

**PICTORIAL
PHOTOGRAPHY IN
AMERICA, 1921**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649368877

Pictorial Photography in America, 1921 by Various

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IN AMERICA

1921

PUBLISHED MCMXXI BY THE
PICTORIAL PHOTOGRAPHERS
OF AMERICA • NEW YORK

FA 16.344 (1921) F



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NEW YORK

PRINTED BY NORMAN T. A. MUNDER & CO. BALTIMORE

COVER DESIGN BY FREDERICK W. GOUDY
HALFTONE PLATES BY WALKER ENGRAVING CO. NEW YORK

PAINTING WITH LIGHT

By ARTHUR WESLEY DOW

Professor of Fine Arts in Teachers College, Columbia University



THE painter need not always paint with brushes, he can paint with light itself. Modern photography has brought light under control and made it as truly art-material as pigment or clay. The old etchers turned chemical action to the service of Art. The modern photographer does the same, using the mysterious forces of nature as agents in making his thoughts visible. It's a long story of effort and experiment since someone observed that an inverted landscape on the wall of a darkened room was painted by light coming through a hole in a shutter. The shutter and the dark room are still acting, but now we can hold the fleeting vision. While we rejoice in the triumph of Science it is the triumph of Art that concerns us most. The photographer has demonstrated that his work need not be mechanical imitation. He can control the quality of his lines, the spacing of his masses, the depth of his tones and the harmony of his gradations. He can eliminate detail, keeping only the significant. More than this, he can reveal the secrets of personality. What is this but Art?

Just here we must remember that neither light, nor chemicals, nor camera, nor nature tell us anything of Art—that Art is not the child of Knowledge or Science or Nature, but is born of trained Appreciation in the soul of man. He that would paint with light must be first of all a Designer. His chief concern will be to find and use his own powers of choice and appreciation. He will need the studio more than the laboratory.

“What is Design?” Ask Korin, Hiroshige, Giotto, Rembrandt, Titian; ask the master-photographers who can build harmonies of line and space and texture. But the secret is not revealed by asking, only by DOING.

THE YEAR'S PROGRESS

By CLARENCE H. WHITE

An Interview with Henry Hoyt Moore

“WHAT notable events, Mr. White, have occurred in the photographic world during the year 1920?”

“Perhaps no outstanding event, either on the art side or the scientific aspect of photography, has marked the year. A steady progress, however, in the direction of a better appreciation of photographic art is apparent. This is seen, for one thing, in the numerous exhibitions that have been held. Confining our attention to American exhibitions, I would remark that instead of, as in former years, having one big exhibition in Baltimore or Philadelphia or some other city, there are now active centers all over the country—there is a regularly established international salon in Los Angeles, and the well-known Pittsburgh Salon, and regularly established exhibitions in Portland and Toronto. There are groups of enthusiastic workers in all these centers. There are also exhibitions of photographic art regularly held in many of the museums of the country.”

AMERICAN PHOTOGRAPHERS SET THE PACE

“I once heard a well-known photographic worker say, ‘If you have any doubt as to the pictorial quality of a photograph, send it to the London Salon and their judgment will decide for you.’ Is this still true?”

“I still feel that the American photographers set the pace, and in this connection I would like to read you this letter from the Secretary of the Royal Photographic Society of Great Britain as indicating the appreciation in England of American pictorial work:

35 Russell Square, London, September, 1920.

I am happy to say that we have received from the United States and Canada a collection of pictorial photographs of such outstanding interest that the task of discrimination became one of great difficulty.

Those selected by the judges have been placed in the exhibition, but the Council of the Society feel that it would be most unfortunate if the collection generally could not be viewed by the English public, and it is proposed that the bulk of the American and Canadian pictures, including those shown at the Annual Exhibition, should form one of our house exhibitions and be open to the public during the last part of January and the beginning of February, 1921.

J. McIntosh, *Secretary.*”

THE SOFT FOCUS LENS

“What changes in the past twenty years, Mr. White, would you say have been most noticeable in photographic work?”

“Well, I would say the most noticeable is what we call the use of the soft focus lens. Secondly, I would say another noticeable change is the better general quality

of photographic work. I feel that the photographers of today have a better idea of picture construction."

"Would you say that one of the changes in the past twenty years is in the spreading of a knowledge of pictorial photography throughout the country?"

"Very definitely so. The interest in pictorial photography twenty years ago was confined to a small group. There are now groups in various centers as large as the national group of the early days."

NO ONE LENS IS SUFFICIENT

"Getting down to a practical question for a moment, Mr. White, do you recommend a soft focus lens for small cameras, the work to be enlarged with a sharp lens, or do you recommend the reverse process?"

"I still keep to my original statement that I made two or three years ago that I do not believe that any one lens will serve all purposes. I sometimes feel that an anastigmat lens is best and sometimes that a soft focus lens is best for some particular work, and sometimes I feel that if I could get only one I would prefer an anastigmat to a soft focus."

SOFTNESS DESIRABLE, NOT FUZZINESS

"Is there a tendency, as shown in the work seen in the magazines, the exhibitions, and the photographs selected for the present *Annual*, to get rid of fuzziness and substitute a rational degree of softness and atmospheric effect?"

