American Art and Photography (Princeton, 20-21 Oct 17)

Princeton University, Princeton, NJ, Oct 20–21, 2017
Deadline: Sep 1, 2016

Anne McCauley, Princeton University

American Art and Photography from 1895 to 1925: Rethinking “Pictorialism”

CALL FOR PAPERS

Symposium organized in conjunction with the exhibition at the Princeton University Art Museum, “Clarence H. White and His World: The Art and Craft of Photography, 1895-1925” (curated by Anne McCauley, Dept. of Art and Archaeology, Princeton University)

“Pictorialism,” as a loosely constituted, international movement advocating photography’s assimilation into the traditional fine arts, succeeded to the extent that it fostered widespread acceptance of the medium as “art” prior to World War I, but failed in the post-War period as its aesthetic agenda was condemned as “anti-modernist,” agrarian, bourgeois, and imitative of an outmoded, idealizing painting. The purpose of this symposium, and the retrospective exhibition of the works of Clarence H. White that it accompanies, is to reconsider and complicate the stylistic goals, methods, influences, politics, and social networks of photographers who identified as “pictorialists” and yet produced works that ranged from book and magazine illustrations, commercial portraits, fashion photos, to Salon prints, and from sharp-focus, silver bromides to multiple-gums. White’s own career serves as a model for the ways that aspiring art photographers responded to changing economic, political, and aesthetic conditions from the fin-de-siècle to the Roaring Twenties, thus straining the very definition of what “pictorialism” might mean.

Fundamental to any rethinking of this critical era is a consideration of how the formative terrain of “modern” art intersected with the trajectory of photography, which was itself shifting as reproductive technologies, printing papers, and camera and negative formats materially altered. Equally important for pictorialist photographers, however, were changes occurring in other, more popular, areas of visual culture, including commercial illustration, news photography, advertising, and cinema. Another major issue that needs to be reconsidered is the role of World War I in the fate of pictorialism (and individual pictorialist careers). In short, does it make sense any longer to apply the terms “pictorialism” and “modernism” to early twentieth-century photography? What has been lost in this bifurcation of photographic history into camps that seem grounded too often in degrees of focus or arbitrary (and poorly defined) oppositions between rural/urban, right/left, or “manipulated”/”straight”?

Topics might include:

- Individual bodies of work by American pictorialists, particularly those in the Photo-Secession or exhibiting with them
- Early photographs by White's students
- American magazine illustration and photography
- Pictorial photography and the Arts and Crafts movement
- Socialism, anarchism, progressivism?: the politics of pictorialism
- American regional organizations and museums/galleries that hosted pictorialist shows
- International pictorialist shows in which the Photo-Secession participated
- Photographic exhibition design, mounting, and framing
- Tonalist or Post-Impressionist painters and photography
- Manual training and the teaching of art photography
- Pictorialist printing processes and their use
- Advertising and fashion photography (pre-1925)
- Women in the Photo-Secession
- The Simple Life; the Colonial Revival; agrarianism and pictorialist subjects
- Neuraesthenia and the pictorialist figure
- Pre-Raphaelitism and pictorialism
- Representing the modern child
- War photography and its impact on art photography
- Silent cinema and pictorial photography
- Amateurism and photography
- Critics, patrons and collectors of pictorialism
- Historiography of pictorialism

Although the focus of this symposium will be aspects of American art and pictorial photography, papers dealing with European photographers and artists who had an impact on or connections with American pictorialists are welcome. Papers should be ca. 30 minutes in length.

Please submit a 250-word abstract and c.v. in English to Anne McCauley, mccauley@princeton.edu by September 1, 2016.

All selected participants will receive RT travel to Princeton (coach fare), hotel (1-2 nights, depending on distance), and an honorarium.

If you have questions, please direct them to Anne McCauley.

Reference:

CFP: American Art and Photography (Princeton, 20-21 Oct 17). In: ArtHist.net, Jun 21, 2016 (accessed Nov 20, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/13327>.