



In Focus:

Group *f/64* and the Bay Area

December 2, 2015-May 29, 2016

Mills College Art Museum, Back Gallery

This catalogue is published on the occasion of *In Focus: Group f/64 and the Bay Area*, an exhibition of thirty photographs from the Mills College Art Museum's collection. The exhibition is organized by members of the Fall 2015 course Museum Studies Workshop taught by Dr. Stephanie Hanor: Eliza Ayres, Iona de la Torre, Melony Ford, Akari Goda-Maurezzutt, Sarah Renning, and Veronica Yazmín.

The exhibition was presented at the Mills College Art Museum, December 2, 2015 through May 29, 2016.

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The Mills College Art Museum is a forum for exploring art and ideas and a laboratory for contemporary art practices. As a teaching museum at a dynamic liberal arts college for undergraduate women and co-ed graduate studies, the museum is dedicated to engaging and inspiring the intellectual and creative life of Mills students through innovative exhibitions, programs, and collections.

COVER: Imogen Cunningham, *Magnolia Blossom*, 1925, Gelatin silver print, MCAM

In Focus:

Group *f/64* and the Bay Area



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Ansel Adams, *Burnt Trees, Owens Valley*,
1940, Gelatin silver print, MCAM



Alma Lavenson, *Abandoned Boat*, ca. 1945,
Gelatin silver print, MCAM

INTRODUCTION

Dr. Stephanie Hanor

Featuring work from the Mills College Art Museum's collection, *In Focus: Group f/64 and the Bay Area* examines photographs by Ansel Adams, Imogen Cunningham, John Paul Edwards, Alma Lavenson, Sonya Noskowiak, Brett Weston, and Edward Weston. Group f/64 was a collective of early 20th-century Bay Area photographers who shared a modernist photographic style characterized by sharp-focused and closely cropped images seen through a particularly Northern Californian point of view.

The exhibition showcases MCAM's unique holdings and demonstrates the connections between Mills and this pioneering group of photographers. *In Focus* features images taken on Mills' campus as well as portraits of innovative visiting artists and faculty, including musician Henry Cowell and muralist Diego Rivera. Work in the exhibition also demonstrates the influence of Albert Bender, the San Francisco philanthropist who helped found MCAM in 1925 and who financed Ansel Adams' first portfolio of photographs. The selected photographs highlight iconic modernist images, including botanicals by Imogen Cunningham, as well as more unusual examples of the artists' work, such as early portraits by Ansel Adams.

The group exhibited together in 1932 at the M.H. de Young Museum in San Francisco. Their name, f/64, was taken from the smallest lens aperture on their large format cameras, which allowed them to capture the greatest possible depth of field in order to create sharply detailed prints. Revolutionary in their day, Group f/64 was one of the first modern art movements equally defined by women. From the San Francisco Bay Area, its influence extended internationally, contributing significantly to the recognition of photography as a fine art.

In Focus: Group f/64 and the Bay Area is curated by students in the Fall 2015 Museum Studies Workshop: Eliza Ayres, Iona de la Torre, Melony Ford, Akari Goda-Maurezzutt, Sarah Renning, and Veronica Yazmín. Their original research is featured in this exhibition catalogue.



ANSEL ADAMS: A DISCERNING AND SELECTIVE IMAGINATION

Eliza Ayres

Ansel Adams' portraits depict everyday life and frame moments in time. While he has received primary acclaim for his depictions of landscapes, his body of work exceeds these perimeters. His portraits capture the personalities of his subjects, in this case, Ina Coolbrith, who has been described by many as the most popular literary ambassador in the early American West. Adams uses techniques such as lighting to determine tonal relationships within the photograph. Another aspect that was very important to him was knowing where to stand and at which angle to take the photograph. Adams was truly able to capture the feelings and personality of his sitter.

In the mid 1920s, Adams, alongside renowned photographers such as Edward Weston, Imogen Cunningham, John Paul Edwards, Consuelo Kanaga, Alma Lavenson, and Willard Van Dyke, formed the photography collective, Group f/46. The group name derives from a diaphragm number on the camera lens. It signifies the qualities of clearness and definition in images, elements that were unanimously important to the group. Adams was devoted to abandoning the Pictorial aesthetic, which portrayed soft focus images, and moving towards a straight photography aesthetic that portrayed clear and sharp images. Group f/64 pioneered this approach in the first half of the twentieth century. His leadership role in Group f/64 was crucial to the movement's success and his development as an artist.

Adams had a love and appreciation for California landscape, specifically Yosemite, which proved to be a recurring subject throughout his life's work. During the mid 1920s he started developing techniques in portraiture as well, stating, "I saw portraits by Dorothea Lange, Consuelo Kanaga, and Imogen Cunningham rather early. During my early development I was concentrating on music,

Ansel Adams, *Portrait of Ina Coolbrith*,
1926, Gelatin silver print, MCAM

so I don't feel I was affected strongly by other photographs."¹ Although he took many snapshots of people in and around San Francisco as a teenager, it was not until 1926, when he was 24, that he began taking more pictures of people, what he considered his first portraits. It could be said that the members of Group f/64 inspired him with their powerful portraits because it was around this time that he began taking his own portraits.

Adams described photography as "the recording of physical and emotional aspects of subjects as it appears in the camera guided by a discerning and selective imagination of the artist."² His approach was to not interfere or interfere only at a limited degree with the reality of the scene, as opposed to the candid approach of waiting for a meaningful expression from his subject and usually missing it. "With most of my subjects I've worked on the theory that the character of the person is in their face at the time of repose, and not in the momentary passing of expression."³

He spent much of his time developing photos in his darkroom, exploring new techniques that he could use on his negatives. Burning and dodging is the process of painting with light onto the enlarger in the darkroom the areas of the photo he thought should be darker or lighter than others. Group f/64 pioneered this technique which was monumental to the development of modern photography. For this portrait of Ina Coolbrith, Adams set up a tripod that he would use to take the photograph. "I prefer a deep rich and featureless background unless there are good reasons for environmental inclusions. I thoroughly dislike conventional or disorganized backgrounds. My portraits indoors were made against a plain screen; its distance from the light controlled its depth of tone. When using daylight, I could choose from the black or white side of the screen, with different distances from the window or skylight and with varied angles, I could manage a wide variety of effects."⁴ We can see that Adams strategically chose to photograph Coolbrith in her natural habitat, at home surrounded by books and her beloved cat. This particular work seems like a transition between Pictorialist photography and straight photography. We see the aspect of Pictorialism with the dreamy, soft focus as well as the concept of straight photography that depicts a scene and focuses on detail.

His subject, Ina Coolbrith, was an extraordinary woman

1 Ansel Adams and James Alinder, *Ansel Adams: 50 Years of Portraits* (San Francisco: Friends of Photography, 1978), p. 13.

2 Adams and Alinder, *Ansel Adams*, p. 21.

3 Mary Street Alinder, *Group f.64: Edward Weston, Ansel Adams, Imogen Cunningham, and the Community of Artists Who Revolutionized American Photography* (New York: Bloomsbury USA, 2014), p. 45.

4 Adams and Alinder, *Ansel Adams*, p. 16.



who in many ways was at the crossroads of history. At birth she was given the name Josephina Smith in honor of her uncle, Joseph Smith, founder of the Mormon church. At a young age her father, Don Carlos Smith died of pneumonia and her mother remarried a non-Mormon. Her mother was determined to erase their controversial past with the founder of a new religion, so they changed their names and crossed the Sierras on a wagon train settling into a new life in California.

Coolbrith was named California's first poet laureate in 1915. She has been described as the most beloved poet in California history, and many children memorized her poems as part of their education. Much like Group f/64 with photography, Coolbrith was an important transitional figure between 19th-century writing and a 20th-century world. As Oakland's first public librarian, Jack London himself described her as "the noble goddess who gave him the keys to the pathway to knowledge."⁵

Coolbrith experienced much controversy when she divorced her husband Robert Carsley after he threatened to kill her over disputes of infidelity. After the divorce she was able to become more independent and immerse herself in the colorful city of San Francisco. Coolbrith befriended a group of like-minded friends in the Bay Area who were defining the Western experience through prose and poetry, much like what Group f/64 was doing with photography. She

Ansel Adams, *Leaves, Mills College*,
ca. 1931, Gelatin silver print

⁵ Ed Herny, Shelley Rideout, and Katie Wadell, *Berkeley Bohemia: Artists and Visionaries of the Early 20th Century* (Layton, UT: Gibbs Smith, 2008), p. 22.

was living at 112 Lyon Street in San Francisco near Haight and Ashbury, in the same house where Janis Joplin would live forty years later.

Albert Bender became Adams' first benefactor and introduced him to Coolbrith. When Bender would visit Coolbrith in her old age, he arrived bringing her rare ports during the Prohibition era. Ina's passion for learning was recognized by Mills College on October 6, 1923 when she was awarded an honorary Master of Arts degree by President Aurelia Henry Reinhardt, a ceremony in which Bender was in attendance. Adams took portraits of Bender as well and spent time on the Mills Campus, one of his most famous photographs being *Leaves, Mills College Campus*.

The literary icon was photographed by Ansel Adams in 1926, the same year he made his renowned photograph, *Monolith, the Face of Half Dome*. In the photograph, Coolbrith is wearing a velvet robe with a long string of beads worn around her neck and a homemade white lace mantilla on her head. This portrait was taken two years before her death in 1928. She had a succession of white Persian cats throughout her life, the one photographed is named Popcorn. One reporter described her in this photograph as a "sad but stately figure," another as "having clear, luminous eyes, very sensitive and expressive hands."⁶ Adams used his own interpretation of her to manipulate the scene of the photograph, capturing the essence of her character.

In this portrait, he uses natural lighting as well as soft focus and tonalities. We see a theme that he uses regularly in portraits of the dark background and the highlighting of his subjects. The light hits the top of her head as well as the top of the cat, creating a dramatic contrast from the dark background. He also effectively captures the contrast of the cat's soft, white fur with its dramatic big, black eyes staring right at the viewer. We can see Adams' process of not suggesting posing and waiting until she was in a relaxed, natural position. "I think that if the person remains the person, and does not become a directed puppet, the question of reality is answered."⁷ The photo is taken in Coolbrith's house, a place where books line the walls. I believe Adams used this as a tool to portray her personality and accomplishments. In her old age, I think he does a powerful job showing the companionship between her and Popcorn.

When asked, do you consider portraits in contrast to the rest of your work, Adams replied: "I actually don't think of people

6 Aleta George, *Ina Coolbrith: The Bittersweet Song of California's First Poet Laureate* (California: Shifting Plates, March 2015), p. 252.

7 Ansel and Alinder, *Ansel Adams*, p. 35.



and rocks and trees as anything very different. If there is something out there that means something to me, I visualize it and I make the image. Of course, the people really mean more than the rocks, but I seem to reach an intuitive response in either case. Photography is a form of awareness and communication. Suddenly you see it's right and you make the exposure."⁸

Ansel Adams, *Monolith, the Face of Half Dome*, 1927, Gelatin silver print

⁸ Alinder, *Group f.64*, p. 43.



