was not the only style represented in Newhall’s department. In 1939, with the financial support of McAlpin, he bought the entire contents of a Moholy-Nagy exhibition at Delphic Studio in New York; two years later, 120 prints by Man Ray entered the collection as a gift from Soby. Because this was an early photography gallery at the time, word of mouth was the primary tool for learning about new photographers. Newhall was especially helped in this regard by Almanu Brodovitch, the art director of Harper’s Bazaar, and a New York art world figure, who recommended and sent him photographers including Alfred Newman and Philippe Halsman. Indeed, the contribution to the development of the new, young department by voices beyond those of Adams and Newhall was quite remarkable. While Newhall was enlisted in the military, from 1942 to 1944, Nancy Newhall took over his curatorial duties, and Willard Morgan (husband of the photographer Barbara Morgan) was briefly appointed director of the department, in 1943, during this period they solicited the opinions of critics, photographers, curators, and exhibition consultants, who also helped to organize exhibitions. Among them were McCausland, who advocated for a politically and socially committed photography (New Werner, in 1944); the photographer Théodore Romeo (War Comes to the People, in 1946), and French Photographs, in 1943; Moholy-Nagy, György Kepes, and Nathan Lerner (How to Make a Photograph, in 1942); and Andreas Feininger (Creative Photography, in 1945). Nevertheless, the department was largely perceived, both inside and outside MoMA, as a temple of straight photography, with a very American bent. Even some members of the photography committee saw the department as promoting an overly narrow conception of photography, and voices were raised in critique. Some of the opposition came from Kirstein and Soby and their supporters, whose tastes were more European or marked by a documentary aesthetic in work such as Evans’s, but whose stance was described by Adams as an “anti-art attitude.”7 Some came from a group defending a more popular and accessible photography, which included Tom Maloney, the editor of U.S. Camera, a wide-circulation photography magazine launched in 1938 for both professionals and amateurs, as well as Morgan and Steichen.

Steichen, the former pictorial photographer who had led the Naval Aviation Photographic Unit during World War II and who preferred to be called “Captain Steichen”), was sixty-six years old in 1945. He had been close friends with Stieglitz early in the century and had been the director of photography for the Conde Nast group during the interwar period. His association with MoMA began in 1937, when he advised Newhall on the centenary exhibition. In 1939 he organized the selection of photographs for the traveling exhibition Documents of America, in 1940; during World War II he organized two exhibitions: Road to Victory, in 1942, and Power in the Pacific, in 1945. These last two exhibitions were pioneering in their design: they were intended to be narrative and popular, taking as their model illustrated wide-circulation magazines such as Life, highlighting subject over, and to the detriment of, style and author. As such they were precisely the opposite of the approach preferred by Adams and the Newhalls. Steichen, supported by Rockfeller, the Museum’s president at the time, and certain Trustees, called for a less elitist photography and, with the support of Maloney, dangled the possibility of consequent and potentially significant support from the photography industry; he was invited to be director of the department in 1947, causing Newhall to immediately resign and the advisory committee, which had been kept out of this decision, to disband.

