

NEWS RELEASE

Paul Strand: Master of Modern Photography

Dorrance Galleries

October 21, 2014–January 4, 2015

This fall, the Philadelphia Museum of Art will present the first major retrospective in nearly fifty years to be devoted to Paul Strand (American, 1890–1976), one of the greatest photographers in the history of the medium. It will explore the remarkable evolution of Strand's work, from the breakthrough moment in the second decade of the twentieth century when he brought his art to the brink of abstraction to his broader vision of the place of photography in the modern world, which he would develop over the course of a career that spanned six decades. This exhibition will examine every aspect of Strand's work, from his early efforts to establish photography as a major independent art form and his embrace of filmmaking as a powerful medium capable of broad public impact to his masterful extended portraits of people and places that would often take compelling shape in the form of printed books and must be considered among his greatest achievements. *Paul Strand: Master of Modern Photography* will celebrate the recent acquisition of more than 3,000 prints from the Paul Strand Archive, which has made the Philadelphia Museum of Art the world's largest and most comprehensive repository of Strand's work.

Timothy Rub, the George D. Widener Director, stated: "Strand's achievement was remarkable. The distinctive place he holds in the history of modern photography rests on his extraordinary artistic talent as well as his belief in the transformative power of the medium in which he chose to work. From his early experiments with street photography in New York to his sensitive portrayal of daily life in New England, Italy, and Ghana, Strand came to believe that the most enduring function of photography and his work as an artist was to reveal the essential nature of the human experience in a changing world. He was also a master craftsman, a rare and exacting maker of pictures. We are delighted to be able to present in this exhibition a selection of works drawn almost exclusively from the Museum's collection, and to share these with audiences in the United States and abroad. *Paul Strand: Master of Modern Photography* will introduce a new generation of visitors to a great modern artist."

Paul Strand's career spanned a period of revolutionary change both in the arts and in the wider world. Always motivated by a strong sense of social purpose, he came to believe that depicting the human struggle, both economic and political, was central to his responsibility as an artist. The exhibition will begin with his rapid mastery of the prevailing Pictorialist style of the 1910s, reflected in serene landscapes such as *The River Neckar, Germany* (1911). On view also will be his innovative photographs of 1915–17 in which he explored new subject matter in the urban landscape of New York and new aesthetic ideas in works such as *Abstraction, Porch Shadows, Twin Lakes, Connecticut* (1916). These new directions in Strand's photography demonstrated his growing interest both in contemporary painting—especially Cubism and the work of the American artists championed by Alfred Stieglitz—and in discovering for photography a unique means of expressing modernity. Strand's work of this period includes candid, disarming portraits of people observed on the street—the first of their type—such as *Blind Woman, New York* (1916), and *Wall Street, New York* (1915), a seemingly random arrangement of tiny figures passing before the enormous darkened windows of the Morgan Trust Company Building, which illustrates Strand's fascination with the pace of life and changing scale of the modern city.

During the 1920s—a period often called “the Machine Age”—Strand became transfixed by the camera's capacity to record the mesmerizing details of other machines. At this time his ideas about the nature of portraiture began to expand significantly. These new and varied interests can be seen in the sensuous beauty of close-up images of his wife, Rebecca Salsbury Strand, to cool, probing studies of his new motion picture camera, such as *Akeley Camera with Butterfly Nut, New York* (1922–23). His ideas about portraiture also extended to his growing preoccupation with photographic series devoted to places beyond New York, such as the southwest and Maine, where he would make seemingly ordinary subjects appear strikingly new. The exhibition will look at Strand's widening engagement with his fellow artists of the Stieglitz circle, placing his works alongside a group of paintings by Georgia O'Keeffe, Marsden Hartley, Arthur Dove, and John Marin, as well as photographs by Stieglitz, who played an important role in launching Strand's career. These juxtapositions will reveal the rich interaction between Strand and his friends and peers during this time.

Over the next several decades, Strand traveled widely in search of new subjects, seeking always to establish a broader role for photography. The exhibition will convey his growing interest in the medium's unique ability to record the passage of time and the specific qualities of locale, as seen in *Elizabethtown, New Mexico* (1930), one of many photographs he made of abandoned buildings. It will show Strand returning to a core motif—the portraiture of anonymous subjects—during the time when he lived in Mexico, from 1932 to 1934. This period abroad had a profound influence on him, deepening his engagement with leftist politics. Many of the works he created at this time, whether depicting individuals, groups of people, or even religious icons, convey in their exceptional compositions a deep empathy with his subjects. This can also be seen in his series devoted to Canada's Gaspé Peninsula from the same decade.