THROUGH THE CAMERA'S EYES: A GENERATION ENCAPSULATED IN AN EDWARD WESTON PORTRAIT

Iona de la Torre

In 1925, Mills College was in its prime as an institution of higher learning for young women whose families could afford to send them here. Situated in the foothills of Oakland, California, the College saw a time of extensive development through the 1920s and beyond as the rest of the economy crashed with the stock market in October of 1929. Outside its gates, Edward Weston and the other photographers of Group f/64 seized the opportunity to inspire an entirely new way of capturing an image during a time of social and economic unrest. For Weston, an effective vehicle for this dramatic stylistic shift was portraiture, and this genre made up a great majority of his body of work from this period. Gazing out from one of many portraits taken at his studio in Carmel, California around 1929 is a woman named Ann Virginia Craig, whose experience represents a similar period of change in the history of Mills College.

Craig's name has spent the better part of a century hiding in the dusty archives of the Mills College library. These records, including archived installments of the yearbook, traditionally compiled by the junior class each year during this period in the college's history, reveal that Weston's mysterious sitter led a rather distinguished career as a Mills student.

The *Oakland Tribune* contributes some substance to Craig's story. The Wednesday, April 30, 1924 issue lists Ann Virginia Craig as a candidate for DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS, and a native of California.¹ The May 12 issue confirms her as a participant in the commencement exercises of 1924, where Miss Elizabeth Rheem Stoner—head of the Physical Education department-- bestowed upon her the coveted Pem Prize Pin, an "award in the shape of a

Edward Weston, *Ann Virginia Craig, Mills College Student, Class of 1925 and 1926*, Gelatin silver print, MCAM

¹ "Ninety to Graduate from Mills: Commencement Week Festivities to begin May 7," *Oakland Tribune*, April 30, 1924: 1. newspapers.com. Web. 31 October 2015.

pin representing the Egyptian symbol of Life . . . each year presented . . . to the senior 'Pem' [Physical Education Major] with the highest proficiency in scholarship as well as in gymnastics and dancing."² The former President of the Freshman Class in 1921, she was also named a "Graduate scholar in hygiene and physical education," and is pictured with the senior class in the 1925 installment of the yearbook, *Myrtaceae*.³ She participated in senior class activities that year, including chairing the Orpheum Committee and serving on the council of Mills Hall, where she lived—both as Head Proctor (first term) and President (second term).⁴

In a 1925 article from the *Oakland Tribune*, announcing candidates for that year, Craig is listed as a candidate for a General California State Certificate.⁵ She was also a graduate member of the Honor Society that year. What all of this equates to: It would appear that Craig was a graduate of both the classes of both 1924 and 1925; earning first her B.A. and then her California State Certificate. The Class of 1922 hails the first graduate students as having paved the road for future generations in their publication of the annual:

There has been no more significant sign of Mills' progress than the establishment, in the fall of 1920, of a graduate department, through which students may work for a Master's degree or a state secondary certificate. . . . The excellence of [the first graduate students'] work has shown that Mills College is rapidly becoming an institution to be known far and wide not only as an undergraduate college, but as a place of higher culture from which may come the finest type of scholar and teacher.⁶

The period spanning from 1912-1943 is known as "The Second Era" in the College's history. By this time, Mills had a reputation as a fine institution of higher learning for affluent women. By the 1920s, both founders were deceased and a new era had been ushered in.

2 Mills College Class of 1922, *The Mills College Junior Yearbook* (Oakland, CA: Mills College, 1921), p. 42.

3 "Mills College to Award Honors on 12th of May: List of Candidates for High Degrees; State Certificates to be Issued," *Oakland Tribune*, April 24, 1925: Page(s). *newspapers.com*. Web. 31 October 2015.

4 Mills College Class of 1925, *Myrtaceae* (Oakland, CA: Mills College, 1924), pp. 44, 149.

5 "97 Degrees Awarded to Mills Girls: Eleven States and Four Nations Represented in 1924 Class; 90 Bachelor and 7 Master Sheepskins Given," *Oakland Tribune*, May 12, 1924: 1. *newspapers.com*. Web. 8 November 2015.

6 Mills College Class of 1922, *The Mills College Junior Year Book* (Oakland, CA: Mills College, 1921), p. 46.



Ann Virginia Craig in *Myrtaceae*, 1924 Mills College Yearbook, Published by the Class of 1925.

The campus was an ever-changing landscape: physically, culturally, and academically. At the helm was Aurelia Henry Reinhardt, the longest-standing President in the history of the College:

The years between 1916 and 1943 time mark a period of growth and expansion at Mills College in which the work of the college attained significance of a national and international character. These years cover the administration of Dr. Aurelia Henry Reinhardt. Her training and experience assured a clearly defined modern approach which the era demanded. A re-definition of goals and a readjustment necessary for continuity of financial support was needed to meet the administrative, educational, and financial challenges of a new century.⁷

Go on an Admissions tour of the campus today and Dr. Reinhardt—known as ‘The Pres’ amongst students of the day—will be introduced as the woman who “got us through two World Wars and the Great Depression, all while being a single mother of two.”⁸ She was responsible in large part for the physical development of the campus: the building count increased from eleven to twenty-eight between her inauguration and her retirement. The holder of a Ph.D from Yale and President of the American Association of University Women, she held women’s education in high regard and is quoted as having stated: “to graduate a woman, a whole woman, is, I should say, the distinctive effort of the American college for women.”⁹

The Mills women of this time were a generation unto their own. A college education was a privilege that few people at this time could even imagine having access to, and to be a woman complicated things. The landscape has changed for women pursuing higher education, and they now outnumber their male counterparts. According to *Forbes*, the male-female ratio in American private colleges was 42.5-57.5. As a result, the role of the contemporary women’s college is being questioned. But this trend only surfaced in the 1970s—decades after Craig’s college career ended.¹⁰

7 Rosalind A. Keep, *Fourscore and Ten Years: A History of Mills College* (Oakland, CA: Mills College, 1946).

8 Mira Mason-Reader, *Mills College Tour Guide Script 2014-2015* (Oakland, CA: Mills College Office of Undergraduate Admission, 2014).

9 George Hedley, *Aurelia Henry Reinhardt: Portrait of a Whole Woman* (Oakland, CA: Mills College, 1961).

10 Daniel Borzelleca, “The Male-Female Ratio in College,” *Forbes*. 16 Feb. 2012. Web. 2 Nov. 2015.



Dr. Aurelia Henry Reinhardt, Mills College
President, 1934.

A 2013 Mills document on best practices regarding transgender students recounts the significance of women's colleges in the history of higher education in the United States:

Women's colleges in the U.S. . . . have their roots in the passionate interest of a small number of educators in providing opportunities for post-secondary study to students who were excluded from or marginalized within mainstream colleges and universities on the basis of their gender. For most of the history of higher education, women have been the sole gender category against whom exclusionary practices were named and codified.¹¹

Dr. Reinhardt's vision for Mills in the 20th century was clearly stated in 1927: "Yesterday the simple curriculum, the small group of students, the isolation of campus life; today the diversified curriculum, the enlarging group of students, and the linking of all campus activities with the needs and opportunities of the great world."¹²

The cycle of change that this portrait represents is especially poignant now, at a time when Mills College again finds itself on the precipice of change. On October 19, 2015, the administration proposed a list of curriculum changes that would vastly alter the academic and cultural landscape of the College. During Craig's tenure as a Mills student, a number of changes were made towards making Mills a non-sectarian school, which likely met with a resentful reaction from the students, not unlike what is occurring now.

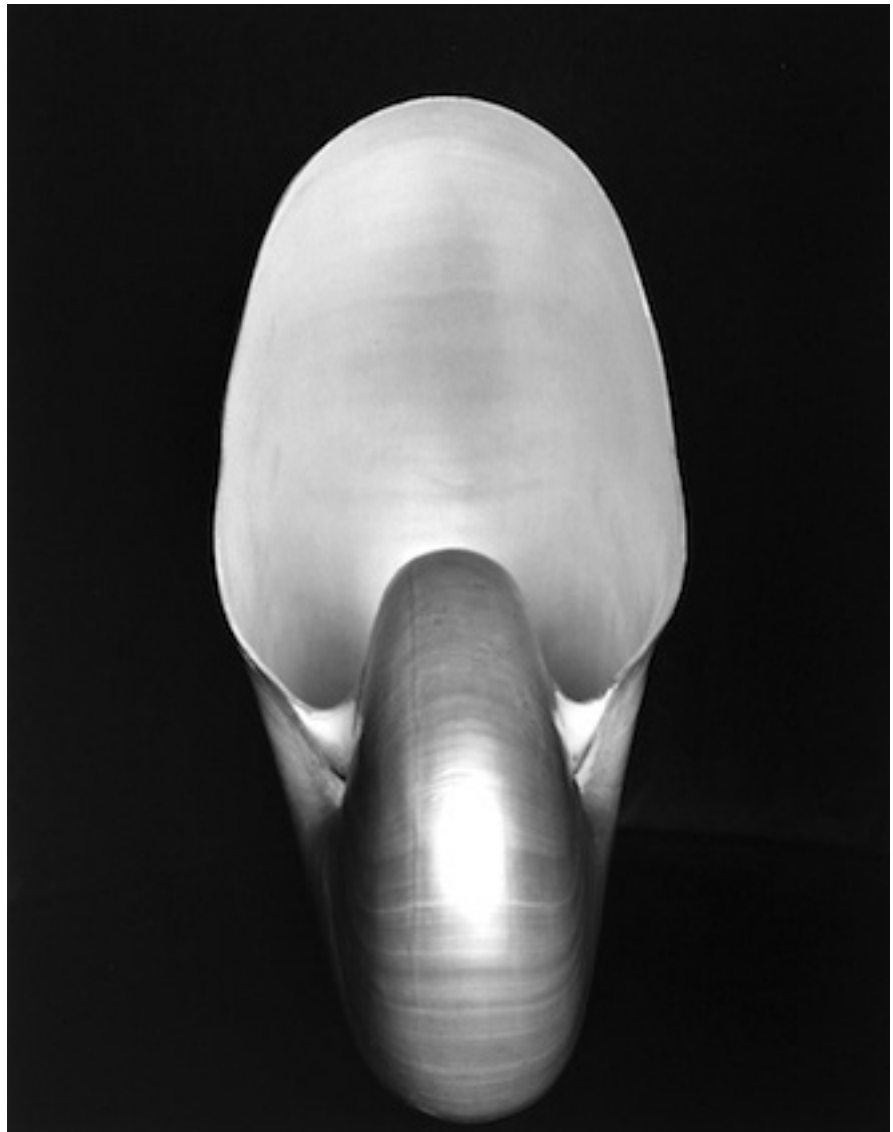
Given a mixed track record in regards to his treatment of women, it is unlikely that women's empowerment was even remotely what Weston had in mind when crafting this portrait of Ann Virginia Craig, Class of 1925. Women were disposable in Weston's mind: "Although he remained married to Flora, he found other women essential . . . With each new passion, he felt a surge of energy that recharged his creativity and enabled him to see more clearly every new object on which he focused his lens."¹³ For photographers like Weston, times were always hard financially, and he was not concerned with the struggles of women pursuing enlightenment. He was used to pinching pennies; "living on the

11 *Report on Inclusion of Transgender and Gender Fluid Students: Best Practices, Assessment, and Recommendations* (Oakland, CA: Mills College Diversity and Social Justice Committee, 2013).

