

NEWS RELEASE

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART
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Mr. Cairns

ADVANCE FOR RELEASE -

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WASHINGTON, D. C., March 15: John Walker, Director of the National Gallery of Art, announced today that the EXHIBITION OF PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALFRED STIEGLITZ will open to the public on March 16. The exhibition honors a pioneer in the field of photography as an art and one who has been hailed as a master of the medium.

Alfred Stieglitz (1864-1946), an important leader in the American art world of the past generation, is also the first photographer whose prints were collected by leading museums of this country.

For the greater part of the century and a half of its history, photography was regarded only as an invention useful for documentary purposes, not as a technique which might be employed to create works of art. Thirty-four years ago no major American art museum included photographs in its print department. The artistic achievement of photography was recognized in 1924 by the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, when a group of Stieglitz prints was placed on exhibition with works by Dürer and Goya. In 1928 the Metropolitan Museum of Art requested and received Stieglitz prints. Subsequently, other museums added his work to their collections, and in each case these were the first photographs to be included with other notable achievements in the Graphic Arts.

In 1949, three years after the death of Stieglitz, the National Gallery of Art was the fortunate recipient of the "key" set of his prints. These are the best prints that Stieglitz made and mounted himself. In many cases he was satisfied with only one of many prints and the others were destroyed by him. The present exhibition is a representative selection from this "key" set. The National Gallery is indebted to Miss Georgia O'Keeffe for the gift of these photographs from the estate of Alfred Stieglitz.

Alfred Stieglitz went to the Berlin Polytechnic in 1882, when he was eighteen years old, to study mechanical engineering. In a Berlin shop window he saw a camera, which he bought at once and from then on he devoted himself to photography. He was fortunate to be able to study under H. W. Vogel, the famous photo-chemist, and by constant experimenting acquired a brilliant technique. In 1887 he won his first medal, the first of more than 150 medals and prizes in important world-wide exhibitions.

Returning to America in 1890, Stieglitz soon became the key figure in the growing movement for pictorial photography. In the gallery established in 1905 at 291 Fifth Avenue in New York (which came to be known as "291"), the American public was able to see work, not only of photographers, but of the most advanced painters and sculptors of the time. The European artists Rodin, Cézanne, Matisse, Picasso, were shown to the American public along with John Marin, Marsden Hartley, Arthur Dove, and later, Georgia O'Keeffe. By exhibitions at "291" and later at An American Place, by many publications, and by the force of his driving personality, Stieglitz was a leader in the cause for modern art in many of its forms.

The exhibition of 118 prints at the National Gallery covers Stieglitz's long career in photography. In photographs such as "The Terminal" of 1892, showing the steaming horses of a New York street car, and "The Steerage" of 1907, a huddled mass of emigrants, an earlier era of American life is depicted. The face of New York, and its changes, the Lake George series, portraits, art exhibitions at "291", clouds, and landscapes are the principal themes of his work, recurring at different periods. A perfectionist in his medium, Stieglitz sometimes made a hundred or more prints from a single negative before reaching the one which satisfied him, then he usually destroyed the remaining prints. In 1937 he made his last photograph, for at the age of 73 he could no longer handle either of his heavy cameras.

An illustrated catalogue in collotype, including chronology and bibliography, accompanies the exhibition. Miss Doris Bry, who is preparing the definitive catalogue of Stieglitz's work, in her introduction to this catalogue, presents an account of his development as a photographer and of his impact on photographic history in the dual role of creative artist and compelling force.

The exhibition will close on April 27.