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THE STIEGLITZ ARCHIVE AT YALE UNIVERSITY

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**W**HAT IS STIEGLITZ?

The question has been asked and answered, asked again and answered by those who were not satisfied. It is still being asked.

The Stieglitz Archive, recently given to the Library's Collection of American Literature by Georgia O'Keeffe, provides the raw material for at least a substantial portion of a fresh answer to the old question. This material can be broadly described as the things Stieglitz kept during his eighty-two years (1864-1946), aside from his own photographic work and collection of paintings. It is a vast untidy conglomeration with little meaning in many of its separate parts. Taken as a whole, however, it comprises a picture of a person and of an era, and gives new clues for the portrait of Stieglitz that remains to be made.

The material at present includes over sixty files of correspondence to and from Stieglitz, ranging from 1881 into 1946; paintings, drawings, and photographs of Stieglitz by such figures as William Chase, Man Ray, Fedor Encke, Ansel Adams, Carl Van Vechten, Todd Webb, Edward Steichen, Clarence White, Frank Eugene, Paul Strand, and many others; newspaper and magazine clippings from the 1880's through 1946, dealing with Stieglitz himself, photography, photographers, the artists he was interested in, the exhibitions he held in his galleries from 1905 to 1946, and many related topics; photographic medals from his early days in photography; scrapbooks

of theater and concert programs from 1877 to 1902; portions of an autograph collection he made as a boy, with bits of journals and papers he kept while at school (earliest date 1873); material related to the Stieglitz family; a group of water colors by Pamela Coleman Smith, which was the first non-photographic work Stieglitz exhibited at "291" (in 1907)—this exhibition was the first in the series of shows at "291" which introduced modern art to America; many of the children's drawings shown at "291" which comprised the first exhibition in this country of children's work as art; miscellaneous drawings by Picabia, Max Weber, Lee Simonson, Man Ray, Angna Enters, and others; copies of 391, *New York Dada*, *MSS*, and other publications sponsored by Stieglitz; as complete as possible a record, with catalogues, of the exhibitions held in Stieglitz galleries from 1905 to 1946; the only complete listing of the Stieglitz Collection of paintings, with photographs and catalogue data for a majority of the works; miscellaneous exhibition catalogues and publications; several boxes of manuscripts, either about "291" or Stieglitz, or just sent to him by friends. These include manuscripts by Djuna Barnes, Oscar Bluemner, Dorothy Brett, Melville Cane, Charles Demuth, Marius De Zayas, Arthur G. Dove, William Einstein, Ralph Flint, Waldo Frank, Lloyd Frankenberg, Yvan Goll, Hutchins Hapgood, Marsden Hartley, Joseph T. Keiley, Alfred Kreymborg, Gaston Lachaise, Henry McBride, John Marin, Henri Matisse, Dorothy Norman, Francis Picabia, Man Ray, Paul Rosenfeld, Carl Sandburg, Herbert J. Seligmann, Edward Steichen, Gertrude Stein, Leo Stein, Paul Strand, Max Weber, Stanton Macdonald Wright, and many others.

In sorting the Stieglitz papers and putting them in some order before delivery to Yale, Miss O'Keeffe felt that the truest picture of Stieglitz would be made available by including all of the letters he had kept, regardless of their seeming interest at the moment. This policy was adopted partly because of the incapacity of a person of the same era to judge adequately the historical worth of seemingly uninteresting letters, partly because the very nature and number of the letters in itself contributed to a greater understanding of something in Stieglitz. When necessary, a few letters were deposited under seal. None were destroyed. In addition, a number of letters written jointly

to Stieglitz and Miss O'Keeffe, and letters written to her by mutual friends which Stieglitz had filed with his own, were included.