12 *Mills College Strategic Plan 2013-2018: Preparing Students for the 21st Century*. (Oakland, CA: Mills College, 2013).

13 Mary Street Alinder, "Edward Weston." *Group f.64: Edward Weston, Ansel Adams, Imogen Cunningham, and the Community of Artists Who Revolutionized American Photography* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 1-26.

Edward Weston, *Shell*, 1S, 1927, Gelatin silver print



edge."His craft was what mattered to him.

From college graduate to seashell, Weston had a way of making the subject of a portrait all that really matters to the viewer. This was, in essence, the very goal of straight photography— the focus of Group f/64. The idea that a very powerful image of a person—or anything—can be created through very simple, un-doctored means was at its core; a new and radical idea in its time. An innovative stride in the realm of photography, the objective itself was simple, and can be framed by a simple question: How does one create a modern photograph?

The portrait of Craig is a very realistic image. Modern in every way, it says all it needs to. The subject is not looking directly at the camera, but instead gazes at a point somewhere outside of

the frame of the picture—where is not important. The subject has just a hint of a smile on her face, and her head is slightly tilted. There is nothing remarkable in the background; the portrait could have been taken anywhere (if not for the inscription that reads, ‘Edward Weston, Carmel’). From her hair to her clothes, the sitter is a woman of her time period: one can imagine what sort of dress is attached to the white collar of her top, and it is notable that she is wearing eye glasses—a fashionable yet expensive accessory for the 1920s-30s. The viewer sees the sitter as the photographer saw her through his own eyes. The “staged” nature of a studio portrait is not detrimental here, and it is the only vestige of Pictorialism in this work. Although it does not look particularly candid, there is nothing esoteric, dreamy, or abstract about the shot. It represents an approach very different from how “the Pictorialists injected their own sensibility into our perception of the image—thereby imbuing it with pictorial meaning.”¹⁴

A “reformed Pictorialist,” Weston could be considered a bridge of sorts between Pictorialism and straight photography. Although he strove for the vivid, fine-lined black and white shots characteristic of this new style, his portrait subjects have enough mystery to plant the seeds of questions in the mind of the reader. Without any of the context of Ann Virginia Craig’s life at Mills, one wonders, ‘Who was she? Where was she from? What did she do with her life after Mills?’ Her grin and gaze entice the reader to ponder over her. Fellow Group f/64 photographer Ansel Adams referred to Weston as:

A profound artist who has made a great contribution to photography. A formalist in the emotional sense, his conceptions are often neo-romantic rather than austere. He derives design and pattern from most of his subject material. . . . There are few photographers who have correlated technique and expression as completely as Edward Weston.¹⁵

In taking this photograph, Weston created a portrait of a graduate of what has become a small but mighty liberal arts college designed to graduate legions of the “whole woman,” and therefore captured a moment in time as well as the profound history behind it. Ann

14 Lisa Hostetler, “Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History: Pictorialism in America,” *metmuseum.org*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, October 2004. Web. 6 July 2015.

15 Therese Thau Heyman, Mary Street Alinder, and Naomi Rosenblum, “Statement for ‘Camera Craft,’ 1933.” *Seeing Straight: The f.64 Revolution in Photography* (Oakland, CA: Oakland Museum, 1992).

Virginia Craig, Class of 1924 and 1925, walked these halls during a time when the College had not yet earned its non-sectarian motto. But what is discernable of her story makes it easy to see why “One destination; many paths” is an appropriate symbolic phrase for Mills College. The Mills students of Craig’s time pioneered the realm of higher education for generations to follow. What Weston has achieved through this realistic and yet mysterious portrait is perhaps more remarkable from the viewpoint of our time: he has given a face to a generation.



WHAT IS SEEN: VISIBILITY IDENTITY, AND ALMA LAVENSON'S *STABLE BOY*

Melony Ford

A young black man sits in a chair against a stable. His eyebrows are raised, staring off-camera with an off-put expression. Perhaps he is surprised or unimpressed, but whatever has caught his gaze is lost to history. In his hands, clasped in his lap along with a jacket and a burning cigarette, is the reins to a horse who seems aware of the unknown action as well. The moment is caught with a technical clarity difficult even in modern photography by Group f/64 member Alma Lavenson. At first glance the photo may seem unremarkable, however the work exists within fascinating contexts, both in relation to U.S. and art history. This essay will analyze Lavenson's photograph with a sociopolitical understanding of the Bay Area at the time, namely in relation to The Great Migration and post-industrialization market shifts. The fact that *Stable Boy* goes largely undocumented outside of Mills College, and that this analysis is therefore largely deductive, should teach gallery visitors to consider how and why certain works become artist's legacies, and what works go unseen.

The Great Migration, Consumer Construction, and The Bay Area

The Great Migration was a historical phenomenon, largely sparked by World War I, wherein black Americans began to disperse from the South into the rest of the country, especially the East and West Coasts where wartime construction boomed and liberal reputations flourished.¹ This era saw a large increase in black citizenship in California, especially in San Francisco and Sacramento. However, this migration was not celebrated at the time. Social scientists frequently pathologized black people for what they perceived as

Alma Lavenson, *Stable Boy*, ca. 1950,
Gelatin silver print, MCAM

1 Shirley Ann Moore, "Getting There, Being There: African-American Migration to Richmond, California, 1910-1945," in *The Great Migration in Historical Perspective: New Dimensions of Race, Class, and Gender*, ed. Joe William Trotter Jr (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), pp. 106-216.

inherent instability. City planners would racially segregate the population's neighborhoods in cities like Richmond, and even census takers in California would minimize the presence of black people in their state.

Meanwhile, this migration overlapped on the tail-end of another social phenomenon, one less obviously connected to this photograph: the social creation of the consumer. Douglas Ward writes about the construction of the consumer which took place between industrialization and World War I.² In the midst of industrialization, emphasis was put on the importance of the producer. Obviously producers still had to have consumers, but the producer was in control of the market. In other words, "the customer is always right" was not the default mindset of mass production. This changing priority was facilitated through the beginnings of market research, searching for the ideal consumer in order to demonstrate where in the United States producers should and should not focus their products and promotion.

Interestingly, the results of this Capitalist project mirrored a major concept Anne McClintock writes about in *Imperial Leather*. Intersectionality is a familiar concept to the Mills community, the idea that individual people inhabit multiple identities that come together to shape their privileges and social status. McClintock takes this idea one step further, demonstrating that these identities actually shape and rely on each other.³ In one of her examples from the 1800s, so-called "feminine" traits were applied to colonized people, while "racial" traits were applied to the colonizers' wives, based upon assumptions that both were mentally inferior and needed colonizing males to take care of them. In the moment this essay analyzes, the consumer was an ideal identity that upheld and required notions of gender, class, and race by being gendered, classed, and racialized. These market studies would rely on notions that black people and migrants, among other categories of people, were not good consumers, thus racializing and classing the consumer as a white person and landowner, and in exchange making being a consumer something desirable and supreme. Meanwhile, the researchers would encourage producers to not advertise or distribute in places that had high populations of black people or migrants, making them unable to attain ideal consumership. As the project of creating the consumer became successful, it began to further disenfranchise those who did not have access to that

2 Douglas B Ward, "Capitalism, Early Market Research, and the Creation of the American Consumer" in *Journal of Historical Research in Marketing*, 2009, pp. 200-223.

3 Anne McClintock, "Double Crossings" in *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

identity. In short, politics around the Great Migration and the shift to consumerism came together to devalue black people in the United States, even in areas like California that had liberal reputations.

Group f/64's Focus on the Unseen

Stable Boy is unlike Lavenson's usual works, typically of landscapes and industrialism. However, her work as a Group f/64 member was in many ways about seeing the unseen. The collective's work was not about abstraction, but rather, capturing subjects with clean, technical photographic skills. For this to be interesting, it must draw attention to what is real and goes unnoticed, what would be mundane or cloaked. Therefore, invisibility would have mattered to Lavenson, as with any other member of Group f/64. The man in the photograph is reacting to something, but to Lavenson what he was reacting to mattered less than the fact that he was reacting, having a human moment in a dehumanized existence.

As a group of Californians, women, people of color, and working class artists, the members of Group f/64 honored the notion of invisibility because at this time they, too, were invisible in their own ways. In the era of early market research previously mentioned, California was not even surveyed, reflecting an assumption that the state and its citizens were not quite American. In conjunction with the intersections of their individual identities, it can be seen how in the early years of these artists' working careers they struggled to be seen and heard. It is also interesting to note who within Group f/64 achieved fame and visibility, and more importantly, who did not.

What *Stable Boy* Can Teach Us About Art Accessibility

At the time *Stable Boy* was taken, the Great Migration brought a large group of black American workers to the Bay Area. Meanwhile, the social creation of the ideal consumer further disenfranchised these migrant citizens, for their race and class as well as the act of migration entirely. While *Stable Boy* is unlike Lavenson's standard landscapes, it remains true to the fascination of the mundane or unseen present in other works by Group f/64.

Alma Lavenson worked alongside prolific photographers such as Imogen Cunningham, Ansel Adams, and Dorothea Lange, producing work of equal quality and impact. However, she lacks the fame and documentation that her peers obtained in their lifetimes. As a result, her work lacks the same documentation: *Stable Boy*, a visually stunning photograph steeped in important cultural history,

is essentially nonexistent outside of Mills College. The photograph that has instead become Lavenson's legacy is a self-portrait of her hands. While the portrait is also phenomenal work, it shares with *Stable Boy* a quality of remarkability in Lavenson's portfolio while lacking the sociologically critical punch. While engaging with a show of works so tied into what is seen and how, the reader is encouraged to question of the museum world what art is seen, what artists are seen, and why. When one enters a museum, are they seeing the stable boy, or the privileged experience he looks upon?



Alma Lavenson, *Self-Portrait (with Hands)*,
1932, Gelatin silver print



THE GOLDEN GATE · SAN FRANCISCO

FROM A PHOTOGRAPH BY ANSEL EASTON ADAMS

PRESENTED BY

ALBERT M. BENDER

1932

STRAIGHT TO THE BAY

Akari Goda-Maurezzutt

The Golden Gate, San Francisco is a photograph taken by Ansel Easton Adams in 1932. The black and white photograph shows the landscape of the San Francisco Bay before the Golden Gate Bridge was built. The construction of the Golden Gate Bridge began on January 5, 1933, only one year after the photograph was taken, and was completed on April 19, 1937.¹ Within the monochromatic image, the coasts of both San Francisco and Marin County are visible stretching inwards from the left and right edges of the frame. As the land tapers off to a point, the Bay opens up towards the viewer. The calm water is dotted with ships, while the sky is filled with towering, white clouds.