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1. Adams, letter to David McAlpin, November 4, 1948, reported in Andrea Adams and Lorraine L. Little, Weaver, 1948, p. 198;
The first goal, broadening the audience for photography, was certainly achieved, largely thanks to *The Family of Man*, in 1955, which was seen at the Museum by a million visitors and whose catalogue has sold the most copies of any publication in the Museum’s history. The Family of Man expanded on Steichen’s exhibitions of the 1940s; it was closer to spectacle than exhibition, entirely at the antipode of his predecessor’s intimate presentations, which were concerned with photography as image and object rather than content. With its five identical sets of prints, The Family of Man followed a trajectory through more than sixty countries, to be seen by nine million visitors, making it the most visited exhibition in the Museum’s history. The second goal, however—the industry’s support—never materialized, forcing Steichen to put aside some of his plans, but under his direction the department gained in stability what it lost in plurality. The polyphony of the Newhall era, in which photographers and critics were brought together to organize exhibitions, was over: of the forty-two exhibitions that appeared during the fifteen years of Steichen’s tenure, he was the sole curator of thirty-nine—including his own retrospective in 1961. Beyond this apparent monolithicism, however, Steichen allowed for a real diversity of tone: he extended and amplified Newhall’s contemporary program, granting new status to non-American photographers—Europeans and, to some degree, Japanese—particularly in the four large group exhibitions of his program: *In and Out of Focus* (figs. 8, 9), in 1948; *Abstraction in Photography*, in 1951; *Post War European Photography*, in 1953, and *The Family of Man*. He was also more open to the variety of photographic styles of the new generation: Frank, Harry Callahan, Todd Webb,kirk Beasley, and W. Eugene Smith all made their way into MoMA under his direction, through exhibition or acquisition. Steichen was more interested in exhibiting than in adding to the collection, which he neglected to some extent. His main legacy is not the some nine hundred thousand works that officially came in during this period but thousands of others, printed under his direction for his exhibitions, very often mounted on Masonite, many of which remain to this day in the Departmental Collection. Under the direction of Szarkowski, who succeeded him in 1962, the department reclaimed the great modern figures of the beginning of the century in a large number of retrospective exhibitions. André Kertész, in 1964; Lange, in 1966; Brassaï, in 1968, August Sander and Bill Brandt, in 1969; Abbott, in 1970; Evans (fig. 10) and Manuel Álvarez Bravo, in 1971, Edward Weston, in 1975, Tina Modotti, in 1977; and Martin Chambi and Adams, in 1978. These photographers were for the most part alive and working at the time; but they were also already becoming historic figures thanks to the accelerated pace at which the history of photography was being written. It was as historical figures that they were addressed in these exhibitions, which largely gave room to printed work—in Evans’s retrospective only ten percent of the two hundred works were made after 1945—and as a result many of them remain best known for their early work to this day.

In the 1990s and 2000s Peter Galassi pursued and refocused this policy: the department closely linked exhibition and acquisition, in particular for work by Aleksandr Rodchenko (fig. 14), Grete Stern and Horacio Coppola, Henri Cartier-Bresson (figs. 10–12), Álvarez Bravo, and Brandt. But as the photography market became increasingly competitive, he more precisely defined some of the rules, more systematically favoring vintage prints over recent ones and methodically analyzing and filling gaps in the collection. The Museum’s purchase, in 2000, of 341 images from the Thomas Walther Collection is a fine example of this; the acquisition has strengthened the collection in the area of interwar European photography, with works by German and Bauhaus artists (Karl Blossfeldt, Helmar Lerski, Franz Roh, Umbo), Soviet Constructivists (El Lissitzky), and Parisian photographers (Maurice Tabard, Kertész). The Museum displayed the collection in 2013, with a major exhibition, catalogue, and research-oriented website (fig. 13).

Donations from the New York Times and of collections of anonymous amateur photography have significantly enlarged and enriched the representation of modern photography in MoMA’s collection. The Museum’s most recent purchases have attempted to fill the remaining gaps in a few traditional areas, such as Surrealism, while seeking out modern works from geographical areas underrepresented in the collection, chief among them Latin America. By researching the Departmental Collection, the department has been able to identify and promote some key pieces—some of them reproduced in this volume—that had previously been neglected, in particular from postwar European and American photography. In so doing, the Department of Photography has been faithful to the concept of a midcentury modernism that is just as mutable in form and definition as the contemporary one.
American Modernism

Ansel Adams
Imogen Cunningham
Tina Modotti
Paul Outerbridge
Eliot Porter
Sherrill Schell
Charles Sheeler
Frederick Sommer
Edward Steichen
Ralph Steiner
Alfred Stieglitz
Paul Strand
Doris Ulmann
Brett Weston
Edward Weston
I was born in Hoboken. I am an American photographer. Photography is my passion. The search for truth my obsession.” These are the words Alfred Stieglitz chose to conclude the introductory text for his show of photographs at Anderson Galleries in 1921, when he was fifty-seven years old. A strange profession of faith, with an onslaught simultaneously coming from a man already recognized for almost two decades as a central figure in the American art and photography worlds. But this exhibition, his first in New York since 1913, was a departure from the past. It presented a complete reworking of his work while also highlighting his very lively character. Seventy-eight of the shots, he pointed out, had been made since July 1918, the date of the last summer of World War I and a time marked by separation from his wife, moving in with Georgia O’Keeffe, a painter twenty years his junior, and the beginning of a series that featured her as a model (plates 1, 2).

