

## The Frick Art & Historical Center presents Impressionist to Modernist masterworks of early photography



Gertrude Käsebier (1852–1934), *Untitled (Billiard Game)*, c. 1909. Platinum print, 7 5/8 x 9 1/2 in. Collection of Michael Mattis and Judith Hochberg. Courtesy of art2art Circulating Exhibitions.

**PITTSBURGH, PA.**- On Saturday, February 21, Impressionist to Modernist: Masterworks of Early Photography opens at [The Frick Art Museum](#) in Point Breeze. Featuring an international group of artists, this exhibition captures—though more than 70 works— a pivotal time in the history of the development of the medium of photography. Beginning in the 1880s and concluding in the 1930s, the exhibition illustrates the progression of photography from the painterly, Impressionistic work of the Pictorialist movement, through the 20th century rise of “straight” photography—a Modernist approach that advocated that photographs be nothing more than direct representation of the world, free from artificial manipulation of the image through lenses, tinting, or processing. Rare, handcrafted, vintage prints made through a variety of processes illustrate some of the artistic choices open to the late-19th and early-20th century photographer, and chart the shift to prominence of the classic black and white (gelatin silver) print, which came to dominate photography in the 20th century.

The exhibition is organized around the galvanic personality of Alfred Stieglitz (1864–1946), photographer, champion of modern art in general, and famously, the husband of painter Georgia O’Keeffe (who is pictured in two of his photographs in the exhibition). Stieglitz, born in Hoboken, New Jersey, and educated primarily in Germany, began writing and publishing about photography in the late 1880s. Throughout the 1890s he worked to promote photography as fine art and gained an international reputation. Impressionist to Modernist: Masterworks of Early Photography includes significant groups of photographs by major members of Stieglitz’s circle, such as Gertrude Käsebier (1852–1934), Clarence White (1871–1925), Edward Steichen (1879–1973), and Paul Strand (1890–1976).

Much of the work of Stieglitz and his associates came about as a reaction to the increasing simplicity of photography. At the invention of the point-and-shoot camera in the late 1880s, cameras were put into the hands of both amateur hobbyists and everyday middle-class people. Photographers who were working to advance the status of photography as fine art needed to separate themselves from the workmanlike “technicians” who ran portrait studios and the regular folk who could press a button and take a snapshot.

Initially, Stieglitz was an advocate of Pictorialism, a photographic style which often has the soft, unfocused appearance of Impressionist painting. Pictorialists, like Gertrude Käsebier, Heinrich Kühn (1866–1944) and Clarence White, sought to emulate the appearance and aims of painting—from subject matter like allegories, genre scenes, and still lifes to visual effects like soft-focus and hand painting, that created a less harshly realistic and more painterly look.

Interestingly, as photographic societies became established, exhibition opportunities grew, and the 20th century continued to bring forth technical advances in photographic equipment and processes, a new generation of photographers reacted against the artistic values of Pictorialism and pressed for a modern aesthetic, “without tricks of process or manipulation,” as stated by Paul Strand, a young disciple of Stieglitz. Stieglitz described Strand’s work as, “brutally direct, devoid of all flim-flam.” Between these two poles of artistic aspiration, are a group of artists who were often as intertwined personally as professionally, and the installation will elucidate many of these fascinating relationships and connections.

With the rise in popularity of digital cameras and smartphones in recent years, photography is more ubiquitous than ever. New technology allows people to carry hundreds of photographs in their pockets and purses every day, and apps and services allow photographers to experiment with a wide range of effects to create images that become both documents of their lives and interpretations of their world. With a camera in nearly everyone’s hand and a preponderance of digital images in the 21st century, distinguishing fine art from everyday snapshots is increasingly challenging. Looking back a century to the artists included in this exhibition who first grappled with the philosophy of photography as fine art may help us to better understand both the images we make and the images we value.