The fact that neither shore reaches the middle of the image allows for a thin strip of water to exist unmolested in the center. The narrow band of water allows the bounds of the Bay to extend limitlessly. Paired with the low horizon and voluminous clouds, the entire scene takes on an ethereal feeling of a vast landscape caught for eternity in a single moment of time. Despite the viewer's possible familiarity with the area, the majesty conveyed through the image is humbling.

The subject of the photograph resonates with the wider body of Adams' work. Adams was famous for his work depicting the California landscape, particularly Yosemite National Park and the Sierra Nevada. His photographs of the natural environment in these locations were critical to the success of many land protection cases. Although Adams did not limit himself solely to landscape photographs, he is particularly well-known for them. Many of these photographs revolve around the theme of portraying the importance and dignity of nature. As seen in *Winter—Yosemite Valley*, taken by Adams in 1959, Adams elevated what the average viewer would consider a mundane object in nature and transformed it into

Ansel Adams, *The Golden Gate, San Francisco*, 1932, Lithograph on paper, MCAM

¹ John Bernard McGloin, "Symphonies in Steel: Bay Bridge and the Golden Gate" <http://www.sfmuseum.org/hist9/mcgloin.html>.



an object of fascination.

Adams met Edward Weston, a prominent photographer, in 1927. Both would eventually become members of Group f/64, which held its first exhibition in 1932, the same year in which *The Golden Gate, San Francisco* was taken.² Members of Group f/64 emphasized moving away from Pictorialism, a style of photography which featured soft-focus images and subject matter that often revolved around fictional stories, to straight photography, which featured sharp-focus images and subject matter of everyday objects or people that became extraordinary through photography. *The Golden Gate, San Francisco* not only follows the guidelines for straight photography, but was also created around the time Adams was a member of Group f/64, which was formed in October 1932.³

2 William Turnage, "Ansel Adams, Photographer," <http://www.anseladams.com/ansel-adams-information/ansel-adams-biography/>.

3 Mary Street Alinder, *Group f.64: Edward Weston, Ansel Adams, Imogen Cunningham, and the Community of Artists Who Revolutionized American Photography* (New York: Bloomsbury USA, 2014), pp. xi, pp. 70.

Ansel Adams, *Winter—Yosemite Valley*, 1959, Gelatin silver print, MCAM



Adams' style of stark black and white images of the environment fit perfectly with Group f/64's vision of straight photography. As was mentioned earlier, the convention of photographing everyday objects allowed for these objects to transform in depth and meaning. Through the use of light and shadow, the subject matter is gifted with wonderful gravity. As seen in the image of Dorothy Minty, taken by Adams in 1929, the use of straight photography gave the image clarity, which allowed for the details of the subject matter including her forward gaze, to be accessible to the viewer. At the same time, the use of cropping placed the woman as the central entity in the image, while the light and shadow gave the figure visual complexity. What would have originally been a pretty, but unremarkable, portrait became the representation of a solemn young woman whose eyes draw the viewer in and encourage them to engage more deeply than they would otherwise.

The Golden Gate, San Francisco resides on a larger sepia-toned sheet with the words, "Presented by Albert M. Bender, 1932"

Ansel Adams, *Dorothy Minty*, 1929, Gelatin silver print, MCAM



Edward Weston, *Portrait of Albert Bender*,
1928, Gelatin silver print, MCAM

printed in neat typeset below the image. Albert Bender had a large impact on Adams's life, influencing his change from musician to photographer.⁴ Before it even existed, Bender managed to sell 50 copies of Adams's first portfolio of photography to his various contacts.⁵ An astute businessman and wealthy insurance broker, Bender was also a generous patron of the arts, and had ties to many of the art institutions in the Bay Area and California at large, which are still recognized today.⁶ The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco—which consists of the de Young Museum and the Legion of Honor—the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the University of California Berkeley Art Museum, and the San Francisco Library are all institutions which can attribute either their existence or a portion of their collection to the patronage of Bender. Bender's generosity to San Francisco in particular led to one exceptionally grateful fan crowning him with the title "Saint Albert of San Francisco."⁷

Bender was also a trustee of Mills College, and his legacy can still be seen in the existence of the Bender Room, located in Carnegie Hall. The Mills College Library also has an Albert M. Bender Collection comprised of approximately 5,600 books touching on a multitude of topics within the Special Collections Heller Room. Bender was fundamental in the establishment of the Mills College Art Museum, and his connection with Group f/64 may account for one reason that we can now boast of such a large collection of photography from this group. While other factors certainly come into play, including individual group members' personal connections to Mills College, as in the case of Imogen Cunningham, Bender's relationship with both Mills College at large and the Mills College Art Museum in particular was key.

While Bender made his living as an insurance broker, he used his money to support Group f/64, among other interests. His identity—as that of a patron of the arts—can be clearly seen in the image entitled *Portrait of Albert Bender*, taken by Edward Weston in 1928.⁸ Weston, mentioned earlier, was another member of Group f/64 with whom Adams was close. Weston was also a devout

4 Turnage, "Ansel Adams, Photographer," <http://www.anseladams.com/ansel-adams-information/ansel-adams-biography/>.

5 Alinder, *Group f.64*, pp. 55.

6 Online Archive of California, "Guide to the Albert M. Bender Papers, 1920-1941" <http://www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/tf8x0nb3jw/>.

7 Mills College, "Albert M. Bender Correspondence, 1920-1941," http://www.mills.edu/academics/library/special_collections/sc_amb_coll.php.

8 John Crosse, "Edward Weston and Mabel Dodge Luhan Remember D.H. Lawrence and Selected Carmel-Taos Connections," <http://socalarchhistory.blogspot.com/2011/12/edward-weston-and-d-h-lawrence.html>.

subscriber to the parameters of straight photography. In this image, Bender is rendered in sharp focus, his face turned at a three-quarter angle to the viewer. The black and white image is closely cropped to show just the bust of Bender, while his eyes gaze out of the right side of the frame.

Bender's ruminating mien gives him the appearance of a learned man of high taste and value, while the black and white rendering lends an additional level of sophistication. Through the composition and technical skill of Weston, Bender is rendered as the altruistic benefactor of artists and educational institutions. This image is also wonderful to view in juxtaposition with *Portrait of Albert M. Bender*, taken by Consuelo Kanaga in 1929, which portrays Bender as a classic businessman of the time. While both images speak the truth, the emphasis rests clearly on different aspects of his personality.

Though the location of *The Golden Gate, San Francisco* ties the image directly to the Bay Area, the photograph is also tied to Mills College and the themes of the exhibition in additional ways. The relationship of Adams and Bender is well documented, but the explicit text on *The Golden Gate, San Francisco* sheet ties the image directly to Bender, and with that connection comes all of the associations Bender had with Mills College. That *The Golden Gate, San Francisco* was found within the Mills College Art Museum collection can also speak to the possibility that the photograph may have been obtained as a gift through Bender.

The fact that Adams is particularly well-known for photographing landscapes and other nature scenes brings *The Golden Gate, San Francisco* easily into the fold with Adams's oeuvre. However, there is an additional level of significance behind the photograph. While not a rule, one of the subjects of straight photography was often industrial in some respect. Although *The Golden Gate, San Francisco* is not of an industrial scene, it does show the effect of the growing industrial market. Within the following year, the Golden Gate Bridge was already being built, and photographs by Adams in a few years show the exact same landscape with the addition of a large and imposing bridge in the background.⁹ Not only does *The Golden Gate, San Francisco* speak to the innovation within photography that Adams and Group f/64 brought to the art world, but also to the innovation of mankind.

9 The Ansel Adams Gallery, "The Golden Gate, before and After the Bridge," <http://www.anseladams.com/the-golden-gate-before-and-after-the-bridge/>



Consuelo Kanaga, *Portrait of Albert M.
Bender*, 1929, Gelatin silver print, MCAM



RUTH CRAVATH AT WORK

Sarah Renning

Acquired by the Mills College Art Museum (MCAM) in 1999 through the generosity of Susan Herzig and Paul M. Hertzmann, *Ruth Cravath at Work* is one of over one hundred pieces from the college's collection of photographs by the short-lived Bay Area photography collective, Group f/64. Group f/64 photographer Imogen Cunningham took the image of Ruth Cravath in 1953. Cravath, pictured working in her stoneyard studio, was a Bay Area-based sculptor and painter and good friend of Albert Bender.

Ruth Cravath (1902-1986) is known for her stonework, most prominently, civic sculptures, portrait busts and bas-reliefs. After studying at California School of Fine Arts, she began teaching classes at the institution in the 1940s along with Imogen Cunningham. Around the time Cunningham took the photo, in the 1950s, construction manager Charles Harney commissioned Cravath for a sculpture of San Francisco's Catholic name saint, Saint Francis of Assisi, at Candlestick Park.¹ With the recent demolition of Candlestick Park, the 27-foot statue has been moved to storage and has yet to be assigned a new home. This statue often goes uncredited, but, like Cravath herself, it is deep-seated in the Bay Area's iconography.

Imogen Cunningham (1883-1976) was a diligent student of photography in her youth and developed into one of the most distinctive artists in MCAM's collection. She studied chemistry at the University of Washington and won a grant to study photographic chemistry in Germany in 1909. At the Dresden University of Technology, Cunningham published a thesis on the integrity and convenience of using platinum prints rather than commercial paper.² When she returned from studying abroad and decided to take up photography as a profession, she began to develop her personal

1 Ted Atlas, "In the Doldrums" in *Candlestick Park* (San Francisco: Arcadia Publishing, 2010), p. 79.

2 Imogen Cunningham Trust, "Biography." Official Site for the Imogen Cunningham Trust (2011). <http://www.imogencunningham.com/page.php?page=about>.

style, taking botanical photographs as well as photos of industrial landscapes and nudes.

Cunningham lived in the Bay Area as a faculty wife of Roi Partridge until she gave birth for the second time to twin boys, after which she began exhibiting her photography more actively.³ Her work was exhibited at the Berkeley Art Museum and she showed in several solo exhibitions from Sacramento to Los Angeles. In 1932, Cunningham joined Group f/64 with which she exhibited at the M.H. de Young Memorial Museum. In 1934, Cunningham received an offer to work for *Vanity Fair* in New York, but was stunted when her husband refused to move across the country. In short, she took the job and she divorced her husband. After working at *Vanity Fair*, Cunningham returned to California and traveled the coast taking and exhibiting her photographs. In 1947, she accepted a position to teach at the California School of Fine Arts (CSFA) and worked alongside contemporaries Ansel Adams, Dorothea Lange, and Ruth Cravath.

Ruth Cravath at Work (1953) directly engages the move away from Pictorialist conventions and an interest toward a new documentarian approach known as “straight photography.” Pictorialism reached its peak in the 1920s, with the aesthetic premise to create effects, rather than record reality. Pictorialist photos were often doctored, manipulated with color, and even collaged together to conceive a new, imaginary version of reality. In dissent of such painterly visions, Group f/64 established a new convention that revolutionized photography as fine art. Straight photography is characterized by sharp focus and direct presentation of visual information. The clarity with which straight photography deviated from soft-focused Pictorialism became a fundamental characteristic of Group f/64, which assembled in 1932.