The exhibition would be a great success, confirming the figure of the new Stieglitz, American, photographer, seeker of truth. He went on to find this truth in a national landscape, not the immense and unspoiled landscape of New Mexico, which would become a favored retreat in the later years. He went on to find this truth in a national landscape, not the immense and unspoiled landscape of New Mexico, which would become a favored retreat in the later years. He went on to find this truth in a national landscape, not the immense and unspoiled landscape of New Mexico, which would become a favored retreat in the later years. He went on to find this truth in a national landscape, not the immense and unspoiled landscape of New Mexico, which would become a favored retreat in the later years. He went on to find this truth in a national landscape, not the immense and unspoiled landscape of New Mexico, which would become a favored retreat in the later years. 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the Preciado family in River Boque, Michoacán, near Detroit (plate 10), made at the request of the advertising agency N. W. Ayer and Son; and shots of industrial subjects (plate 9) that served as the basis for paintings commissioned by Fortune magazine in 1938. Steichen also worked with Steiner (plate 29) and Underground (plates 11–13), both of whom had trained at the Clarence White School of Photography, established in 1914, where the instruction—provided in part by artists who disagreed with Stieglitz, including White himself and the painter Max Weber—allowed for the application of a moderate modernism to commercial photography. Like any general outline, this one is broadly drawn, and there are exceptions. Stieglitz, at the heart of the straight-photography movement, is paradoxically one of the artists who most frequently moved away from it; his work from the 1920s is shot through with a more experimental, abstract, and European spirit, as in images of skies and hands that are legible in any direction. A similar distancing from the norms of straight photography can be seen in the work of Tina Modotti, although her professional and personal association with Weston has too often relegated her unequivocally to the camp of American modernism. Her work certainly retains some of modernism’s features, such as its precision, always reinforced by contact printing; its stark, deliberate compositions, which leave no room for accidents; its minimalist, memorial forms; and the subtlety of tonal values offered by platinum and palladium printing. But Modotti also drove on a dynamic European modernism inherited from German Neues Sehen (New Vision) photography. In 1922, she began using a portable Graflex, which allowed her the mobility to make Telephoto Wires, Mexico (plate 19), a dynamic, low-angle shot more akin to contemporary Soviet photography than to work by her American colleagues, both in terms of its subject (the image was made near Pacifica, on returning from a visit to Weston’s studio in Carmel), and in its technique, which one might describe as cultivated. was a departure from the rougher European works. A year later, for Photography, 1930, the first exhibition devoted to modernist photography in the United States, Lincoln Kirstein selected images that highlighted this tendency as well. Nevertheless, a number of American photographers, especially on the East Coast, were, like Modotti, already distancing themselves from this aesthetic. Artists in Europe, in reaction to the 1929 crisis and the rise of totalitarian governments, began to decry the experimental work of the 1920s for being politically and socially disengaged, and in the United States the practitioners of straight photography and others began to question it as well. Some were eager to demonstrate political commitment and address new audiences; Strand and Steichen did so by exceeding the limitations of photography, abandoning photography altogether in the mid-1930s for film, forming the heart of Nykina, a collective of Marxist photographers and filmmakers in New York. As the political crisis of the 1930s progressed and the engagement of artists increased, in the Federal Art Project and other programs, more and more artists raised their voices against the elitism of straight photography: the lack of political engagement in its images, the lack of social responsibility in its dissemination, and the preciousness that seemed to attend the details of its making. Such criticisms continued throughout the decade and were taken up by photographers of the following generation; Walker Evans, in particular, identified straight photography with Stieglitz as its exemplar, as a counterexample of engaged political art. Perhaps because of this critical attack, the center of the straight-photography movement began to shift away from New York in the 1930s, to Taos, New Mexico, where two generations of East Coast artists (O’Keeffe, Strand, John Marin) and West Coast artists (Adams, Weston) had been meeting since early in the twentieth century. A more significant center emerged in Carmel, California, where Weston and his son Brett lived, and in the San Francisco Bay Area. In 1932, at the invitation of Adams and William Van Dyke, photographers including Weston, Cunningham, and Dorotha Lange gathered in San Francisco to form the group known as f64—denoting a lens’s smallest aperture, which allowed maximal depth of field—a name which is itself a tribute to straight photography. Following Stieglitz, breaking with the Pictorialist tendencies still present in the work of the West Coast artists (and from which some f64 members, such as Weston and Cunningham, had emerged), the group advocated a non-Pictorialist photography in its manifestó: “Pure photography is defined as possessing no qualities of technique, composition or idea, derivative of any other art.”22 Adams saw the West Coast as particularly fertile ground for the blossoming of this form, an art “perfect for the American West because both the medium and the west were young and unburdened by the traditions of the East coast and older media.”23 The group was supported by the de Young Museum in San Francisco, which to date has received or to several art museums between 1932 and 1935 and acquired some of its works.24 In 1938, the group was invited by the de Young Museum to exhibit its work in San Francisco. November 15th (plate 34) was sent to Mary Street Mills, Group of Six New York, Amsterdam, 1938, p. 66.
Alfred Stieglitz
American, 1864–1946