The decision to place the Stieglitz Archive at Yale, rather than in one of the country's great public libraries, was made in general on the basis of the nature of a great university library. The Yale University Library, with its unique and well-established Collection of American Literature, already contained so many special collections that related to Stieglitz's contemporaries and friends, that it seemed the most appropriate repository. Already in this department were housed the Gertrude Stein Collection, the *Hound and Horn* papers, Lachaise papers, Nadelman papers, the James Weldon Johnson Collection, and others. Miss Katherine Dreier had given to the University a large portion of the Société Anonyme Collection of paintings. The *Dial* papers were on deposit, and promises had been made of the Marsden Hartley papers from Miss Norma Berger and the Charles Demuth papers from Robert Locher.

To stay alive the material must be used, and the vividness that the original papers in interlocking collections have in close geographical proximity to each other can be seen in the following example. In the Stieglitz papers are letters of 1913 to him from Gertrude Stein and Marsden Hartley, in which Hartley tells Stieglitz of his first meetings with Gertrude Stein, and she in turn writes to Stieglitz of her interest in Hartley and his work. Hartley then writes to Stieglitz about Gertrude Stein's admiration of Stieglitz's portrait of Hartley and his self-portrait (which Hartley had shown her), and requests prints for her. Miss Stein also writes to Stieglitz about securing prints. In the Stein Collection are Stieglitz's replies to Gertrude Stein, and probably in the Hartley papers will be Stieglitz's replies to Hartley. Ultimately Stieglitz found the negatives and made new prints which he sent to Miss Stein. In 1946 Gertrude Stein bequeathed the prints to Yale—and the circle is complete.

The letters to Stieglitz at present form one of the most stimulating portions of the Archive. Although the variety of correspondents is of special interest to students of these figures, in relation to Stieglitz they acquire still another dimension, for it was characteristic of something in him that people so often wrote him their deepest feelings. People wrote to Stieglitz of their personal lives, ambitions, successes and

failures, theories of life, of art, their reactions to events surrounding them. Often the letters were written more to themselves as self-clarification than to him, though the writers may not have known it. Many of the most eloquent were written by persons who had only spoken to Stieglitz once or twice, those who had experienced a memorable moment, had had something added to their lives that they could not forget, through the medium of Stieglitz and the paintings he hung in his "Rooms" for them.

The list of the writers goes into the hundreds. A few of the best known may be mentioned: Sherwood Anderson, over 130 letters from 1922 to 1938; Oscar Bluemner, 75 letters from 1912 to 1930; Dorothy Brett, 120 letters from 1928 to 1944; Hart Crane, 12 letters from 1923 to 1929; Charles Demuth, 60 letters from 1916 to 1934; Arthur Dove, over 300 letters from 1913 to 1945; William Einstein, 150 letters from 1936 to 1946; Waldo Frank, 112 letters from 1916 to 1944; Marsden Hartley, 292 letters from 1911 to 1942; Alfred Kreyborg, 34 letters from 1915 to 1931; Frieda and D. H. Lawrence, 10 letters from 1923 to 1934; Mabel Dodge Luhan, 65 letters from 1913 to 1941; John Marin, about 200 letters from 1910 to 1945; Lewis Mumford, 55 letters from 1925 to 1946; Duncan Phillips, 60 letters from 1928 to 1946; Paul Rosenfeld, 113 letters from 1915 to 1938; Cary Ross, over 100 letters from 1931 to 1942; Herbert J. Seligmann, 176 letters from 1918 to 1937; Edward Steichen, 150 letters from 1900 to 1921; Gertrude Stein, 10 letters from 1912 to 1913; Leo Stein, 23 letters from 1911 to 1945; Paul Strand, 78 letters from 1916 to 1935; Jean Toomer, 40 letters from 1924 to 1944; Edward Weston, 26 letters from 1922 to 1942; Clarence White, 118 letters from 1898 to 1914; Stanton Macdonald Wright, 75 letters from 1916 to 1945; and countless others.

