

The Museum of Modern Art

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CONTEMPORARY STATEMENTS BY PHOTOGRAPHERS AND CRITICS

"Why should not the camera also throw off the shackles of conventional representation...? Why not repeated successive exposures of an object in motion on the same plate? Why should not perspective be studied from angles hitherto neglected or unobserved?... Think of the joy of doing something which it would be impossible to classify, or to tell which was the top and which was the bottom!"

Alvin Langdon Coburn, 1915

Photograms of the year 1916, p. 23.

"We live in a time of the greatest precision and of maximum contrasts: photomontage offers us a means to express this. It shows ideas: photography shows objects."

César Domela-Nieuwenhuis, 1931

Translated from introduction to catalogue of the exhibition "Fotomontage" held by the Staatliche Kunstbibliothek in the former Kunstgewerbemuseum, 1931, p. 5-6.

"Dada is the reaction against all attempts to deny reality.... In the past, vast quantities of love, time and effort were applied to painting a body, a flower, a hat, a cast shadow, etc. Now, we just take a pair of scissors and cut out all the things we need from paintings or photographs."

Wieland Herzfelde, 1920

Translated by Gerhard Loose from catalogue of the First International Dada Fair, Otto Burchard Gallery, Berlin, 1920, p. 2. (Karpel No. 142)

"This century belongs to light. Photography is the first attempt to give form to light, even though by transposition. Perhaps it is this very transposition that almost results in abstraction.

László Moholy-Nagy, 1927

Translated by Gerhard Loose from L. Moholy-Nagy, "Die beifspiellose Fotografie" Das Deutsche Lichtbild, Jahreschau 1927, Berlin, Verlag Robert & Bruno Schultz, 1927.

"A bird's eye view of trees which form a unity with the pattern of the street. The lines running in many directions, placed each behind the other, form a rich spatial net work."

László Moholy-Nagy, 1928

Typescript label on back of original print Spring in Berlin, 1928.

"Bruguiere has shaped panic with paper and light. He has shaped flight in likewise manner. Ambience. But this is not a narrative, this is an experience kinetic of what the eye knows does not move."

Harry Alan Potamkin, 1929

Harry Alan Potamkin, "Francis Bruguiere Photo," Transition, No. 18, 1929, p. 81.

"Comparatively new is also a further variety of the reality-photo: the negative print. The principle of inversion is known in arrangement of abstract forms, as applied in weaving and basket-work.... This specifically photographic charm cannot be experienced elsewhere, for the distinction between a day and night view of the same reality is quite a different thing."

Franz Roh, 1929

Franz Roh and Jan Tschichold, editors. Foto-Auge; 76 Fotos der Zeit, Stuttgart, Akademischer Verlag Dr. Fritz Wedekind & Co., 1929, p. 17.

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"The photogram hovers excitingly between abstract geometrical tracery and the echo of objects. In this tension there often is a peculiar charm. These pictures are taken without a camera, by the meeting of objects with sensitive paper. By exposing them a long or a short time, holding them close or far, letting sharp or subdued artificial light shine upon them, schemes of luminosity are obtained that so change the colour, outline and moulding of objects as to make them lose body and appear but a lustrous strange world and abstraction."

Franz Roh, 1929

Franz Roh and Jan Tschichold, editors. Foto-Auge; 76 Fotos der Zeit, Stuttgart, Akademischer Verlag Dr. Fritz Wedekind & Co., 1929, p. 16.

"'Songs of the Sky - Secrets of the Skies as revealed by my Camera,' are tiny photographs, direct revelations of a man's world in the sky - documents of eternal relationship - perhaps even a philosophy. 'My' camera means any camera - any camera into which his eye may look."

Alfred Stieglitz, 1924

Introduction to catalogue of exhibition at the Anderson Galleries, New York, 1924.

"With the eye of the machine, Stieglitz...has shown that the portrait of an individual is really the sum of a hundred or more photographs. He has looked with three eyes and has been able to hold, by purely photographic means, space-filling, tonality and tactility, line and form, that moment when the forces at work in a human being become most intensely physical and objective. In thus revealing the spirit of the individual he has documented the world of that individual, which is today."

Paul Strand, 1922

Paul Strand, "Photography and the New God," Broom, v.3, p.252-58, 1922. Reprinted in Nathan Lyons, ed., Photographers on Photography. Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice-Hall, Inc. in collaboration with George Eastman House, 1966.

"The camera should be used for recording of life, for rendering the very substance and quintessence of the thing itself, whether it be polished steel or palpitating flesh.

Edward Weston, 1924

The Daybooks of Edward Weston, Volume I: Mexico. Edited by Nancy Newhall. Rochester, N.Y., George Eastman House, 1961, p. 55.

"Should we use 'abstract' in describing a photograph?...The most abstract line or form, of necessity is based on actuality - derived from nature, even as God is pictured a glorified man.... To keep one's feet planted to terra firma is to keep the head poised and receptive."

Edward Weston, 1926

Daybooks of Edward Weston, Volume 1: Mexico. Edited by Nancy Newhall. Rochester, N.Y., George Eastman House, 1961, p. 150.