In 1937, five years after Group f/64’s first and only show at the de Young Museum, a government initiative appeared to emulate the innovations of Group f/64 and mark the beginning of a populist movement in documentary photography. Under direction from President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal, the Farm Security Administration (FSA) hired photographers to survey the country and document displaced farmers and rural families deeply affected by the stock market crash of 1929. The images were meant to inform the public as well as Congress of the national impact of the Great Depression on everyday Americans, and demonstrate issues the

³ Cunningham’s husband, Roi Partridge (1888-1984), also an artist, began teaching at Mills College in 1920, and served as the first director of MCAM from 1925-35.



Ruth Cravath, *St. Francis of Assisi*, 1971-1973, Stone, metal, and stained glass

New Deal was meant to solve.⁴ With the startling realist images that came out of the FSA's investigation into the economic downturn, photography saw the emergence of a new sub-genre: documentary photography. Although not explicitly considered art, documentary photography relied on compositional elements that had been established by Group f/64 only a few years earlier, such as a clear focus and precise point of view. The innovations of Group f/64 paved the way for the FSA, and ushered in a new era of modernism in fine art photography.

Compositionally, Cunningham's photo of Cravath harkens back to the hard-working Americans during the economic depression and World War II, though it was taken over twenty years later. With the war creating a desperate need for a labor force, women were recruited to work jobs previously designated only for men. During this time, there was an emergence of print media depicting women as industrial workers, prompting women to take manual labor jobs as a form of patriotism and support for their husbands, brothers and sons fighting the war abroad. However, this visual information quickly disappeared when the soldiers came home and expected to return to their jobs, effectively displacing women from the work force.

At first glance, Cravath appears to be hoisting industrial chains, quite larger than her modest frame, at the helm of a circular wheel, which combined alludes to shipyard imagery. A simply dressed woman with bandana-covered hair, straightforwardly photographed working in an industrial landscape, suggests she may be a woman working at one of San Francisco's shipbuilding facilities. Despite the imagery that connotes a workingwoman during World War II, Cravath was in fact working in her own sculpture studio. Not only was this an unusual profession for a woman in the 1950s, it was uncommon subject matter for photography. By this time, Cunningham had famously expanded from Group f/64 and established a new personal style in modernist photography known as street photography. This style revels in the success of Group f/64's dissent of Pictorialism, with a completely raw premise to capture un-staged content.

In her lifetime, Cunningham received several awards including a Fellow of the National Academy of Arts and Sciences, honorary Doctor of Fine Arts from the California College of Arts and Crafts, Oakland, and a Guggenheim Fellowship to print her early

⁴ Paul J. Karlstrom, ed., *On the Edge of America: California Modernist Art, 1900-1950* (1996), <http://ark.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft5p30070c/>.

negatives.⁵ The nation's most prominent museums have collected her work, including the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Getty Museum in Los Angeles, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Modern Art in New York, The Museum of Fine Arts in Boston and many more. A collection of her work has been acquired by the Smithsonian, as well as the Library of Congress and the National Gallery of Art. With a full life and list of remarkable achievements, Cunningham passed away in 1976 at 93 years old.

⁵ Imogen Cunningham Trust, "Biography." Official Site for the Imogen Cunningham Trust (2011). <http://www.imogencunningham.com/page.php?page=about>.



RIVERA THROUGH WESTON'S LENS

Veronica Yazmín

Portrait of Diego Rivera by Edward Weston, depicts the Mexican muralist artist in a close-up in which one can feel the bubbly personality of Weston's subject. Here the photographer allows the viewer an intimate moment where not just the sitter, but also the light and shadows, play a role in providing a sense of knowing this person. Rivera's face fills the photograph with his full-bodied cheeks, lips and nose as the light hits his features. The shadows produce an abstracted effect of Rivera's face, yet Weston gives enough detail that the sitter can be identified. Rivera's circular hat is an element that also frames the shot. The sharp image of the painter not only provides an intimate moment but one can almost touch his coat as one would in an embrace. The painter is larger than life in an accessible abstraction of his personality.

Before his collaboration with Group f/64, Weston had a long career as a photographer. As a child, his father gifted him a basic camera, a no. 2 Bulls-Eye Kodak, which sparked his love for photography. He was the oldest member of the group, in his mid forties when they formed in 1932, while the other group members were primarily in their twenties, including up-and-coming artists such as Ansel Adams and Weston's son Brett.

Weston had a portrait studio in Carmel where he often photographed tourists and sold prints of them for a living; he also did some of his best work there. A perfect example of this is *Pepper No. 30*, in which Weston turned an ordinary pepper into a sensual form. Using the figure of the pepper to resemble the silhouette of a body, Weston ignited a passion for composition and love for the ordinary beauty of his subject. In a flirtatious way, he reveals to the viewer just enough of the subject, making one explore his photograph to find reasoning, beauty and life in this ordinarily object. Always playing with light and shadow, Weston loved to venture into nature and took many wonderful landscape images of the coast of Carmel. Weston played with his subjects by creating in those



moments a story behind each photograph and, as with *Portrait of Diego Rivera*, he frames these stories for the viewer to see.

During the early twentieth century photographers used a soft-focus and painting-like photography style in order to make their photographs more of an art form. This type of photography was called Pictorialism and it was a way the photographer would show he or she had a hand in the making of the picture. Weston began as Pictorialist, however, for him, and later on for Group f/64, sharp and clear images were important. Group f/64 members believed that photography was an art form and that it had no need to mimic charcoal drawings or paintings in order to create great artistic photographs. Weston called this “straight photography” and the group became pioneers and mastered this art form. Images were geometric, close-cropped, with emphasis in the light and shadows of their subjects, exploring realism and finding abstraction. This ignited controversy and although they struggled to be considered artists at that time, many of the Group f/64 photographers became respected innovators of modernist form of art.

Edward Weston, *Pepper No. 30*, 1930,
Gelatin silver print



Weston and Rivera became friends when the photographer visited Mexico in 1923. Both men respected and admired each other and in *Daybooks of Edward Weston*, Weston writes:

Last evening Diego Rivera visited the exhibit. Nothing has pleased me more than Rivera's enthusiasm. Not a voluble emotion, but a quiet keen enjoyment, pausing long before several of my prints, the ones which I know are my best. Looking at the sand in one of my beach nudes, a torso of Margrethe, he said, "This is what some of us moderns were trying to do when we sprinkled real sand on our paintings or stuck on pieces of lace or paper or other bits of realism."¹

While in Mexico, Weston's artistic ability grew and he believed he could photograph anything and create a masterpiece.

Edward Weston, *Excusado*, 1925, Gelatin silver print

¹ Gina Genis, "Diego Rivera Visits Edward Weston, Mexico, 1923" <https://ginagenis.wordpress.com/2011/02/13/diego-rivera-visits-edward-weston-mexico-1923/>.

Excusado is a beautiful composition of a toilet taken from the floor looking up. By placing his camera on the floor, Weston gives the viewer a different perspective, giving the toilet power over the viewer. The toilet then becomes something of greatness, no longer something to be looked down upon. “Although some who saw *Excusado* thought it scandalous to treat a toilet as art-worthy, his friend Diego Rivera remarked that it was the most beautiful photograph he had ever seen.”²

Rivera and Weston would both eventually share the same patron, Albert Bender. Bender was a founding trustee of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in the 1930s. As patron of the arts, Bender helped many artists associated with the Bay Area including Weston and Rivera. Rivera was a known Communist at a time when the United States was weary of Communism and Bender used his connections in order to help the painter obtain his visa to visit San Francisco.

Below this photograph Weston inscribes, “To my dear friend Albert Bender.” Both Rivera and his wife, Frida Kahlo were also very fond of him. While they visited San Francisco, Kahlo painted a portrait of herself and Rivera, which she also dedicated to Bender. This portrait is part of the collection at SFMOMA.³

Members of Group f/64 were interested in close-cropped compositions, geometric forms, and the play of light and shadow. In *Portrait of Diego Rivera*, Weston achieves all of this and demonstrates that a photographer can and has created a masterpiece. He has captured the perfect moment, which will now live forever in a photograph, a lucid and clear image that will always be current as time passes without vanishing into a soft lingering memory. Weston was a man who followed his own convictions, whose art was influenced by the artists he surrounded himself with, including Diego Rivera. His work is not limited by fear of the unknown but influenced by discovery the beauty behind the ordinary.

If to live is to express the emotions of life,
then to create art is to express the life of emotions.
—Edward Weston⁴

2 Mary Street Alinder, *Group f.64: Edward Weston, Ansel Adams, Imogen Cunningham, and the Community of Artists Who Revolutionized American Photography* (New York: Bloomsbury USA, 2014), p. 19.

3 National Museum of Ireland, “A Dubliner’s Collection of Asian Art—The Albert Bender Exhibition” <http://www.museum.ie/en/exhibition/albert-bender.aspx?article=ad5e5b89-3cd5-4fa9-bb22-8a1f02211c3a>.

4 Alinder, *Group f.64*, p. 1.



Frida Kahlo, *Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera*,
1931, Oil on canvas, Collection SFMOMA,
Albert M. Bender Collection



EXTENDED LABEL TEXTS

Imogen Cunningham, *John Winkler, Etcher*,
1963, gelatin silver print, MCAM



Brett Weston

(United States, 1911—1993)

Air View of San Francisco Toward Oakland, 1940

Gelatin silver print

7 5/8 in. x 9 1/2 in.

Museum Purchase, Susan L. Mills Fund, 1941.3

This aerial photograph of San Francisco was taken in 1940 by Brett Weston. Weston was the son of founding member of Group f/64, Edward Weston. Although by 1940 the photography collective had gone their separate ways, this photograph conveys the ideas and new-found techniques that were pioneered by Brett Weston's father and his colleagues. Weston developed a love for photography at an early age and had a close artistic relationship with his father. When Weston was fourteen, his father took him out of school to work as his apprentice on a trip to Mexico. It was on this trip he found himself surrounded by artists such as Diego Rivera and Frieda Kahlo. Weston followed in Group f/64's footsteps by photographing the Bay Area and new the innovations of the West Coast.

1940 was a time of new development in California and Weston was there to document it. As opposed to Ansel Adam's photograph *The Golden Gate, San Francisco*, taken in 1932 before construction of the bridge, Weston depicts the city after the Golden Gate Bridge was finished in 1937 allowing an influx of people to the developing city. Similar to his photograph, *Dune*, 1934, Weston conveys patterning through line and shadow to give a sense of abstraction to the image. Abstraction was a technique he used throughout his entire career. Although the title of this work is *Air View of San Francisco Toward Oakland*, people who are familiar with San Francisco can see this is actually a view looking out towards Marin and Alcatraz.

Eliza Ayres

Imogen Cunningham

(United States, 1883—1976)

Helene Mayer, 1935

Gelatin silver print

9 1/4 in. x 7 1/4 in.