1. Georgia O’Keeffe—Hands and Thimble. 1919
Palladium print
9 5/8 × 7 5/8 in. (24.6 × 19.4 cm)
Gift of David H. McAlpin, 1980

2. Georgia O’Keeffe. 1918
Palladium print
9 5/8 × 7 5/8 in. (24.6 × 19.4 cm)
Alfred Stieglitz Collection
Gift of Georgia O’Keeffe, 1980
Alfred Stieglitz
American, 1864–1946

3. *Apples and Gable, Lake George*, 1922
Gelatin silver print
4 1/2 × 3 5/8 in. (11.5 × 9.2 cm)
Anonymous gift, 1943

4. *Equivalent*, 1929
Gelatin silver print
4 11/16 × 3 5/8 in. (11.9 × 9.2 cm)
Alfred Stieglitz Collection.
Gift of Georgia O’Keeffe, 1950

5. *Equivalent*, 1925
Gelatin silver print
4 11/16 × 3 5/8 in. (11.9 × 9.2 cm)
Alfred Stieglitz Collection.
Gift of Georgia O’Keeffe, 1950
Edward Steichen
American, born Luxembourg, 1879–1973

Laughing Boxes. c. 1922
Gelatin silver print
9 5/8 × 7 5/8 in. (24.4 × 19.4 cm)
Bequest of Grace M. Mayer, 1997

Backbone and Ribs of a Sunflower. 1921
Platinum print
7 9/16 × 9 1/2 in. (19.3 × 24.2 cm)
Bequest of Grace M. Mayer, 1997

Imogen Cunningham
American, 1883–1976

Magnolia Blossom. 1925
Gelatin silver print
6 3/4 × 8 1/2 in. (17.1 × 21.6 cm)
Gift of Albert M. Bender, 1939
Charles Sheeler
American, 1883–1965

9 Wheels. 1939
Gelatin silver print
6 5/8 × 9 5/8 in. (16.8 × 24.4 cm)
Anonymous gift, 1943

10 Criss-Crossed Conveyors, River Rouge Plant, Ford Motor Company. 1927
Gelatin silver print, printed 1941
9 3/8 × 7 1/2 in. (23.9 × 19 cm)
Gift of Lincoln Kirstein, 1941
Paul Outerbridge
American, 1896–1958

9 Saltine Box. 1922
Platinum print
3 9/16 × 4 1/2 in. (9 × 11.5 cm)
Gift of David H. McAlpin, 1968

10 Ide Collar. 1922
Platinum print
4 7/16 × 3 1/4 in. (11.3 × 8.4 cm)
Gift of the artist, 1922
(moved 1972)

11 H-O Box. 1923
Platinum print
4 3/4 × 3 1/16 in. (12 × 8 cm)
Edward Steichen Fund, 1972

American Modernism
Edward Weston
American, 1886–1958

11. Armco Steel, Ohio. October 1922
Silver print
8 3/4 × 5 3/4 in. (22 × 14.7 cm)
The Thomas Walther Collection.
Gift of Thomas Walther, 2001