By the 1940s, books would become Strand's preferred form of presentation for his work, reflecting a synthesis of his aims both as a photographer and filmmaker, and offering him the opportunity to create multifaceted portraits of modern life. In his photographs of New England, Strand drew upon cultural history, conveying a sense of past and present in order to suggest an ongoing struggle for democracy and individual freedom. Images of public buildings, such as *Town Hall, New Hampshire* (1946), and portraits of people he met, including *Mr. Bennett, East Jamaica, Vermont* (1943), were reproduced in *Time in New England*. This book was published in 1950, the year Strand moved to France in response to a growing anti-Communist sentiment at home, and reflected his political consciousness. Strand described New England as "a battleground where intolerance and tolerance faced each other over religious minorities, over trials for witchcraft, over the abolitionists . . . It was this concept of New England that led me to try to find . . . images of nature and architecture and faces of people that were either part of or related in feeling to its great tradition."

The exhibition will also highlight his project in Luzzara (1953), where he focused his attention on the everyday realities of a northern Italian village recovering from the miseries of war and fascism. This series is centered on images of townspeople, as seen in *The Family, Luzzara (The Lusetitis)* (1953), and fulfills his long-held ambition to create a major work of art about a single community. Strand's photographs of Luzzara were published in *Un Paese: Portrait of an Italian Village* (1955).

In 1963, Strand was invited to Ghana at the invitation of Kwame Nkrumah, its first president following the end of British rule. Strand, fascinated by Ghana's democracy during these years, was excited to photograph a place undergoing rapid political change and modernization. He saw modernity in the efforts of a newly independent nation to chart its future unfolding simultaneously alongside traditional aspects of Ghanaian culture. Portraiture was central to the project, as seen in *Anna Attinga Frafra, Accra, Ghana* (1964), in which a young schoolgirl balances books on her head. The project led to the publication of *Ghana: An African Portrait* (1976).

In Strand's later years, he would increasingly turn his attention close to his home in Orgeval, outside Paris, often addressing the countless discoveries he could make within his own garden. There he produced a remarkable series of still lifes. These were at times reflective of earlier work, but also forward-looking in their exceptional compositions that depict the beauty of myriad textures, free-flowing movement, and convey a quiet lyricism.

In addition to Strand's still photography, the exhibition will present three of his most significant films, in whole or as excerpts. *Manhatta* (1921), his first film and an important collaboration with painter and photographer Charles Sheeler, will be shown in full. This brief non-narrative "scenic" is considered the first American avant-garde film. It portrays the vibrant energy of New York City, juxtaposing the human drama on the street with abstracted bird's-eye perspectives taken from high buildings and scenes of the ferry and harbor, all punctuated by poetry from Walt Whitman. Strand's second film, *Redes* (1936), conveys the artist's growing

social awareness during his time in Mexico. Released as *The Wave* in the U.S., the film is a fictional account of a fishing village struggling to overcome the exploitation of a corrupt boss. *Native Land* (1942) is Strand's most ambitious film. Co-directed with Leo Hurwitz and narrated by Paul Robeson, it was created after his return to New York when Strand became a founder of Frontier Films and oversaw the production of leftist documentaries. Ahead of its time in its blending of fictional scenes and documentary footage, *Native Land* focuses on union-busting in the 1930s from Pennsylvania to the Deep South. When its release coincided with the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, it was criticized as out-of-step with the nation, leading Strand to return exclusively to still photography.

Paul Strand: Master of Modern Photography is curated by Peter Barberie, the Brodsky Curator of Photographs, Alfred Stieglitz Center at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, with the assistance of Amanda N. Bock, Project Assistant Curator of Photographs. Barberie said, "Whether he was printing in platinum, palladium, gelatin-silver, making films, or preparing books, Strand was ultimately more than a photographer. He was a great modern artist whose eloquent voice addressed the widest possible audience, and this voice continues to resonate today."

About Paul Strand

The last major retrospective dedicated to Strand was organized by the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1971. Born in New York City, Strand first studied with the social documentary photographer Lewis Hine at New York's Ethical Culture School from 1907–09, and subsequently became close to the pioneering photographer Alfred Stieglitz. Strand fused these powerful influences and explored the modernist possibilities of the camera more fully than any other photographer before 1920. In the 1920s, Strand tested the camera's potential to exceed human vision, making intimate, detailed portraits, and recording the nuances of machine and natural forms. He also created portraits, landscapes, and architectural studies on various travels to the Southwest, Canada, and Mexico. The groups of pictures of these regions, in tandem with his documentary work as a filmmaker in the 1930s, convinced Strand that the medium's great purpose lay in creating broad and richly detailed photographic records of specific places and communities. For the rest of his career he pursued such projects in New England, France, Italy, the Hebrides, Morocco, Romania, Ghana, and other locales, producing numerous celebrated books. Together, these later series form one of the great photographic statements about modern experience.