Museum Purchase, 1936.10

The statuesque blonde photographed by Imogen Cunningham is Helene Mayer. Cunningham, who lived on campus with her husband, Roi Patridge, founding director of the Mills College Art Museum and professor of studio arts, was always on the look out for subjects who projected strong and interesting personalities. She found these qualities in Mayer, a world famous fencer on a teaching fellowship at Mills College. She was known around campus as a talented, fun-loving teacher who wore evening gowns, white tennis dresses, American Indian jewelry, as well as her signature fencing outfits, like the one she is wearing in the photograph. Mayer found herself in the center of controversy at her time at Mills.

President Aurelia Reinhardt recruited her for a teaching fellowship after her visa from Scripps College was finished. This visa allowed her to stay in California and not return to Nazi Germany where she would have been put in a concentration camp. Reinhardt in a way was responsible for her rescue from Nazi Germany. In 1936, a year after this photograph was taken, the Olympics were held in Berlin. Under the Nuremberg Laws, Mayer was no longer considered a German citizen. However, many countries threatened to change the site of the Olympics if Nazi Germany did not allow Jewish people to participate. Because she was a previous gold medalist, Germany reluctantly extended the invitation to Mayer, who accepted and competed under the swastika.

Eliza Ayres





Ansel Adams

(United States, 1902—1984)

Winter—Yosemite Valley, 1959

Gelatin silver print

8 1/2 in. x 6 3/8 in.

Gift of Alice Harwood, class of 1924, 1986.26.12

“Yosemite Valley, to me, is always a sunrise, a glitter of green and golden wonder in a vast edifice of stone and space.” –Ansel Adams

Ansel Adams left his mark as a photographer primarily by his extensive work photographing the natural wonders of Yosemite Valley and beyond. This image is a microcosm of his extensive body of work. In contrast to the subject matter of some of Adams’ better-known works—such as *The Golden Gate, San Francisco* (displayed nearby) and *Moon and Half Dome*—this small portion of a pine tree covered in snow may not seem very remarkable, but it conveys the same aesthetic charm of nature that his more majestic pieces boast—but in a more intimate way.

An excellent example of straight photography, this image represents a tiny piece of a landscape as one might see it in person, upon crouching next to a pine tree on a wooded path to pick up an acorn. It transports the mind’s eye to that “vast edifice of stone and space” that Adams came to know so well—and extends an invitation for a leisurely winter’s day walk through the “glitter of green” represented thoughtfully and clearly in black and white. Adams has captured a pocket of “golden wonder” that might go unnoticed on an ordinary walk through the woods.

Iona de la Torre

Imogen Cunningham

(United States, 1883—1976)

Mills College Art Gallery [Original Front Entrance], 1925

Gelatin silver print

9 5/8 in. x 7 3/8 in.

Gift of the Albert M. Bender Estate, 1942.130.b

“Anybody is influenced by where and how he lives.”

— Imogen Cunningham

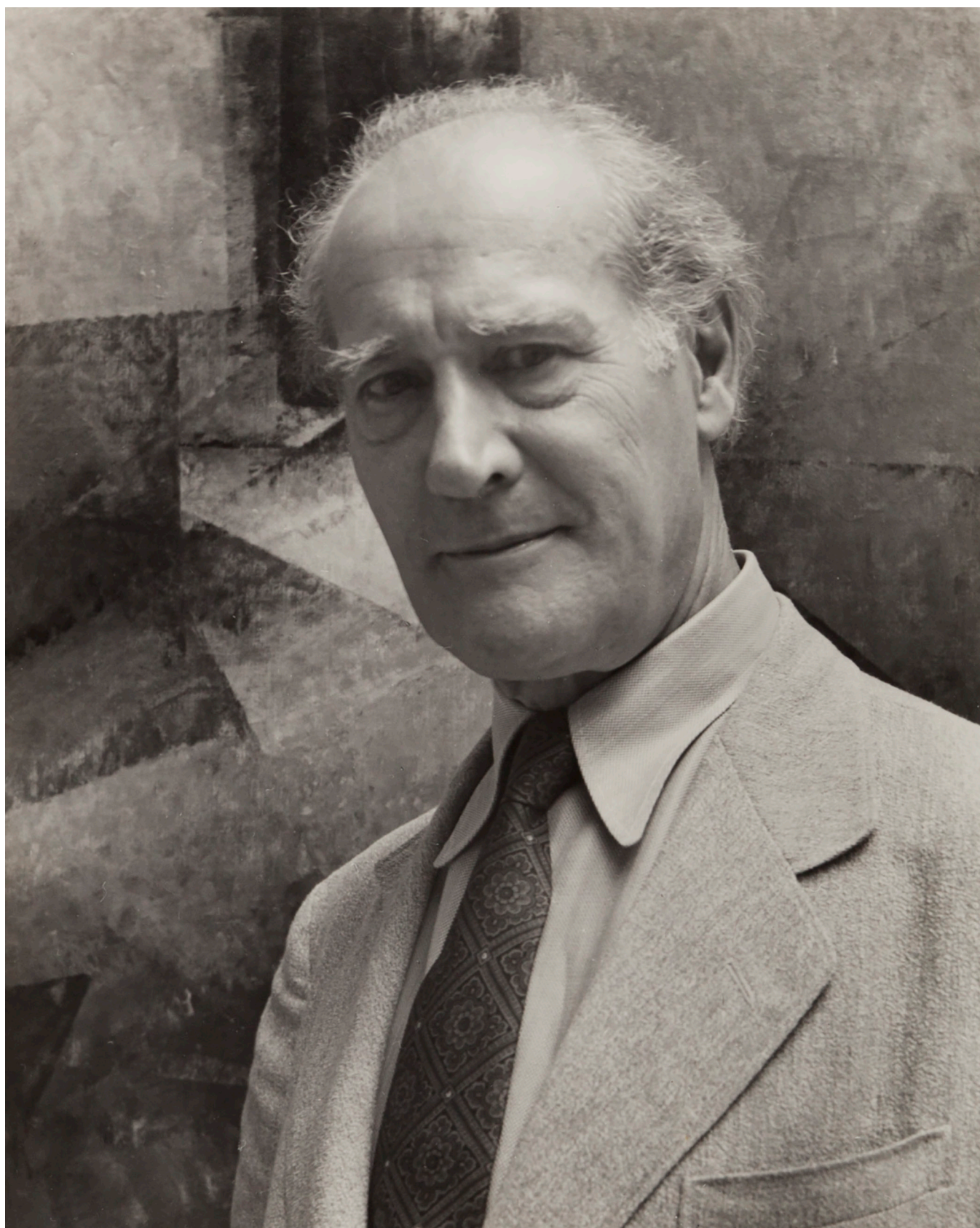
This image was taken in Imogen Cunningham’s back yard: the Mills College campus. At this time, the landscape of the college was changing drastically with the prolific work of notable architect Walter Ratcliff, Jr.—whose tenure as Architect and Planner for the college stretched from 1923 to 1947. The year 1925 marked the opening of the Mills College Art Gallery (now the Mills College Art Museum, or MCAM), one of Ratcliff’s first projects on campus. Cunningham’s photographs taken on the 135-acre campus during this period provide a visual record of the process. As the wife of Roi Partridge—the first Director of the Mills College Art Gallery—she lived on campus, and spent a lot of time documenting its aesthetic nuances.

This image of the original entrance to the gallery portrays the extravagant stone facade within the context of its proper time and place—the Spanish Colonial Revival style was popular in California in the 1920s. Ratcliff’s “take” on the style is characterized by his use of stone facades, paired with the signature elements of the architectural style: the roofing tiles, arched doorways and great wood paneled doors.

One of Cunningham’s great strengths as a photographer was being able to present a close-up of her subject matter as both a portrait and a microcosm of its context—a strategy she developed in great part through her work here at Mills.

Iona de la Torre





Imogen Cunningham

(United States, 1883—1976)

Portrait of Lyonel Feininger, Painter, 1939

Gelatin silver print

9 1/2 in. x 7 1/2 in.

Museum Purchase, Susan L. Mills Fund, 1957.70

Lyonel Feininger (1871—1956) was a German-American painter, photographer, cartoonist, and teacher born and raised in New York. In the years prior to this portrait, Feininger was a friendly rival to Edward Weston, working in the Pictorialist photographic style Weston detested, though over time he developed into a modernist artist. At the time this photograph was taken, he was teaching at Mills College. From when he was sixteen years old until he took the job at Mills, he had dual citizenship between the States and Germany. However, around the same time that Group f/64 showed at the de Young Museum, Feininger was targeted by the Nazi party. His work was even included in *Entartete Kunst*, the infamous degenerate art show organized by the Nazi party in 1936. Ultimately, it became unbearable for him and his wife to stay in Germany, and he spent time in Oakland before returning to the East Coast. Mills' role as a safe haven for fleeing Germans can also be seen in another stunning Cunningham portrait of fencer Helene Mayer.

Melony Ford

John Paul Edwards

(United States, 1884—1968)

Port Anchor, ca. 1932

Gelatin silver print

9 1/4 in. x 7 1/2 in.

Museum Purchase, Susan L. Mills Fund, 1941.19

Industrialization is a reoccurring theme in Group f/64's photography. In this stunning, true to life photograph of the anchor chain of a boat, Edwards plays with the idea of abstraction without a Pictorialist approach. It is easy to see the influence of fellow Group f/64 members, like Imogen Cunningham, who took very up close, very detailed photos of flowers. Edwards additionally demonstrates in this photo the power of making the mundane beautiful, a crucial element of Group f/64's work. This photo was most likely taken towards the end of the 1930s, when the Kaiser Shipyards were running. These 7 shipyards, four of which were in Richmond, were naval supply areas for World War II. On top of this, the proximity of Oakland and similar San Franciscan neighbors to the ocean also indicates a common presence of commercial or personal ships. However, Edwards is able to use contrast and abstraction to make the common extraordinary.

Melony Ford





John Paul Edwards

(United States, 1884—1968)

Boats and Spars, ca. 1932

Gelatin silver print

9 3/8 in. x 7 3/8 in.

Museum Purchase, Susan L. Mills Fund, 1941.18

“Group f/64 limits its members and invitational names to those workers who are striving to define photography as an art-form by a simple and direct presentation through purely photographic methods . . . Pure photography is defined as possessing no qualities of technic, composition or idea, derivative of any other art-form.”

— from the Group f/64 Manifesto, 1932

In *Boats and Spars*, John Paul Edwards creates a stunning display of contrasting formal elements. Two boats are presented side by side, towering above the viewer and framing the photograph with their bulk. The three white spars cut across the photograph, contrasting sharply with the curvilinear lines of the boats. Between the boats, spars, and cables, Edwards both creates depth within the photograph and produces an intricate maze of geometric shapes. Another example of contrast can be seen between the black and white components of the photograph. The overpowering presence of the boats, emphasized by cropping, is brought into sharp relief by the stark white background of the sky. The shadows within the white spars soften the contrast between the boats and the sky, while the added dimension from the cables further tie the opposing colors together. The entire photograph is a study of juxtaposition. The combination of monochromatic photography, cropping, and geometric shapes bring the industrial nature of the subject matter into focus. All of these elements are key ideals of Group f/64: Edwards presents the boats in a straightforward manner, using only the techniques that the camera offered him.