12. Torso of Neil. 1925
Silver print
6 3/4 × 4 3/4 in. (17.1 × 12.2 cm)
Purchase, 1948

13. Nude. 1925
Silver print
9 1/8 × 5 1/4 in. (23.2 × 13.3 cm)
Gift of David H. McAlpin, 1956

14. Torso of Neil. 1925
Silver print
6 3/4 × 4 3/4 in. (17.1 × 12.2 cm)
Purchase, 1948

American Modernism

Edward Weston
American, 1886–1958

11 Pepper No. 30: 1930
Gelatin silver print
7 7/16 × 5 1/2 in. (19.3 × 14 cm)
Gift of David H. McAlpin, 1968

16 Nude on Sand: 1936
Gelatin silver print
7 7/16 × 9 5/8 in. (19.3 × 24.4 cm)
Gift of David H. McAlpin, 1968
Tina Modotti
Italian, 1896–1942

9 Telephone Wires, Mexico. 1925
Palladium print
8 15/16 × 6 5/16 in. (22.8 × 16.1 cm)
Gift of Dorothy M. Hoskins, 1959

19 Roses, Mexico. 1924
Palladium print
7 3/8 × 8 1/2 in. (18.8 × 21.6 cm)
Gift of Edward Weston, 1944

20 Worker’s Hands. 1927
Palladium print
7 1/2 × 8 7/16 in. (19 × 21.5 cm)
Anonymous gift, 1965
Tina Modotti
Italian, 1896–1942

Mella’s Typewriter. 1928
Gelatin silver print
9 7/16 × 7 9/16 in. (24 × 19.2 cm)
Anonymous gift, 1965

Charles Sheeler
American, 1883–1965

Cactus and Photographer’s Lamp, New York. 1931
Gelatin silver print
9 1/2 × 6 5/8 in. (23.5 × 16.6 cm)
Gift of Jeanne K. Kootz, 1942
Paul Strand
American, 1890–1976
untitled (1920–21), from the book Roll, Jordan, Roll, by Jula Peterkin and Doris Ulmann, 1933
Gelatin silver print
9 5/8 × 7 5/8 in. (24.5 × 19.4 cm)
John Parkinson III Fund, 1976

Doris Ulmann
American, 1882–1934
untitled (1929–31), from the book Roll, Jordan, Roll, by Jula Peterkin and Doris Ulmann, 1933
photogravure
8 9/16 × 6 7/16 in. (21.8 × 16.4 cm)
Gift of Blanchette Hooker Rockefeller, 1974
Imogen Cunningham
American, 1883–1976

Figures No. 1, 1923
Palladium print
The White, 1921 × 441 cm
Gift of Albert M. Bender, 1940

Alfred Stieglitz
American, 1864–1946

Dorothy True, 1919
Palladium print
7 5/8 × 9 9/16 in. (19.3 × 24.3 cm)
Alfred Stieglitz Collection,
Gift of Georgia O’Keeffe, 1950

Sherril Schell
American, 1917–1997

Hand of José Clemente Orozco, 1929–30
Gelatin silver print
9 3/4 × 7 1/2 in. (24.9 × 19 cm)
John Parkinson III Fund, 1986
American Modernism

Alfred Stieglitz
American, 1864–1946

From the Shelton, West 1935
Gelatin silver print
9 1/4 x 7 1/4 in. (23.5 x 18.4 cm)
Alfred Stieglitz Collection. Gift of Georgia O’Keeffe, 1950

Ralph Steiner
American, 1899–1986

American Rural Baroque 1930
Gelatin silver print
9 1/2 x 7 1/2 in. (24.2 x 19 cm)
Gift of Lincoln Kirstein, 1938
Ansel Adams
American, 1902–1984

11 Monolith, the Face of Half Dome, Yosemite Valley. 1927
Gelatin silver print
7 1/4 × 5 1/4 in. (18.7 × 13.4 cm)
Gift of Albert M. Bender, 1939

31 Moonrise, Hernandez, New Mexico. 1941
Gelatin silver print
14 7/8 × 19 in. (37.8 × 48.3 cm)
Gift of the artist, 1943
Ansel Adams
American, 1902–1984

