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THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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FOR WEDNESDAY RELEASE

EXHIBITION OF WORK OF THE EARLY 20TH-CENTURY PHOTO SECESSION GROUP
AND CAMERA WORK

An exhibition of Photo Secession work will open on September 29 at the Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, to remain on the 1st floor until November 28. Consisting of over 150 photographs, the showing has been organized by Edward Steichen, Director of the Museum's Department of Photography and himself the only surviving founder of this important group.

This exhibition constitutes another of the Museum's flash-backs towards the antecedents of present-day photography. The Photo Secession was the first organized group of American photographers representing a photographic revolution of that time. Organized in 1902, it was not a secession from any existing organization but "a protest against the conventional concept of pictorial photography." Outstanding photographers in the group, whose work is included in this show, were: Alfred Stieglitz, Alice Boughton, Anne Brigman, Alvin Coburn, Frank Eugene, Gertrude Käsebier, Joseph Keiley, George Seeley, Edward Steichen. The present exhibition, the first Photo Secession showing since 1910, represents the movement as it looked to itself at the time and as it was then recorded in Camera Work, the most handsome and unique photographic publication ever issued, edited and published by Alfred Stieglitz from 1903 to 1917. Most of the gravure engravings were made directly from the original negatives, and printed on a hand press by a method not unlike that used for etchings on copper or steel engravings. The Museum's exhibition consists entirely of plates from Camera Work and Camera Notes. These plates have made photographic history not only in the United States but wherever they have been shown throughout the world.

Mr. Steichen has briefly summarized the history and background of Photo Secession as follows:

"The previous exploratory groundwork for this union was the work of Alfred Stieglitz. While his crusade for the recognition and establishment of photography as an art began in 1885, it was first as editor of The American Amateur Photographer from 1891 to 1896, then as editor of Camera Notes from 1897 to 1903, that the real foundations for the Photo Secession were laid.

"However, the first group exhibition of American photography was shown at the Royal Photographic Society's galleries in London in 1900, arranged by F. Holland Day of Boston. Most of the leading

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future Photo Secessionists were contributors to this London exhibition entitled 'New School of American Photography.'

"The Photo Secession came into existence during a blizzard on the night of March 5, 1902, when its first exhibition opened at the National Arts Club in New York. Camera Notes reported that it was officially christened 'Photo Secession' that night in a speech by Alfred Stieglitz delivered to the assembled guests which included among other notables, Sir Philip Burne-Jones, Richard Watson Gilder, the Duke of Newcastle. Its stated purpose was 'above all to dignify that profession until recently looked upon as a trade.'

"The story of the Photo Secessionists moved forward another step when they acquired quarters at 291 Fifth Avenue, which became known as the 'Little Galleries.' Three small rooms on the top floor soon became a center of controversy. The Photo Secessionists began to expand and include other arts as well as photography. In the course of this expanded effort the galleries began to be known as '291.' In addition to exhibitions of photography in its own gallery, the Photo Secession sent member shows to all parts of America and to many cities of Europe: Hamburg, The Hague, Paris, Wiesbaden, St. Petersburg, Dresden, Vienna, London.

"The last exhibition arranged by the Photo Secession featuring the work of its leading members was shown at the International Exhibition of Pictorial Photography held at the Albright Gallery in Buffalo. This was also the first comprehensive exhibition of pictorial photography held in America. The quality and the hanging of this exhibition has become a legend in the story of American photography. The present exhibition at the Museum is the first Photo Secession showing since the one at the Albright Gallery in 1910.

"Camera Work was the official organ of Photo Secession and in its pages and those of its immediate predecessor Camera Notes, Stieglitz selected and reproduced these photographs and the text about the photographs written by diverse authors, some of them closely associated with Camera Work: Sadakichi Hartman, Joseph Keiley, Charles H. Caffin, Bernard Shaw, Maurice Maeterlinck. Criticisms in the press and magazines were reprinted in Camera Work and excerpts from these opinions, both pro and con, are included in this exhibition. Photographs and text in the exhibition illustrate and tell the story of an important and relatively recent period in American photography. They record objectively the work and the ardent opinions of the period, and some of its splashes of enthusiasms. Alfred Stieglitz was its very life blood.

"The battle for the recognition of 'photography as an art' reached its climax at the Albright Gallery show. Any further major efforts with the same material would simply have been sterile momentum. Shortly afterwards a new revolution in photography began its period of gestation. The work of Paul Strand reproduced in the last two published numbers of Camera Work was the first printed indication of this new period.

"The first world war ended the career of Camera Work, the Photo Secession galleries and '291.' The loss of these activities was partly mitigated by the fact that for the first time in his life Stieglitz was able to pour all his creative ardor into his own photography. The magnificent results of this effort were shown in the exhibition of his photographs here at the Museum during the summer of 1947."