Akari Goda-Maurezzutt

Edward Weston

(United States, 1886—1958)

Portrait of Albert Bender, 1928

Gelatin silver print

8 5/8 in. x 6 1/2 in.

Gift of William P. Wentworth, 1980.18

A savvy businessman and wealthy insurance broker, Albert M. Bender was also a generous patron of the arts and a trustee at Mills College. Bender was instrumental in the creation of the Mills College Art Museum and donated many artworks to the museum's collection, including many of the photographs on display in this exhibition. Bender's legacy can still be seen in the existence of the Bender Room, located in Carnegie Hall, as well as the Albert M. Bender Collection. The Albert M. Bender Collection, located in the Special Collections Heller Room of the Mills College Library, consists of approximately 5,600 books on a variety of topics. Bender was a close friend of many of the members of Group f/64 and encouraged many of them in their photographic pursuits. Original correspondence between Bender and various members of Group f/64, such as Ansel Adams, can be seen in the Special Collections Heller Room. In *Portrait of Albert Bender*, Bender's contemplative gaze, combined with the elegant black and white photography, lend him an air of sophistication. Edward Weston's technical and compositional skills work together to depict Bender as a philanthropic benefactor of artists.

Akari Goda-Maurezzutt





Imogen Cunningham

(United States, 1883—1976)

Amaryllis, 1932

Gelatin silver print

9 1/2 in. x 7 1/2 in.

Museum Purchase, Susan L. Mills Fund, 1941.9

Amaryllis is an elegant example of Cunningham's interest in botanical subjects. It is also symptomatic of a marriage that conditioned her to investigate the world at the head of a pin. As a Mills College faculty wife cooped up with three young children, with a garden in her back yard, flowers and other plants became her primary subject. After she separated from her husband, Roi Partridge, Cunningham broadened her scope of subject matter to include industrial landscapes and nude portraiture. These dynamic moments were captured at a time when she needed distraction from her domestic life and mark an important phase in her work. The micro-botanical images demonstrate a fiercely contained creative energy and honed sensitivity to patterns in nature.

Sarah Renning

Sonya Noskowiak

(Germany, 1905—1975)

Basque Glass Bottle, 1938

Gelatin silver print

9 1/2 in. x 7 5/8 in.

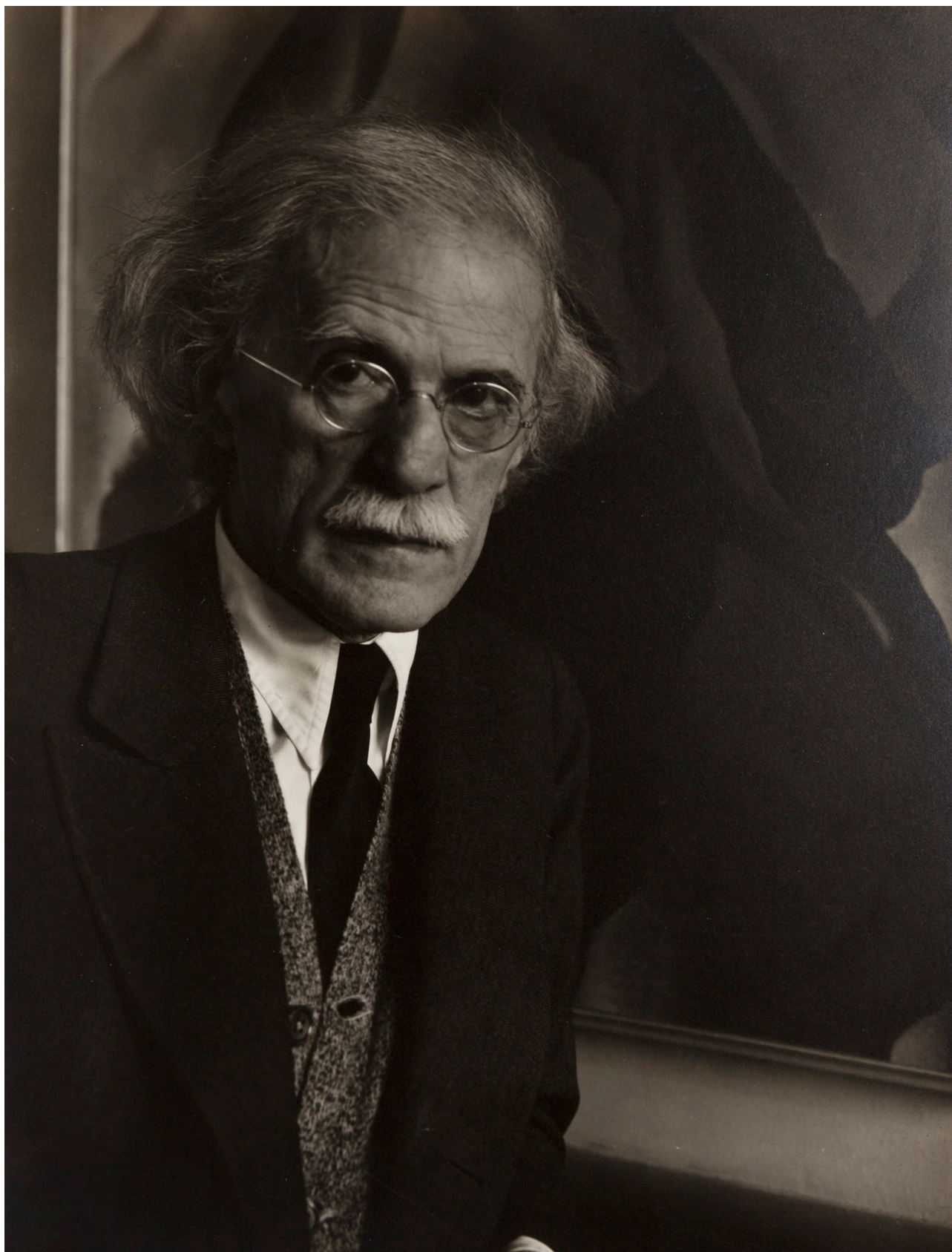
Museum Purchase, Susan L. Mills Fund, 1941.31

Sonya Noskowiak was born in Germany and moved with her family to Los Angeles at age 15. Ten years later, she began her career in photography at the L.A. studio of John Hagemeyer. In 1929, Noskowiak began a five-year stint as a darkroom assistant to Edward Weston, with whom she was a member of Group f/64.

This architectural portrait of a glass vessel exhibits the aesthetic principles of Group f/64's innovations in straight photography. Noskowiak captures the detail of the glass surface against the dark atmosphere by closing the camera lens to the smallest aperture—f/64—and leaving the shutter open for an extended period of time. Defining a sharp focus on a transparent form, highly contrasted against a deep black backdrop, Noskowiak achieves stunning technical form.

Sarah Renning





Imogen Cunningham

(United States, 1883—1976)

Alfred Stieglitz (New York City), 1934

Gelatin silver print

9 3/8 in. x 7 1/8 in.

Museum Purchase, Susan L. Mills Fund, 1941.10

A pioneer in her field, Imogen Cunningham was a photographer, a feminist and a mother who had a vast knowledge of chemistry, which was her major in college and provided her a deep technical understanding of photography.

Alfred Stieglitz, the subject of this image, was a New York-based photographer and owner of Gallery 291. He was well known in the art world for bringing modernist art to America, including work by artists such as Picasso, Cézanne, and Matisse among others. Albert Bender described him as an “intellectual talking machine, but nevertheless . . . the chief man in America to have raised photography to a high plane.” Cunningham visited Stieglitz in New York City with the hope of exhibiting in his gallery. To prove her worth she asked if she could photograph him with his own camera. Cunningham had Stieglitz pose in front of *Black Iris*, a painting by Georgia O’Keeffe, his lover. Stieglitz was not impressed with her portraits of him, as he claimed he always looked good in photographs.

Her portraits portray the aesthetics of Group f/64: a sharp and clear image, the perfect use of light and shadow, and her close compositions. In this portrait she captured Stieglitz in a serious stare, as if he is daring the photographer and even the viewer. He is standing in a relaxed but elegant pose, with glimmers of light on his face highlighting his wrinkles, as if acknowledging his expertise.

Ansel Adams once wrote a review of Cunningham’s work and said, “Her work is very beautiful and sincere.” He was right; her depiction of her subject only spoke visual truth and with her daring style, she clearly photographed Stieglitz as he saw himself, a man in charge of the world.

Veronica Yazmín

Brett Weston

(United States, 1911—1993)

Dune, 1934

Gelatin silver print

7 5/8 in. x 9 1/2 in.

Museum Purchase, 1936.12

Concerned about his rebellious teenage son, Brett, Edward Weston took him to Mexico in 1925, where he taught his son to use a camera. Like his father, Weston found his calling through the lens of his camera. Through his father's teachings and his own talented eye, Weston became an important member of Group f/64.

Weston and his father often photographed together, including shooting sand dunes in California. In *Dune*, Weston allows detail to accentuate every aspect of what he has captured. His photograph is a sharp contrast of shadow and light, showing the viewer every speck of sand. Although the contrast in the photograph is striking, Weston makes this composition work in harmony.

Weston demonstrates his attention to detail in his photographs. His use of sharp focus may have even exceeded that of his father—with his close cropping and use of angles, he creates a visually pleasing composition that clearly portrays the aesthetics of Group f/64.

Veronica Yazmín



WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

All works in *In Focus: Group f/64 and the Bay Area* are from the collection of the Mills College Art Museum.

Ansel Adams

(United States, 1902—1984)

Burnt Trees, Owens Valley

[Alternate title: *Trees and Mountain*], 1940

Gelatin silver print

11 7/8 in. x 8 in.

Museum Purchase, Susan L. Mills Fund, 1941.37

Ansel Adams

(United States, 1902—1984)

The Golden Gate, San Francisco,

from a photograph by Ansel Easton Adams—Presented by Albert M. Bender, 1932

Lithograph on paper

15 1/8 in. x 11 3/4 in.

Gift of the Estate of Albert Bender, 1983.5.2

Ansel Adams

(United States, 1902—1984)

Portrait of Ina Coolbrith, 1926

Gelatin silver print

8 3/4 in. x 6 in.

Transfer from the Mills College Library, 1976.34

Ansel Adams

(United States, 1902—1984)

Winter—Yosemite Valley, 1959

Gelatin silver print

8 1/2 in. x 6 3/8 in.

Gift of Alice Harwood, class of 1924, 1986.26.12

Imogen Cunningham

(United States, 1883—1976)

Alfred Stieglitz (New York City), 1934

Gelatin silver print

9 3/8 in. x 7 1/8 in.

Museum Purchase, Susan L. Mills Fund, 1941.10

Imogen Cunningham

(United States, 1883—1976)

Amaryllis, 1932

Gelatin silver print

9 1/2 in. x 7 1/2 in.

Museum Purchase, Susan L. Mills Fund, 1941.9

Imogen Cunningham

(United States, 1883—1976)

Helene Mayer, 1935

Gelatin silver print

9 1/4 in. x 7 1/4 in.

