

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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file Steichen
Dinner

No. 31 MUSEUM ESTABLISHES EDWARD STEICHEN PHOTOGRAPHY FUND

At a dinner given by the Trustees of the Museum of Modern Art on Thursday, March 25, to celebrate Edward Steichen's 75th birthday, the establishment of the Edward Steichen Photography Fund for the purchase of photographs for the Museum collection was announced by Dr. Henry Allen Moe "in recognition of his eminence as a photographer, of his devotion to the interests of younger members of his profession and of his service to the Museum of Modern Art as Director of our Department of Photography."

More than 120 invited guests including poet and author Carl Sandburg, Eugene Meyer, publisher of the Washington Post, Nelson Rockefeller, Museum trustee, Rear Admiral Lewis S. Parks, Navy Chief of Information, Elmo Roper, public opinion analyst, Tom Maloney, publisher of U. S. Camera, Wayne Miller, young photographer and René d'Harnoncourt, Director of the Museum of Modern Art, paid tribute to Mr. Steichen who has been Director of the Museum's Department of Photography since 1947 and before that had a long distinguished career. Dr. Henry Allen Moe, 1st Vice-Chairman of the Museum Board of Trustees and Chairman of the Trustee Committee on Photography, acted as Toast Master. The dinner was held at the Museum, 11 W. 53 St.

At the dinner, Carl Sandburg, brother-in-law of the famous photographer, described Mr. Steichen as:

"A painter whose works are in famous galleries, a photographer who has been a pioneer and a wayshower if not a prophet, a plant breeder whose toilsome exploits have bordered on wizardry, a daring experimenter in the first days of color photography and in later years projecting and promoting exhibitions of approved master photographers with always an eye for advancing the work of promising younger men and women, a man possessed of the American Dream so deeply and intricately that he shrinks from words and prefers to tell it in deeds and actions."

He continued his statement by speaking about the major Museum exhibition Mr. Steichen is now preparing and said:

"The forthcoming exhibition, 'The Family of Man,' will very possibly and quite likely, as some of us see it now, be a vivid and powerful oration, a true holiness sermon in no words at all, in pictures in documentary photographs, [and] be persuasive of the kinship of all mankind..."

Mr. Steichen's role in World War II, in which he served as a Captain in command of all naval combat photography, was lauded in a message sent by Admiral Arthur W. Radford, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff:

"During the later phases of World War II, when our Nation was involved in the bitterest war in its history, Captain Steichen and his associates succeeded in capturing by photography an indelible record of certain epic struggles of our United States Navy. Today, in official Navy files, there is the outstanding record of that achievement. Future generations will thank him for enabling them to share a sense of pride in the achievements of those trying times."

In a booklet published by the Museum and presented to the guests as part of the birthday celebration, William A. M. Burden, President of the Museum said:

(more)

When Edward Steichen accepted the Directorship of the Museum's Department of Photography in 1947, Nelson Rockefeller expressed the gratitude of the Museum and the Trustees, saying no one could bring greater achievement, experience, and enthusiasm to the position and pointing out that it was peculiarly fitting that Edward Steichen should become affiliated with the Museum of Modern Art as he had been one of the first to introduce modern art to this country's public. After seven years of this happy and fruitful association, all of us, Trustees and staff, reiterate Mr. Rockefeller's thanks and say again how fortunate we are.

"Although Mr. Steichen first devoted much of his time and energy to paintings, it is by his great achievement as a creative photographer and as an inspiring leader that most of us know him. He has preached and practiced photography as an art form, and during the '20s and '30s he revolutionized magazine and advertising photography as chief photographer for the Condé Nast publications VOGUE and VANITY FAIR.

"During the past seven years his exhibitions at the Museum have been acclaimed by the public and the press. Especially noteworthy has been the number of fine young photographers whom Mr. Steichen has found, encouraged and whose work he has exhibited, such as in the show 'Always the Young Strangers.'...Now, for our 25th Anniversary Year program of major exhibitions, Mr. Steichen is preparing another great exhibition on a universal and inspiring theme, 'The Family of Man.' We are proud of these exhibitions which have been called 'one of the most significant contributions to photographic advancement,' and we are proud to feel that in some way we have all participated in them.

"Mr. Steichen has received many, many honors, including the Legion of Honor, the Distinguished Service Medal, and in peacetime, the Fine Arts Medal of the American Institute of Architects.

"The Museum of Modern Art has no medal to bestow. But, as a token of our affection and appreciation for Edward Steichen, we are establishing the 'Edward Steichen Photography Fund' for the purchase of photographs for the museum collection as a way of perpetuating his and our faith and belief in photography as a creative art."

René d'Harnoncourt, Director of the Museum, presented an original lithograph by Toulouse-Lautrec to Mr. Steichen from the staff as a memento of the great esteem with which his colleagues regard him.

Mr. Steichen's own testimony on the art of photography is included in the testimonial booklet which also lists the 30 exhibitions he has directed for the Museum and a chronology of his life.

In one of these statements on photography Mr. Steichen says:

"The ultimate importance of any art medium depends mainly on the complete freedom of expression accorded the artist. The lack of freedom of expression can be imposed from within as well as from without. A specific cult evolved by the individual photographer or by a group can be almost as pernicious as that of a program imposed by a political ideology.

"Photography's continuing growth depends mainly on the seeking and probings of generation after generation to uncover the still dormant potentialities and resources of the medium, which in turn open new doors towards wider and wider horizons. The photographer's search for truth must be unending."

Other guests at the dinner, which was attended by editors, publishers, art directors, photographers, bankers, military personnel and artists, as well as members of Mr. Steichen's family, included: Margaret Burke-White, Mrs. Simon Guggenheim, Mr. Julius Klyman, Mr. and Mrs. Alexander Liberman, Mr. and Mrs. Homer Page, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Sheeler and Mr. and Mrs. James Thrall Soby.