



THE PHOTOGRAVURE: Examples from 1897 – 2023

Laurie Archer
Christa Blackwood
Edward Curtis
Cy DeCosse
Frank Eugene
Josephine Sacabo
Eddie Soloway
Paul Strand
Edward Steichen
Alfred Stieglitz
Hiroshi Sugimoto



ALFRED STIEGLITZ, *Wet Day on the Boulevard (Paris)*, 1897, vintage photogravure from *Picturesque Bits of New York and Other Studies*.

Opening Reception: Friday, April 28, 2023, 5-7pm

Exhibition is on view April 28 - June 3, 2023

Obscura Gallery is excited to present a select survey of photogravures representing work from over a century, with prints dating from as early as 1897 to contemporary prints made in 2023. The earliest print in this exhibition is an 1897 Alfred Stieglitz photo from his portfolio *Picturesque Bits of New York and Other Studies*. The most recent work will be 2023 abstract landscapes from New Mexico and Chile created from polymer plates by Santa Fean Eddie Soloway.

The photogravure is an intaglio print process that, in the early development of photography, was invented to produce high-quality ink reproductions of photographs, featuring deep shadows and luminous highlights. Early photographic pioneers Joseph Nicéphore Niepce and William Henry Fox Talbot invented the process in the 1840s, and then it was perfected in 1879 by Karl V. Klíč. Traditionally, photogravures were photographs that were etched into a metal plate using light sensitive carbon tissue. The plate was then inked and run through a printing press to produce a positive ink print known for its distinctive, luminous tonal qualities. With most contemporary photogravures, the metal plates have been replaced with polymer plates and other less toxic chemicals are used in the process.

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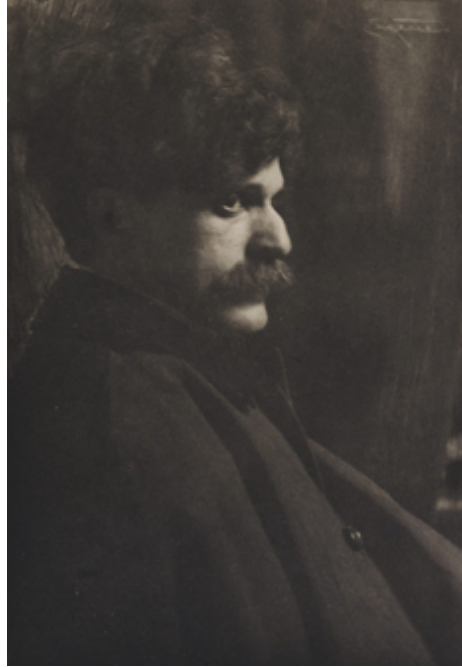
ALFRED STIEGLITZ, *The Hand of Man*, *Camera Work XXXVI*, 1902, 6.25 x 8.5", vintage photogravure.

In the history of Western photography, perhaps the most widely known examples of photogravures are from both Alfred Stieglitz's *Camera Work* periodical and Edward Curtis's *North American Indian Project*. Alfred Stieglitz has been celebrated as one of the greatest practitioners of the photogravure process. From the mid-1890s to the mid-1910s, Stieglitz printed large editions of photogravures of photographs – his own work and that of other photographers - most of which he included in his periodicals *Camera Notes*, *Camera Work*, and *291*. Photogravure was also the process used in Stieglitz's 1897 portfolio *Picturesque Bits of New York and Other Studies*, from which the photograph, *Wet Day on the Boulevard (Paris)*, 1897 is included in this exhibition. This 1897 portfolio, printed in an edition of 25 by Robert Howard Russell, included twelve photogravures on plate paper, using different ink colors. In addition to supervising the printing of each image, Stieglitz himself made the steel engravings from the diapositives (positives made from negatives).



ALFRED STIEGLITZ, *Wet Day on the Boulevard (Paris)*, 1897, 6 x 11.25", vintage photogravure.

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FRANK EUGENE, *Portrait of Alfred Stieglitz*, 1901, *Camera Notes* Vol. 4 No. 3, 1902, 6.25 x 4.5", vintage photogravure.

Through photogravure production, Stieglitz championed the work of many photographers and artists of his time, publishing them in magazines that set a new standard of excellence in photographic reproduction while highlighting important work from both Europe and the U.S. Included in this exhibition are photogravures from *Camera Work* and *Camera Notes* of images by Edward Steichen and Frank Eugene, in addition to those by Alfred Stieglitz.



EDWARD STEICHEN, *Rodin - Le Penseur*, *Camera Work Steichen Supplement*, 1906, 6 x 7.25", vintage photogravure on tissue.



EDWARD SHERIFF CURTIS, *Vanishing Race – Navaho*, 1904, *Plate 1, Portfolio 1*, 18 x 22", vintage photogravure.

