

# NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

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\*\*PRESS PREVIEW:  
TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 1, 1983  
10 A.M. to 3 P.M.

## COMPREHENSIVE EXHIBITION OF PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALFRED STIEGLITZ AT NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

WASHINGTON, D.C. October 21, 1982. Alfred Stieglitz, the first retrospective exhibition of Stieglitz photographs in almost fifty years, traces the development of his technique and style from the late nineteenth century until 1935. Over 170 photographs, many to be exhibited for the first time, go on view in the National Gallery of Art's new Ground Floor galleries in the West Building from February 3 through May 8, 1983. All of the works have been selected from the key, or master set, of 1600 Stieglitz photographs given to the National Gallery by his widow, Georgia O'Keeffe, in 1949.

The exhibition has been made possible by a generous grant from Springs Industries, Inc. After its premiere at the National Gallery, it is scheduled to travel to The Metropolitan Museum of Art (June 14-August 14, 1983) and to The Art Institute of Chicago (October 11, 1983-January 3, 1984).

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During his lifetime and in the years since his death in 1946, Alfred Stieglitz has been renowned for his introduction of modern European art to America and for his support of contemporary American artists, but he was always, first and foremost, a photographer. Throughout his long career, he continually tested and explored both the technical and expressive capabilities of the medium in order to understand what he called "meaning of the idea photography." And he was committed to the belief that photography is a valid form of artistic expression. To prove his point, he made some of the first artistic studies of New York City, a subject previously neglected and even scorned by American artists. Using the newly invented hand camera, Stieglitz captured the mood of that city at the dawn of the twentieth century. He also made some of the first photographs at night, in the rain and snow--conditions which had previously been considered impossible to record.

Stieglitz was also particularly concerned with understanding the relationship between photography and the other fine arts. His association with such European artists as Cézanne, Picasso, Picabia, and Kandinsky, as well as the Americans Marin, Hartley, Dove, and O'Keeffe, had an ongoing influence on his photographs. Their work demonstrated to him, at least during the 1910s, that while it was the function of painting, sculpture, or drawing to reveal the subjective feelings of the artist, it was the function of photography to make an objective record of reality, to provide visual truths about the world. To that end,

Stieglitz photographed the skyscrapers of New York City, the landscapes around Lake George, as well as the artists with whom he was associated in order to reveal the objective reality--indeed, the very essence--of the forms in front of his camera.

Between 1917 and 1937, Stieglitz made over 300 photographs of Georgia O'Keeffe. He called this a "composite portrait" and his aim was to document the evolution of the essence of O'Keeffe. He did not believe that O'Keeffe's individuality was confined to her head and face alone, but that all parts of her body--her feet, torso, and especially her hands--were expressive of her essence. Stieglitz noted that many of his photographs of O'Keeffe's hands could be hung so that any side was "up"; this was a clear indication that these were not to be seen as functional objects, but as independently expressive forms.

In contrast, Stieglitz between 1922 and 1931 made a series of highly subjective studies of clouds which he called Equivalents. Strongly influenced by Kandinsky, Stieglitz came to believe that not only painting, but also photography, could abstractly express subjective, mental states. Thus he photographed clouds not as a pictorial complement to the land, but as abstract forms. In much the same manner as he photographed the landscape of Lake George in the late 1920s and 1930s as a metaphor for his emotions, so too in these rarely seen series of cloud photographs did Stieglitz search for the visual equivalent to his inner, subjective state.

Georgia O'Keeffe herself has been closely involved in all aspects of the exhibition, which has been planned and organized by guest curators Sarah Greenough and Juan Hamilton. Lynn Gould, assistant curator of the Gallery's Graphic Arts Department, has coordinated the exhibition.

Accompanying the exhibition is an illustrated book by Ms. Greenough and Mr. Hamilton with many previously unpublished writings by Stieglitz. The book is also available in a hardback edition, published by the National Gallery of Art and Callaway Editions.

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