

## **Alfred Stieglitz**

**Photographer  
American**

Born	January 1, 1864	Hoboken, New Jersey
Died	July 13, 1946	New York, New York

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Had Alfred Stieglitz never taken a photograph in his life, he would still be numbered among the most significant influences in American cultural life in the period before World War II. As editor of the now legendary magazine *Camera Work*, as proselytizer for the art of photography, and as director of the 291 gallery and, later, The Intimate Gallery and An American Place, Stieglitz was among the first to introduce the art of the European and American avant-garde to the American public while simultaneously championing, publishing, and exhibiting much of the best photography of the period. Nevertheless, it is Stieglitz's body of photographic work which has firmly established his place among 20<sup>th</sup> century artists.

Stieglitz's career spanned more than 50 years and bridged 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century styles in photography. Born in Hoboken, New Jersey, Stieglitz studied mechanical engineering in Berlin, Germany. Even while an engineering student he was drawn to photography, and in the 1880s he traveled throughout Europe taking pictures. At the age of 24 he received first prize in a British photographic competition judged by P. H. Emerson, the first of the 150 medals he was to receive in his lifetime. In 1889 Stieglitz returned permanently to New York where he began exhibiting his own work extensively and writing on photography - predominantly on the movement now known as Pictorialism, whose influence pervaded his early work. Pictorialism had originated in France and England (where its major practitioners were loosely organized into a group called The Linked Ring, which conferred honorary membership on Stieglitz). When, in 1902, Stieglitz formed the Photo-Secession group and opened the first of his galleries, the American photographers he exhibited were more or less influenced by Pictorialist tenets. These included the application of Aestheticism and Symbolist styles borrowed from the fine arts, and the use of the gum bichromate and glycerin printing processes, soft focus, and retouching of the negative or positive to achieve painterly or graphic effects. In his own work Stieglitz soon came to reject retouching and other forms of manipulation, often choosing to photograph in rain, mist, or snow to create the desired softness of effect as well as to demonstrate that vision was more important than condition or equipment. Among Stieglitz's most celebrated photographs of this period are "Paula" (1889), "The Terminal" (1893), and "The Steerage" (1907).

In the same year that he established the Photo-Secession, Stieglitz began publishing the quarterly *Camera Work*, which continued until 1917 and featured hand-tipped photogravures, criticism, and reproductions of the work of vanguard artists. In 1908, Stieglitz began exhibiting painting and sculpture at his 291 gallery. Exhibitions included the works of Matisse, Cezanne, Rodin, Braque, O'Keeffe (whom he was to marry in 1924), and primitive African artisans. His own work evolved progressively toward "pure" photography, a direction confirmed by his recognition of Paul Strand, whose photographs comprised the last two issues of *Camera Work*. Writing in 1922, Stieglitz stated: "My aim is increasingly to make my photographs took so much like photographs [i.e., rather than paintings, etchings, etc.] that unless one has eyes and sees, they won't be seen - and still everyone will never forget having once looked at them." That same year Stieglitz began his extended series of cloud photographs, which he termed "equivalents" and of which he wrote: "[They] are equivalents of my basic philosophy of life." Later he was to describe all his work as "equivalents" - a Symbolist notion which Stieglitz was effectively able to translate into photographic expression.

After the closing of 291 and the termination of *Camera Work*, Stieglitz opened the Intimate Gallery (1925-1929) and An American Place (1929 until his death in 1946), in which he exhibited principally painting, sculpture, and graphic work, and occasionally photography. His work of this later period includes portraits, hundreds of studies of Georgia O'Keeffe, photographs of Lake George (where Stieglitz summered), clouds, and New York City views.