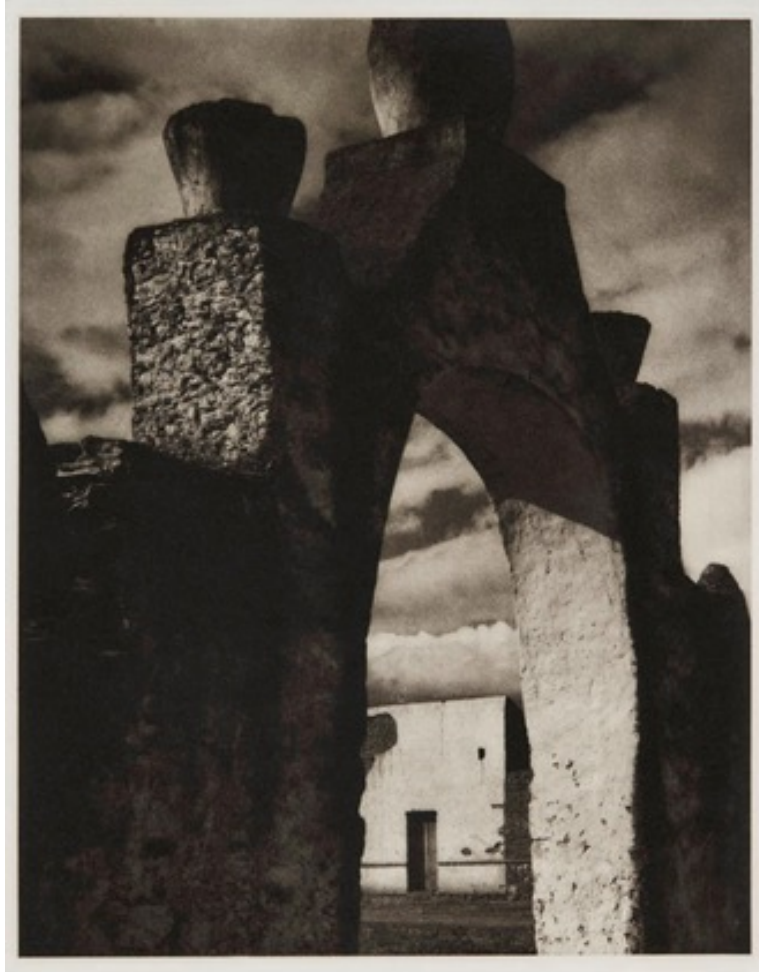
One of the longest running photogravure projects ever undertaken was Edward Sheriff Curtis's epic quest from 1907 - 1930 to document, through word and picture, the traditional cultures of Native Americans in the Western United States. Finally completing a 20-volume set, Curtis had pursued his images by traveling on foot and by horseback deep into the Indian territories. He packed his large-format camera and necessary supplies for months of field work. Curtis was motivated by the belief that he was in a desperate race against time to document the North American Indian, or what he called *The Vanishing Race*, before white expansion and the federal government destroyed what remained of the natives' way of life. In the exhibition, we have the first plate from this entire project, an image named "The Vanishing Race," as well as a few other prints from Curtis's enormous project.



EDWARD SHERIFF CURTIS, *A Travois – Blackfoot*, 1926, *Volume 18*, 5.5 x 7.25", vintage photogravure.

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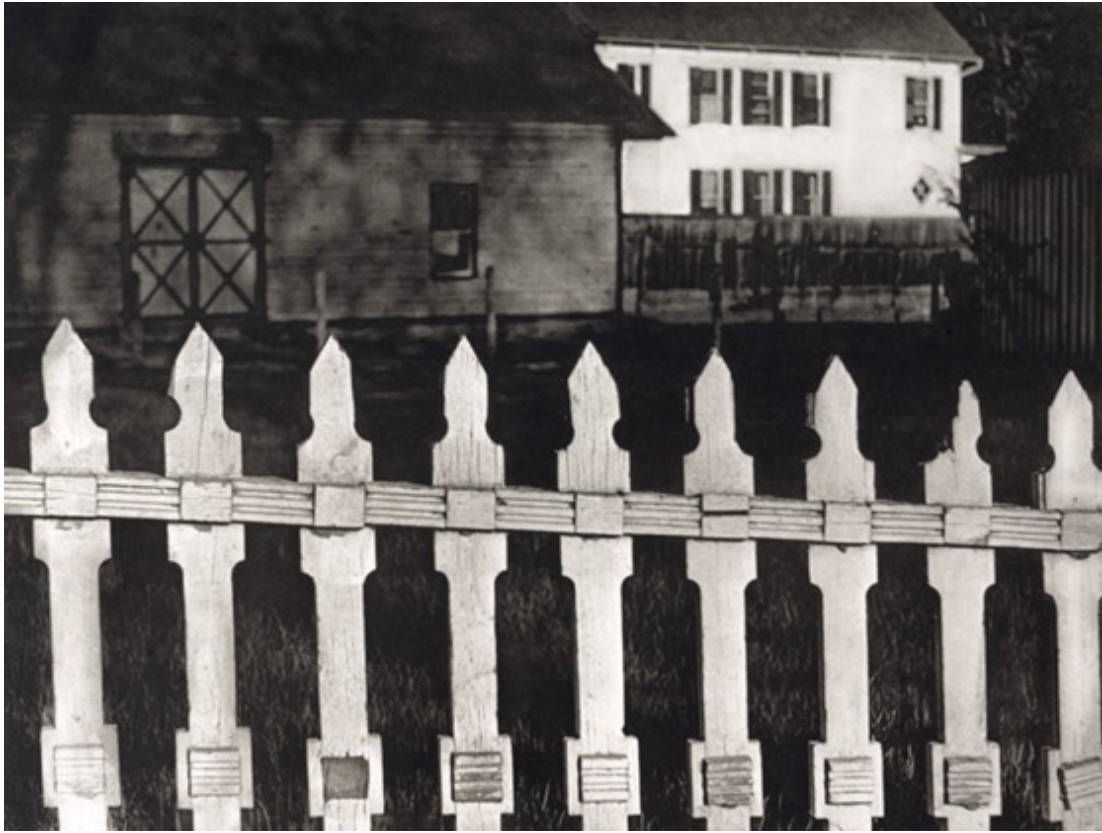
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PAUL STRAND, *Church Gateway, Hidalgo*, 1932, from *The Mexican Portfolio* 1967, 10 x 8", photogravure, edition of 1000.