Surf Sequence, 1940
Five gelatin silver prints
dim. prints: 8 × 9 5/8 in. (20.3 × 24.4 cm)
dims. mats: 8 × 10 1/8 in. (20.3 × 25.7 cm)
Gift of Mrs. Morgan Fair, 1941
Edward Weston
American, 1886–1958

55
Dunes, Oceano. 1934
Gelatin silver print
7 × 9 in. (17.8 × 22.9 cm)
Gift of Marge Armitage, 1965

Eliot Porter
American, 1901–1990

35
Northern Parula Warbler. June 30, 1940
Gelatin silver print
8 3/4 × 6 1/2 in. (22.2 × 16.5 cm)
Gift of the artist, 1962
Brett Weston
American, 1911–1993

Broken Window. 1937
Gelatin silver print
7⅝ × 9⅜ in. (19 × 24.4 cm)
Gift of Albert M. Bender, 1939

Frederick Sommer
American, born Italy, 1905–1999

Glass. 1943
Gelatin silver print
7 1/8 × 9 1/8 in. (18 × 23.6 cm)
Nelson Rockefeller Fund, 1949
The New Photographer

Josef Albers
Gertrud Arndt
Herbert Bayer
Aenne Biermann
Ilse Bing
Karl Blossfeldt
Max Burchartz
Paul Citroen
Andreas Feininger
T. Lux Feininger
Werner David Feist
Jaromír Funke
Rudolf Hausmann
Florence Henri
Hilde Hubbuch
Lotte Jacobi
Emilie Kesting
Gunhild Krull
El Lissitzky
Man Ray
László Moholy
Walter A. Paterha
Albert Renger-Patzsch
ring + pit
Aleksandr Rodchenko
Franz Roh
Hajo Rose
Willi Ruge
August Sander
Christian Schad
Osamu Shihara
Jan Tschichold
Umbo
Iwao Yamawaki
In the 1920s the most ambitious currents of avant-garde thought flowed through photography and film, away from painting and sculpture, where they had flourished most vividly. Many artists began to make the transition from heavy fixed cameras to portable, lightweight 35mm cameras (in particular the Leica), used with perforated film and wide-aperture lenses, and they began to work at higher film speeds and experiment with montage, seriality, and dynamic modes of media production. The ethos of this new machine age was best summarized by the artist El Lissitzky, who in his The New Photographer (Eindhoven, the Netherlands: Painter, Photographer, Typographer, 1929), 16. English translation as “Against the momentality,” in The New Left. New York: The New Press, 2018, p. 38.

In 1921, the editor of the architecture and design periodical *Malerei Photographie Film* (Photography, Film, Painting) (Munich: Verlag der Bauhaus, 1923), 25, a book produced under the auspices of the Bauhaus, he further asserted that the modern photographer and film artist held a new culture of light, which had overtaken the transformative aspects of painting. Moholy-Nagy’s 1926 book is a figure behind this new critical theory of photography. In his 1922 manifesto, “Production-Reproduction,” written with and for Moholy, he argued that new technical and sensory experiences and expanded consciousness could be achieved by combining the reproducible forms of photography and film with the modernist philosophical and artistic intention.

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which Albers encouraged.10 By placing contact prints and unyielding image of the Aryan physique that dominated Weininger (1930, plate 66); both denaturalize the idealized statue. This portrait visually dispenses with the idea of sliced away, so that he appears to be an armless classical his reflected self into marble with a section of his arm included experiments with macroscopic close-ups and structural details and was rooted in proficiency in the wordplay of the Objectives (camera lens).11 In 1929 Peterhans joined the Bauhaus faculty as head of its first specialized photography workshop. Peterhans advocated what he called photographic Sehen (photographic seeing), a new school of seeing and a new way of ordering that vision in a formal and conceptual medium was instrumental to students such as Grete Stern, who noted, “Peterhans taught me how to create a vision of what I wanted to reproduce beforeviewing the camera12 —alongside Henri, Lotte Jacoby, and Germaine Krull, among others—would go on to play a critical role in refining the cultural agency of women, pushing the boundaries of new cultural freedoms. They were professional artists who experimented creatively with photography, voted, and enjoyed sexual independence. Stern had married two commercial and avant-guard work, and in 1930 and Ellen Auerbach established ringl + pit, “Whipping the boundaries of new cultural freedoms. They were professional artists who experimented creatively with photography, voted, and enjoyed sexual independence. Stern had married two commercial and avant-guard work, and in 1930 and Ellen Auerbach established ringl + pit, the monumental collection that Sander worked on over most of his career, is a study in New Objectivity. Made up of more than six hundred portraits of different professions, social classes, and character types in German society, it divides these images into seven groups based on sociological classifications: the Frame of Photography,” a new training manual.17 Walker Evans, in ‘Faces, Streets and Other Writings’ (Munich: Kurt Wolff, 1929). English translation as “Faces, Streets and Other Writings” (London: NLB, 1979), pp. 254–55.

