GETTY MUSEUM ACQUIRES THIRTEEN RARE PICTORIALIST PHOTOGRAPHS

Acquisitions includes iconic works by Edward Steichen, Heinrich Kühn, Gertrude Käsebier, and others

LOS ANGELES – The J. Paul Getty Museum announced today the acquisition of thirteen photographs from the height of Pictorialist photography around 1900, including some of the period’s most iconic photographs. Seven photographers are represented in the acquisition: Edward Steichen, Heinrich Kühn, George Seeley, Alvin Langdon Coburn, Baron Adolph de Meyer, Gertrude Käsebier, and Clarence H. White. The acquisition includes 12 purchased photographs and one donated photograph, all from the collection assembled in the 1980s by Raymond E. Kassar.
“The breadth of the Museum’s photographs collection is unmatched, and this grouping adds important depth to our existing holdings of Pictorialist photography,” says Timothy Potts, director of the J. Paul Getty Museum. “While we have been making great strides in developing the collection with works by contemporary photographers, this acquisition represents a wonderful opportunity to enrich the collection’s historic roots in work by prominent artists who were among the first to embrace photography as an art form.”

The subjects documented in these thirteen images include nude studies, women in darkly lit interiors, children in domestic scenes, figures in the landscape, a view of Venice, the depiction of a ship at sea, and a still life. The motifs have been rendered with labor-intensive processes in the darkroom, including the gum-bichromate process, platinum and palladium printing, and combination printing.

Pictorialism developed as an international movement at the end of the nineteenth century to promote photography as a fine art. Selecting subjects favored by painters and printmakers, these photographers saw the darkroom as an arena in which to realize unique, handcrafted prints. Coating textured papers with pigments or oil-based inks gave photographers greater control of the final image, as did platinum and palladium papers that yielded a subtle range of grey tones. Each print was deemed a unique work of art that represented the artist’s vision and craftsmanship, rather than the product of a purely mechanical medium. The artists represented in the collection are loosely connected by their association with Alfred Stieglitz (American, 1864-1946), one of the founders of the Photo-Secession, an organization that championed photography as a legitimate means of artistic expression.

Through his early association with the Photo-Secession and Steiglitz, Edward Steichen became one of the most important American Pictorialists. His La Cigale (1901) is considered a masterpiece of the movement and features a cowering, nude woman half-hidden in shadows.
with her back turned toward the viewer. Heinrich Kühn was one of the most technically proficient Pictorialist photographers, and *Miss Mary at Her Night Table* (1907) features one of his most well-known subjects, his children’s nanny Mary Warner. Both these works are part of the acquisition.

Plans for exhibition of the photographs will be announced.

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The J. Paul Getty Museum collects in seven distinct areas, including Greek and Roman antiquities, European paintings, drawings, manuscripts, sculpture and decorative arts, and photographs gathered internationally. The Museum’s mission is to make the collection meaningful and attractive to a broad audience by presenting and interpreting the works of art through educational programs, special exhibitions, publications, conservation, and research.

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