Museum Purchase, 1936.10

Imogen Cunningham

(United States, 1883—1976)

John Winkler, Etcher, 1963

Gelatin silver print

10 in. x 8 in.

Gift of Joan Murray, 1984.14

Imogen Cunningham

(United States, 1883—1976)

Magnolia Blossom, 1925

Gelatin silver print

10 3/4 in. x 13 5/8 in.

Transfer from the Mills College Library, 1976.32

Imogen Cunningham

(United States, 1883—1976)

Magnolia Blossom, 1925

Gelatin silver print

14 in. x 11 in.

Gift of Alice Harwood, class of 1924, 1986.26.11

Imogen Cunningham

(United States, 1883—1976)

Mills College Art Gallery [Original Front Entrance], 1925

Gelatin silver print

9 5/8 in. x 7 3/8 in.

Gift of the Albert M. Bender Estate, 1942.130.b



Alma Lavenson, *Chemist's Shelf*, 1931,
Gelatin silver print, MCAM

Imogen Cunningham

(United States, 1883—1976)
Mills College Art Gallery [Gallery Gate], 1925
Gelatin silver print
9 1/2 in. x 7 1/4 in.
Gift of the Albert M. Bender Estate, 1942.130.e

Imogen Cunningham

(United States, 1883—1976)
Portrait of Lyonel Feininger, Painter, 1939
Gelatin silver print
9 1/2 in. x 7 1/2 in.
Museum Purchase, Susan L. Mills Fund, 1957.70

Imogen Cunningham

(United States, 1883—1976)
Ruth Cravath at Work, 1953
Gelatin silver print
7 3/4 in. x 7 1/8 in.
Gift of Susan Herzig and Paul M. Hertzmann, 1999.18.2

Imogen Cunningham

(United States, 1883—1976)
Untitled (Entrance to Esther Waite's House), ca. 1975
Gelatin silver print
7 3/8 in. x 7 1/2 in.
From the Estate of Esther Waite (Mills '22), 2006.3

John Paul Edwards

(United States, 1884—1968)
Boats and Spars, ca. 1932
Gelatin silver print
9 3/8 in. x 7 3/8 in.
Museum Purchase, Susan L. Mills Fund, 1941.18

John Paul Edwards

(United States, 1884—1968)
Port Anchor, ca. 1932
Gelatin silver print
9 1/4 in. x 7 1/2 in.
Museum Purchase, Susan L. Mills Fund, 1941.19

Consuelo Kanaga

(United States, 1894—1978)
Portrait of Albert M. Bender, 1929
Gelatin silver print
3 7/8 in. x 3 in.
Transfer from the Mills College Library, 1980.26

Alma Lavenson

(United States, 1897—1989)
Abandoned Boat, ca. 1945
Gelatin silver print
7 5/8 in. x 8 3/8 in.
Museum Purchase, Susan L. Mills Fund, 1945.5

Alma Lavenson

(United States, 1897—1989)
Stable Boy, ca. 1950
Gelatin silver print
8 7/8 in. x 7 5/8 in.
Museum Purchase, Susan L. Mills Fund, 1954.23

Alma Lavenson

(United States, 1897—1989)
Union Oil Tanks II, 1931
Gelatin silver print
7 3/8 in. x 9 5/8 in.
Gift of Paul Wahrhaftig, 1999.21.1

Alma Lavenson

(United States, 1897—1989)
Chemist's Shelf, 1931
Gelatin silver print
8 in. x 10 in.
Gift of Paul Wahrhaftig, 1999.21.2

Alma Lavenson

(United States, 1897—1989)
Six Bottles, 1931
Gelatin silver print
8 in. x 10 in.
Gift of Paul Wahrhaftig, 1999.21.3

Sonya Noskowiak

(Germany, 1905—1975)
Basque Glass Bottle, 1938
Gelatin silver print
9 1/2 in. x 7 5/8 in.
Museum Purchase, Susan L. Mills Fund, 1941.31

Brett Weston

(United States, 1911—1993)
Dune, 1934
Gelatin silver print
7 5/8 in. x 9 1/2 in.
Museum Purchase, 1936.12

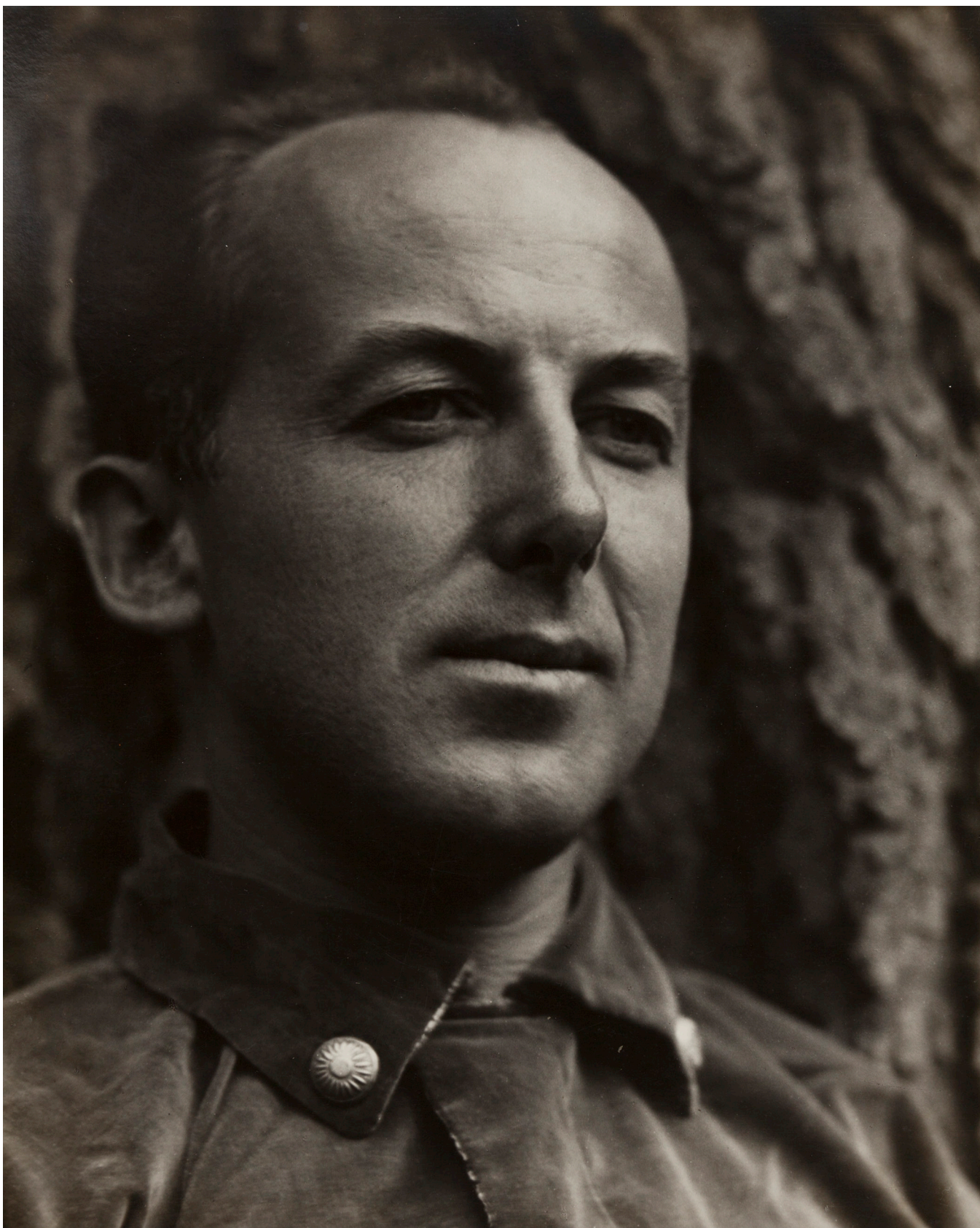
Brett Weston

(United States, 1911—1993)
Air View of San Francisco Toward Oakland, 1940
Gelatin silver print
7 5/8 in. x 9 1/2 in.
Museum Purchase, Susan L. Mills Fund, 1941.3

Edward Weston

(United States, 1886—1958)
Portrait of Diego Rivera, 1924
Gelatin silver print
7 1/8 in. x 7 1/8 in.
Transfer from the Mills College Library, Gift of Albert M. Bender, 1976.33

Edward Weston, *Portrait of Henry Cowell*, 1930, Gelatin silver print, MCAM



Edward Weston

(United States, 1886—1958)

Portrait of Henry Cowell, 1930

Gelatin silver print

9 1/2 in. x 7 1/2 in.

Transfer from the Mills College
Library, 1976.35

Edward Weston

(United States, 1886—1958)

Portrait of Albert Bender, 1928

Gelatin silver print

8 5/8 in. x 6 1/2 in.

Gift of William P. Wentworth,
1980.18

Edward Weston

(United States, 1886—1958)

Ann Virginia Craig, Mills College

Student, Class of 1925 and 1926

Gelatin silver print

9 3/8 in. x 7 in.

Gift of Mr. John B. Merrell II,
1987.13.1

Imogen Cunningham, *Magnolia Blossom*,
1925, Gelatin silver print, MCAM



Members of Group *f*/64

Ansel Adams
Imogen Cunningham
John Paul Edwards
Sonya Noskowiak
Henry Swift
Willard Van Dyke
Edward Weston

Photographers invited to display
their work with Group *f*/64

Preston Holder
Consuelo Kanaga
Alma Lavenson
Brett Weston

Group *f*/64 Manifesto

The name of this Group is derived from a diaphragm number of the photographic lens. It signifies to a large extent the qualities of clearness and definition of the photographic image which is an important element in the work of members of this Group.

The chief object of the Group is to present in frequent shows what it considers the best contemporary photography of the West; in addition to the showing of the work of its members, it will include prints from other photographers who evidence tendencies in their work similar to that of the Group.

Group *f*/64 is not pretending to cover the entire spectrum of photography or to indicate through its selection of members any deprecating opinion of the photographers who are not included in its shows. There are great number of serious workers in photography whose style and technique does not relate to the metier of the Group.

Group *f*/64 limits its members and invitational names to those workers who are striving to define photography as an art form by simple and direct presentation through purely photographic methods. The Group will show no work at any time that does not conform to its standards of pure photography. Pure photography is defined as possessing no qualities of technique, composition or idea, derivative of any other art form. The production of the "Pictorialist," on the other hand, indicates a devotion to principles of art which are directly related to painting and the graphic arts.

The members of Group *f*/64 believe that photography, as an art form, must develop along lines defined by the actualities and limitations of the photographic medium, and must always remain independent of ideological conventions of art and aesthetics that are reminiscent of a period and culture antedating the growth of the medium itself.

The Group will appreciate information regarding any serious work in photography that has escaped its attention, and is favorable towards establishing itself as a Forum of Modern Photography.

Written on the occasion of Group *f*/64's first exhibition in 1932 at the M.H. de Young Memorial Museum, San Francisco.