\[18\] People of the Twentieth Century (Menschen des 20. Jahrhunderts), the monumental collection that Sander worked on over most of his career, is a study in New Objectivity. Made up of more than six hundred portraits of different professions, social classes, and character types in German society, it divides these images into seven groups based on sociological classifications: the Frame of Photography,” a new training manual.17 Walker Evans, in ‘Faces, Streets and Other Writings’ (Munich: Kurt Wolff, 1929). English translation as “Faces, Streets and Other Writings” (London: NLB, 1979), pp. 254–55.

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Aleksandr Rodchenko

Mother (Mat’). 1924
Gelatin silver print
8 7/8 × 6 1/2 in. (22.5 × 16.5 cm)
Gift of the Rodchenko family, 1998

Vladimir Mayakovsky. 1924
Gelatin silver print
11 5/8 × 8 3/16 in. (29.5 × 20.8 cm)
Gift of the Rodchenko family, 1998
Chauffeur (Shofer). 1929
Gelatin silver print
11 3/4 × 16 1/2 in. (29.8 × 41.8 cm)
Mr. and Mrs. John Spencer Fund, 1970

Pioneer Girl (Pionerka). 1930
Gelatin silver print
19 1/2 × 14 9/16 in. (49.6 × 37 cm)
Gift of Alex Lachmann and friends of the Rodchenko family, 1994

Assembling for a Demonstration (Sbor na demonstratsiiu). 1928–30
Gelatin silver print
19 1/2 × 13 7/8 in. (49.5 × 35.3 cm)
Mr. and Mrs. John Spencer Fund, 1970

Aleksandr Rodchenko
Russian, 1891–1956
El Lissitzky
Russian, 1890–1941

43 Self-Portrait (Constructor)
(Avtoportret [Konstruktor]). 1924
Gelatin silver print
5 1/2 × 3 1/2 in. (13.9 × 8.9 cm)

45 Runner in the City (Record)
(Begun v gorode [Rekord]). 1926
Gelatin silver print
10 1/2 × 8 13/16 in. (26.7 × 22.4 cm)

Franz Roh
German, 1890–1965

Jan Tschichold
Swiss, born Germany, 1902–1974

44 Photo-Auge: 76 Fotos der Zeit
(Photograph eye: 76 photos of the time). 1929
Book with letterpress cover by El Lissitzky
Page: 11 5/8 × 8 1/16 in. (29.5 × 20.5 cm)
Publisher: F. Wedekind, Stuttgart
Gift of The Judith Rothschild Foundation, 2001
Paul Citroen
Dutch, born Germany, 1896–1983
Metropolis (Weltstadt). 1923
Gelatin silver print
8 × 6 in. (20.3 × 15.3 cm)

Hajo Rose
German, 1910–1989
Untitled (self-portrait). 1931
Gelatin silver print
9 × 7 3/4 in. (22.3 × 19.7 cm)
Christian Schad
German, 1894–1982

Schadograph, 1919
Gelatin silver print (photogram)
6 5/8 × 5 in. (16.8 × 12.7 cm)
Purchase, 1937

Man Ray
American, 1890–1976

Rayograph, 1922
Gelatin silver print (photogram)
9 3/8 × 11 3/4 in. (23.9 × 29.9 cm)
Gift of James Thrall Soby, 1941
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