The letters taken as a whole have an aspect that in transcending the personal elements reflect that quality in Stieglitz that made him throughout his life so much of his time and at the same time ahead of it. They become the history of an era of which his life is a parallel part, on which his life made an undeniable dent. In the course of this history, a series of themes concerning Stieglitz emerge so repeatedly from diverse points of view that their validity seems assured.

In trying to know Stieglitz better through the letters, the dominant

themes that emerge are those of energy and passion, directed by a unique creative force. It was the extraordinary fusion of these three elements that made Stieglitz what he was. They made him not only a fighter, but a fighter who had to and did win. Arthur Dove, in writing to Stieglitz, has stated this especially vividly:

You follow through anything you do with your whole life . . . Am convinced that you have a will through living your life as an idea that makes things happen. Treating life as a work of art is a thing that is seldom done. One has to have a terrific love of the sensitive human thing to be able to do it.<sup>1</sup>

The Archive material at Yale records the histories of Stieglitz's many battles in graphic detail. One of the earliest was in the field of photography, when as a very young man he became interested in it, and determined to become an authority throughout the world. By 1890, at the age of 26, he had achieved this, and throughout his life maintained his position. From this interest grew his fight for the recognition of photography as one of the fine arts, and to accomplish this, while continuing to make his own photographs, he worked through the organized photographic groups in the United States and Europe. When these no longer seemed adequate, he formed his own group, the Photo-Secession. The history of the years preceding the formation of the Photo-Secession, the events that necessitated it, and the subsequent struggle led by Stieglitz for its recognition as the prime group speaking for photography as an art, are recorded in detail at Yale. It is a story of complicated relationships, battles, feuds, fights, jealousies, intrigues, and arguments beyond belief. Probably the lack of the general use of the telephone is responsible for the large body of written documents that records this period. I doubt that anyone can read through to the end of this material without a feeling of complete exhaustion, combined with amazement at Stieglitz, who survived it and achieved his purposes.

From his work for the recognition of photography as an art grew his interest in modern art. The first non-photographic work exhibited at the Photo-Secession Galleries was that of Pamela Coleman Smith, in 1907 (several of these paintings are in the Archive at Yale), and from that time on he added to his other activities the fight for the

1. Printed with the kind permission of William Dove, for the Estate of Arthur G. Dove.

acceptance of modern art, both European and American, in this country.

The record of the early exhibitions of modern art at "291" (as the Photo-Secession Gallery had come to be known) is too well known to repeat in detail here. It is enough to say that prior to the 1913 Armory show, Stieglitz had already exhibited Rodin, Matisse, Marin, Maurer, Hartley, Toulouse-Lautrec, Picasso, Dove, Weber, Cézanne, Rousseau, and the first showing of children's work as art. In the years during and after the Armory show, until the closing of "291" in 1917, Stieglitz added the following landmarks, among others: Picabia, Brancusi, Braque, the first exhibition of African Negro Sculpture as art, Nadelman, Strand, Stanton Macdonald Wright, Severini, and Georgia O'Keeffe.

When the dealers in this country became interested in modern European art Stieglitz concentrated his fight to that for the living American artist, convinced "that something alive in the arts must come out of America."<sup>2</sup>

Stieglitz never thought of the galleries associated with his name as being "his." They belonged to the artists, the public, the people. They were laboratories for experiments, educational centers, places where things could happen. In the same sense he was not a "dealer," in spite of the many people who called him this. He was the medium through which the artist's work was given to the world, might be seen and become known by the public, and he never made any money from the sale of paintings. To Stieglitz the artist's work was a unique and miraculous thing in the world and thus to be respected. It could never really be paid for by any amount of money. Stieglitz's assertion of the dignity of the artist's work, and his unwavering devotion to this principle are also on record at Yale.

In conjunction with these activities the Stieglitz Collection of paintings, photographs, etc., was growing all the time. The history of the Collection has been too well recorded to repeat here. In tangible form it represents better than any words Stieglitz's consistent relationships with the artists he was most interested in and shows the way in which he stood for his group, guaranteeing them their living,

2. Quoted with kind permission of Georgia O'Keeffe, from her article in the *New York Times*, December 11, 1949, "Stieglitz: His Pictures Collected Him."

giving them the freedom to work as they wished. His interest in seeing the artist's growth, seeing the new work year by year, and his steadfast support of his group to the world, is likewise shown in these series of letters.

