



# Edward Steichen : The Early Years

*Joel Smith*

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One of the most influential figures in the history of photography, Edward Steichen (1879-1973) was also one of the most precocious. Born in Luxembourg, raised in Wisconsin, and trained as a lithographer's apprentice, Steichen took up photography in his teens and by age twenty-three had created brooding tonalist landscapes and brilliant psychological studies that won the praise of Alfred Stieglitz in New York and Auguste Rodin in Paris, among others. Over the next decade, this young man--the preferred portraitist of the elite of two continents--was repeatedly acclaimed as the peerless master of the painterly photograph. This volume, covering the period from the late 1890s to World War I, highlights masterpieces from The Metropolitan Museum of Art, which houses the finest collection of Steichen's early work in the world, and reproduces them in near-facsimile through four-color digital offset lithography.

Steichen worked with a designer's inventive eye, a Symbolist's poetic sensibility, an entrepreneur's charisma, and--above all--the originality and finesse of a creative and painstaking printer to establish ambitious new standards in artistic photography. Overlaying the subtle tone-poetry of his platinum prints with repeated washes of harmonious color, he created unforgettable images. In his three famous twilight views of New York's Flatiron Building, one of the landmarks of turn-of-the-century architecture, Steichen crafted a powerful symbol of a new age. His stunning sequence of Rodin's *Balzac* figure in the moonlight is presented here as are his nudes, with their frankly erotic sense of flesh and weight. And the intense energy of a decade comes to life in his portraits of a diverse cast ranging from Richard Strauss to J. P. Morgan, Maurice Maeterlinck to George Bernard Shaw--and Steichen himself, the founding auteur of a century of celebrity. In the accompanying text, Joel Smith explores Steichen's maturing artistry in the light of contemporary developments in photography, graphic design, and the decorative arts.

This is a stunning visual record of the emergence of Steichen as a great artist and is one of the most important books to be published on his life and work in recent years.

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