

ALFRED STIEGLITZ

the Lake George years

‘... much has happened in photography that is sensational, but very little that is comparable with what Stieglitz did. The body of his work, the key set – I think – is the most beautiful photographic document of our time.’ Georgia O’Keeffe 1978



[Georgia O’Keeffe: a portrait] 1918
platinum photograph, 24.6 x 19.7 cm
J Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles
© J Paul Getty Trust

The photographs Alfred Stieglitz [1864–1946] took around his summer house at Lake George, New York state, USA after 1915 are considered a major departure and dramatically influenced the course of photography. The desire to build a specifically ‘American’ art led Stieglitz to explore the essential nature of photography, released from contrivances and from intervention in print and negative.

‘Photography is my passion. The search for truth my obsession,’ he would write in 1921.

‘Stieglitz’s mature photographs from the 1910s onwards are free from any sense that photography must refer to something outside of itself in order to express meaning,’ said Judy Annear, senior curator photography, Art Gallery of New South Wales.

This major exhibition is the first in Australia of Stieglitz’s photographs. 150 are included and are amongst the very best Stieglitz ever printed. They are also the rarest. One third of the exhibition is being lent by the National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, which holds ‘the key set’ – selected by his lover, muse and wife, the artist Georgia O’Keeffe, and deposited there after Stieglitz’s death.

‘Passionate and provocative; charismatic, verbose and intellectually voracious; a self-described revolutionist and iconoclast with an unwavering belief in the efficacy of radical action; competitive, egotistical, narcissistic and at times duplicitous, but also endowed with a remarkable ability to establish a deep communion with those around him – these are but some of the adjectives that can be used to describe Alfred Stieglitz,’ said Sarah Greenough, senior curator of photographs, National Gallery of Art, Washington.



clockwise from top left:

Ellen Koeniger 1916
gelatin silver photograph, 11.1 x 9.1 cm
J Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles
© J Paul Getty Trust

Ford V-8 1935
gelatin silver photograph, 19.5 x 24.3 cm
George Eastman House, part purchase and
part gift from Georgia O'Keeffe

Spiritual America 1923
gelatin silver photograph, 11.7 x 9.2 cm
Philadelphia Museum of Art: the Alfred Stieglitz
Collection 1949

Major loans are also coming from the J Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, Museum of Modern Art and Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Art Institute of Chicago, and George Eastman House, Rochester amongst others.

The exhibition begins with a selection of Stieglitz's photographs from the 1910s including those that he took at his gallery 291 in New York City of artists and collaborators, including O'Keeffe. Stieglitz was a superb photographic printer and dedicated to aesthetics in publishing. A number of the later editions (from 1911–17) of his publication *Camera work* – described as the most beautiful journal in the world – are included.

Stieglitz's portraits grew steadily in power in the 1910s and 20s, and continued to be a major part of his photographic practice. He would sometimes photograph his subjects over and over again and none more so than O'Keeffe, whom he met in 1916.

Stieglitz photographed O'Keeffe for the first time in 1917. He continued to photograph her from every angle, clothed and unclothed, indoors and out until his last photographs from 1936/37. In all there are more than 300 photographs of O'Keeffe which convey all the nuances of their relationship in that 20-year period. A selection is included.

Stieglitz first visited Lake George in the 1870s with his parents. The visits slowed until the 1910s but from 1917 until his death he spent every summer there. Stieglitz's ashes are buried at Lake George.

The photographs of people, buildings, landscapes and skies that Stieglitz took at Lake George form a collective portrait of a place which has not been rivalled in the history of photography worldwide for its subtlety of feeling expressed in the simplest of terms.



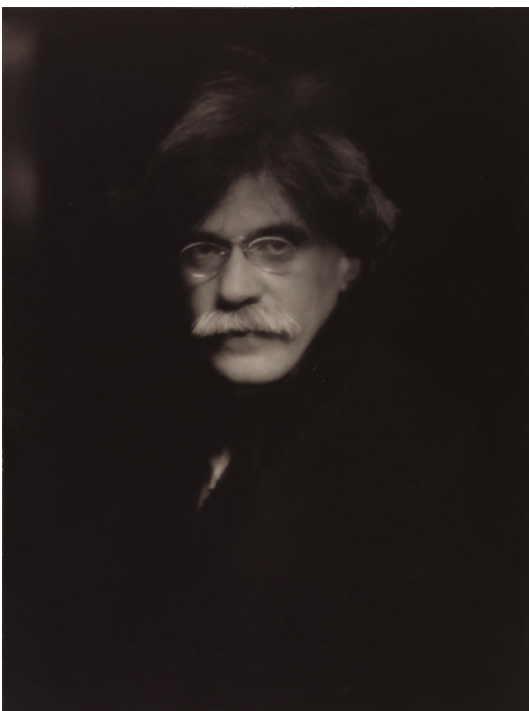
clockwise from top left:

Dancing trees 1921–22
palladium photograph, 24.2 x 19.3 cm
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
Gift of David A Schulte 1928

Equivalent 1924
gelatin silver photograph, 9.2 x 11.8 cm
Art Institute of Chicago, Alfred Stieglitz Collection

[Self-portrait] 1907, printed 1930
gelatin silver photograph, 24.8 x 18.4 cm
J Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles
© J Paul Getty Trust

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Stieglitz developed the idea for his cloud photographs in 1922 because he wanted to create images which carried the emotional impact of music and to disprove the idea being put about that he hypnotised his [human] subjects. The first title for the cloud photographs was simply *Music: a sequence...*; this was eventually superseded by *Equivalent* as Stieglitz believed that these photographs could exist as the visual equivalent to other forms of expression.

‘I wanted to photograph clouds to find out what I had learned in 40 years about photography,’
wrote Stieglitz in 1923.

Stieglitz changed the course of photography worldwide and has influenced major figures in photography from Minor White to Robert Mapplethorpe, Max Dupain to Tracey Moffatt and Bill Henson.

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