The Paul Strand Collection at the Philadelphia Museum of Art

In 2010, the Philadelphia Museum of Art announced that it had acquired the core collection of photographs by Paul Strand. Through the generosity of philanthropists Lynne and Harold Honickman, Marjorie and Jeffrey Honickman, and H.F. "Gerry" and Marguerite Lenfest, the Museum received as partial and promised gifts 1,422 images from The Paul Strand Archive at the Aperture Foundation, as well as 566 master prints from Strand's negatives by the artist Richard Benson. The Museum also entered into an agreement with the Aperture Foundation to purchase an additional 1,276 photographs.

The Paul Strand Collection permits the study of Strand's career with prints from the majority of his negatives, including variants and croppings of individual images. Together with other photographs already owned by the Museum, the acquisition makes the Philadelphia Museum of Art the world's most comprehensive repository for the study of his work, just as it is for Marcel Duchamp and Thomas Eakins.

Catalogue

The exhibition will be accompanied by a substantial scholarly catalogue, published by the Philadelphia Museum of Art, featuring 245 plates and scholarly essays by Peter Barberie and Amanda N. Bock. The catalogue will also include the transcript of a roundtable conversation about Strand's later projects and the broader photographic culture of the 1950s–70s, a comprehensive annotated chronology of Strand's life and work, compiled by Samantha Gainsburg (\$75.00). The international tour is organized by the Philadelphia Museum of Art in collaboration with Fundación MAPFRE and made possible by the Terra Foundation for American Art.

Support

In Philadelphia, the exhibition is supported by The Annenberg Foundation Fund for Major Exhibitions, The Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation, The Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation, Lynne and Harold Honickman, Veritable, LP, The PepsiCo Foundation, Jeffrey A. Beachell, Leigh and John Middleton, Mr. and Mrs. Stewart A. Resnick, Constance and Sankey Williams, The Women's Committee of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, John Alchin and Hal Marryatt, Lois G. and Julian A. Brodsky, Steve and Gretchen Burke, David and Julia Fleischner, Mr. and Mrs. Robert A. Fox, Mr. and Mrs. Berton E. Korman, Ira M. Lubert, Lisa D. Kabnick and John H. McFadden, Bruce and Robbi Toll, an anonymous donor, and other generous supporters.

In-kind support provided by Pace/MacGill Gallery.

The accompanying publication is supported by Lynne and Harold Honickman and The Andrew W. Mellon Fund for Scholarly Publications at the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

The acquisition of The Paul Strand Collection was made possible through the leadership support of Lynne and Harold Honickman, Marjorie and Jeffrey Honickman, and Marguerite and Gerry Lenfest; and with contributions from The Annenberg Fund for Major Acquisitions and The Henry P. McIlhenny Fund in Memory of Frances P. McIlhenny, The John D. McIlhenny Fund, Barbara and Theodore Aronson, the Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation, Lois G. and Julian A. Brodsky, Annette Y. and Jack M. Friedland, Zoë and Dean Pappas, Andrea M. Baldeck, M.D., and William M. Hollis, Jr., Thomas Callan and Martin McNamara, Constance and Sankey Williams, Betty and Harry Gottlieb and family, Ruth and Peter Laibson, The Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation, Bonnie and Peter McCausland, and an anonymous donor, as well as through the generosity of Cynthia B. Holstad, The Women's Committee of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Donald V. Selkow and Lynne Clibanoff, Anne R. Albright and Trevor R. Drake, Jill and Paul Aschkenasy,

Ralph Citino and Lawrence Taylor, Sally and Timothy Rub, Innis Howe Shoemaker, and many other generous individuals, and through funds raised from deaccessioned works of art.

Exhibition tour dates

- Philadelphia Museum of Art, United States, October 21, 2014–January 4, 2015
- Fotomuseum Winterthur, Switzerland, March 7–May 17, 2015
- Fundación MAPFRE, Madrid, Spain, June 3–August 30, 2015
- Victoria and Albert Museum, London, England, March 19–July 3, 2016

Exhibition hours

Tuesday through Sunday: 10:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Wednesdays and Fridays until 8:45 p.m.

Social media

Facebook: philamuseum; Twitter: philamuseum; Tumblr: philamuseum; YouTube: PhilaArtMuseum; Instagram: @philamuseum

The Philadelphia Museum of Art is one of the most important museums in the United States, with a collection of more than 227,000 works of art. The Museum's many galleries present painting, sculpture, works on paper, photography, decorative arts, textiles, and architectural settings from Asia, Europe, Latin America, and the United States. Its facilities include a landmark main building; the Ruth and Raymond G. Perelman Building; the Rodin Museum; and two historic houses in Fairmount Park, Mount Pleasant and Cedar Grove. The Museum offers a wide variety of activities for public audiences, including special exhibitions, programs for children and families, lectures, concerts, and films.

For additional press information contact the press office at pressroom@philamuseum.org or 215-684-7860. For general information, call 215-763-8100 or visit philamuseum.org.