Another primary aspect of Stieglitz was his enormous capacity in two areas not usually combined in one man. He was a uniquely creative person in his own medium, photography. At the same time he was intensely interested in the Artist in the broadest sense of the word, in the creative element that may exist in anyone, doing anything, recognized or ignored. This spark of latent or realized potentiality was the thing of importance in people, the thing that made them or their work alive, that might give something to the world of enduring value. So Stieglitz encouraged it. Both Paul Rosenfeld and Sherwood Anderson have said this in different ways in letters to Stieglitz. Rosenfeld wrote to Stieglitz, saying: "I was again struck by the curious manner in which you become for people not only a person but a symbol when you enter their lives."<sup>3</sup> And Sherwood Anderson wrote to Stieglitz:

But dear man, you do so make the world a living place for so many people. I imagine only a few have really got to know you . . . In our age you know there is much to distract from the faithful devotion to cleanliness and health in one's attitude toward the crafts, and it takes time to realize what the quality has meant in you. I really think man you have registered more deeply than you know in Marin, O'Keeffe, Rosenfeld, myself, and others. . . . whatever blows the actuality of life may deal you I think you may well know that no other man of our day is so deeply loved. You have kept the old faith that gets so lost and faint but that always has some man like yourself to make it real again to the younger ones.<sup>4</sup>

Stieglitz's interest in many people was essentially an *impersonal* interest in the creative process as manifested in a particular individual at a given moment. The degree to which he gave of himself to the person for that thing at that moment was likewise essentially impersonal, even though it might frequently seem uniquely personal to the individual involved. It was through this capacity that Stieglitz created an atmosphere which enabled the person to grow, to gain

3. Printed with kind permission of the executors of the Paul Rosenfeld Estate.

4. Printed with the kind permission of Mrs. Eleanor Anderson, for the Sherwood Anderson Estate.



confidence, to move in his life and in his work. The mistaking of the impersonal interest for a personal one is probably one of the most misunderstood aspects of Stieglitz, and during his life gave rise to countless misunderstandings and difficulties.

This momentary identification with the person before him makes Stieglitz's letters to others often difficult to understand if read as they are, ignoring the capacity for identification in Stieglitz. For when he wrote to a poet, he became a poet; likewise, when he wrote to a fool, he wrote in the fool's idiom.

Although there is no representative group of Stieglitz prints at Yale, it would be highly inaccurate to discuss Stieglitz without some mention of his own photographic work. For all the confusions and seeming contradictions of the written word are resolved in his prints. The best thing in Stieglitz with the truest line, the greatest clarity of vision, and the most extreme and undeviating integrity is seen in the body of his own photographs. It is this standard that Stieglitz set and maintained for himself in his own work that carries over into the highest aspects of his relationships to the people in his world, documented in the Archive material.

I have phrased my opening question "What is Stieglitz?" and not "What was Stieglitz?" in spite of his death in 1946. I have done this primarily because the moving forces Stieglitz stood for and fought for are as important now as during his life, and the effect of his work moving now in people who knew him or his work makes the question in the present tense most valid. His support both in actions and words of the creative element in people, his affirmation of life, his efforts to create conditions in which the American artists could work toward their highest standards, all are on the record for us to see if we wish, learn if we wish, ignore if we wish.

As the years go on, it seems that the prediction made by Charles Demuth in an early letter to Stieglitz is being fulfilled:

Together we will add to the American scene, more than has been added since the 60's and 70's—maybe more than they added. I feel that all together we are more or less fine.<sup>5</sup>

DORIS BRY.

5. Printed with the kind permission of Robert Locher, for the Charles Demuth Estate.