"I would say that the reproductions that we see in the magazines do not in all cases represent lens work but, I fear, bad printing sometimes. There is often a good definite quality in soft focus lens work that looks very definite indeed, even more definite than a sharp lens will give. Fuzziness is bad, but not softness. The soft focus lens seems to be more popular than ever and it apparently has come to stay."

PROFESSIONAL PHOTOGRAPHY INFLUENCED BY THAT OF THE PICTORIALIST

"Has the professional photography of today been influenced, in your judgment, by the work of the pictorialists?"

"Yes, very decidedly, and the professionals confess it. The best professional photographers freely admit that they have drawn much inspiration from the pictorial workers' ideas."

THE POPULAR MEDIUMS

"What medium—gum, multiple gum, bromoil, platinum, bromide, chloride—is most popular today?"

"Bromide and chloride are the most popular. That this is so is probably because they are easier to use; but there are very earnest workers—some of the best—who insist on using the processes which give a greater range and greater possibilities of

quality, such as bromoil, gum, and gum platinum. I would say that these processes are more popular than they used to be."

COLOR PHOTOGRAPHY

"Has color photography made any advance during the year? Are autochromes still popular? Has any progress been made in the direction of producing color photography on paper?"

"I do not know of any special progress in this branch of the art. Color photography on paper has been worked out successfully by Mr. Ives, and I think the difficulty in obtaining materials has temporarily affected the popularity of color photography in this country."

"Is the color process used to any extent for portraiture in the United States?"

"I do not think it is used to any great extent, but I believe that it has great possibilities and that it can be used if workers will take the necessary care and pains. I think the difficulty of getting material recently has set things back along this line."

THE "SECRET" IS THE ARTIST

"Have the so-called pictorial photographers any 'secrets'? People often ask, 'How are these effects produced?' What is the best method of producing soft, atmospheric pictures? Can a skilled worker take an ordinary hard negative and, by suitable manipulation or the use of soft paper, produce an atmospheric print? Is the medium the secret? Will one paper or developer produce soot and whitewash effects and another a picture? Are soft effects generally produced by manipulation in developing negatives or prints?"

"I believe the quality of a picture is not due to the medium by which it was made. It depends entirely on the man who made it. I think one man can make a good print on soft paper and another a good print on hard paper. I do not think the medium makes the picture. I think the medium produces the picture to some extent, but it does not make the picture."

HAND WORK VS. STRAIGHT PRINTS

"What are the limits of hand work that are legitimate in photography? I don't like to use the word faking, but most people would so describe it. I mean, for instance, putting in skies, blocking out obtrusive backgrounds, sunning down high lights, retouching negatives, printing through prepared masks that entirely alter the negative, and pencil or air brush work on prints?"

"I do not have any objection to anybody using any methods that he pleases providing that the result is convincing; and I believe that practically every one of these means has been used successfully in making pictures. On the other hand, some of the best and probably more good pictures have been produced by not using any of them—that is, by making the picture straight."

COMMERCIAL POSSIBILITIES FOR PICTORIAL WORK

"Are there commercial possibilities at present for pictorial photographers? Has the public shown an increasing desire to buy soft focus pictures? Is there a demand on the part of magazines and newspapers for pictorial work?"

"There is a very definite demand on the part of both magazines and newspapers for soft focus pictures. In fact, sometimes the art editors, in their eagerness to get soft focus work, will buy a photograph because it is fuzzy, without regard to its quality. But the outlook for the pictorial worker in its financial possibilities is steadily improving."

AIRPLANE PHOTOGRAPHY

"Has any pictorial work been done in connection with airplane photography? Is the apparatus for this sort of work too expensive for anything besides military or movie use?"

"At present I do not know personally of any pictorial work being done in this direction, but I have seen reproductions in newspapers of pictures from airplanes that show most interesting results. Airplane photographers as a rule do not as yet put into their work a marked pictorial quality."

ELABORATE APPARATUS NOT ALWAYS NECESSARY

"Have any notable inventions marked the year? Is the photostat coming into use and has it any value other than commercial? Do you recommend one of the new high-priced enlarging cameras, which focus the lens automatically on any size of paper, as suitable for clubs to purchase?"

"Well, I must confess that I have only heard of it, and the price seems to be such as to discourage almost all the pictorial workers that I know. In my observation of the work that has been done by pictorialists, the very fact that in many instances they use makeshift apparatus has resulted in some of the most beautiful effects in their work. Good apparatus is of course desirable, but there are happy accidents with the other sort. It is the workman, not his tools, that counts. Get the best tools if you can afford them, but remember that you can make just as bad pictures with an expensive outfit as you can with the cheapest."

HOW MR. WHITE JUDGES A PHOTOGRAPH

"Many persons would like to know, Mr. White, what are the criteria used by advanced workers like yourself in judging a photograph. Do you allow so many points for composition, for technique, for originality of conception, or for success in a difficult medium? Or do you say, 'That picture pleases me, and I vote for it,' without attempting to state in mathematical form the qualities of its success as a picture?"

"I would say that the first thing a man should do in judging pictures is to answer the appeal of the picture. I think a picture should have a message—that is, it should