Also on exhibit is a notable photogravure produced by Paul Strand in 1932. At the invitation of Carlos Chavez, the Secretariat of Public Education in Mexico, Strand traveled around Mexico, photographing churches, religious imagery, local communities, and the land. Strand's work culminated into the 1940 *Photographs of Mexico* portfolio of 20 photogravures. Twenty-seven years later, he then re-released the portfolio in an edition of 1,000 under the revised name *The Mexican Portfolio*. The print we have in this exhibition, *Gateway Hidalgo*, is from the second edition of this portfolio. Strand said of the gravure portfolio: *"The thing that was original about this portfolio was that it was a conscious attempt to see if one could make reproductions which were so close to the originals – the originals being platinum prints – that they were good enough to be framed....And I chose gravure as the one medium that I thought was possible to do that job."*

Over the years Aperture and other organizations have been involved in special projects using the photogravure to print work of well-known photographers. One example we have in the exhibition is a photogravure published posthumously in 1980 of Paul Strand's iconic and best-known image, *The White Fence, Port Kent, 1916*. This hand-pulled dust-grain photogravure, bearing the authorization seal of the Paul Strand Archive, was printed by master photogravure printer Jon Goodman in an edition of 300. The print is accompanied by a text written by poet Robert Creeley.



PAUL STRAND, *The White Fence, Port Kent, 1916*, Aperture, 1980, 9.5 x 11.75", photogravure, edition of 300.

In addition to the 20th Century masters, we have several photogravure pieces in the exhibition by contemporary artists who are using photogravure in new and exciting ways. All of the contemporary artists are using polymer plates in their work.



CY DECOSSE, *Provence Thistle (Dipsacus Sylvestris)*, 2002, 13.75 x 13.75", photogravure, edition of 50.

Obscura Gallery's represented artist Cy DeCosse, along with printer Keith Taylor, were at the forefront of revitalizing nineteenth-century photographic processes into contemporary photographic practices in the early 2000s. Cy believes in close, intimate images that show ordinary things in a surprising new light. By painting his backgrounds, he "floats" the subject, creating a surreal still life distinctive to his personal style.



CY DECOSSE, *Common Milkweed*, 2002, 13.75 x 13.75", photogravure, edition of 50.

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LAURIE ARCHER, *On the Road XVI*, c. 2014, photogravure and thread, edition of 7.

Santa Fean Laurie Archer created a series titled *On the Road* in which she photographed detritus she found on morning walks, and incorporated the influence of William Stafford's poetry. Archer additionally stitched thread onto the photogravure from a solar plate etching. Solar plate, developed in the 1970s, is a light sensitized steel backed polymer material used by artists as a simple, safer and faster alternative to the metal plate photogravure printing techniques.



CHRISTA BLACKWOOD, *a dot red: Chisos*, 2013, 18 x 24", photogravure, edition of 9.

Christa Blackwood's "a dot red : a series" explores genres and images found in landscape and portrait photography, by combining historical photographic technique with more contemporary conceptual strategies. Blackwood photographed glorious natural landscapes in the Southwest in similar vein to the majestic landscapes of the great American West produced by famed photographers Edward Weston and Ansel Adams. In the printing process, Blackwood inserted a saucer-sized translucent red dot in various areas on the image — an area that perhaps in a more traditional, and male-made image, a woman would have stood as a model, as many male landscape photographers such as Weston had done with their models in the landscape. These works shift the focus of attention and enable a reconsideration of their classical subjects. The gravures are printed on kitakata, a thin Japanese paper made with gampi fiber.



EDDIE SOLOWAY, *Ephemeral Ice*, From the series, *Luminance*, 2023, 9.25 x 13.75", photogravure, edition of 9.

After years printing in both analog and digital darkrooms, Santa Fean Eddie Soloway has been exploring the hand-pulled photogravure process. The images in the exhibition from Patagonia, (above) and New Mexico (below) capture the gentle radiance and refraction of light in abstract landscape.



EDDIE SOLOWAY *Spectral Emanations I*, 2023, 9.25 x 13.75", photogravure, edition of 9.