Alfred Stieglitz

1864–1946 · American

The photograph as fine art — and light as pure abstraction



The Steerage · 1907

"I am an American. Photography is my passion. The search for Truth my obsession."

— Alfred Stieglitz, 1921 exhibition catalogue, Anderson Galleries

KEY WORKS

- The Steerage, 1907 — the definitive argument for photography as art
- The Flatiron Building, 1902 — the city in weather
- Equivalents, 1922–31 — cloud photographs as pure abstraction
- Georgia O'Keeffe: A Portrait — 330 photographs over 20 years

CONTEXT

Stieglitz did more than almost anyone to establish photography as fine art in America. He founded Camera Work — the most beautiful photography publication ever produced — and the 291 Gallery, which showed Picasso and Matisse alongside photographers. His Equivalents — photographs of clouds made to express pure emotion — are perhaps the first truly abstract photographs. His 20-year portrait of Georgia O'Keeffe is one of the great sustained collaborations in photographic history.

WHY THIS PHOTOGRAPHER

Stieglitz is the person who made it possible for photography to be taken seriously as art. The Equivalents introduce the abstract photograph — an image that isn't of something so much as it is something. That idea becomes relevant when students approach the ice breaker exercises and the My Work unit.

O'KEEFFE: A PORTRAIT



Georgia O'Keeffe — Hand, 1919



Georgia O'Keeffe, 1918

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Stieglitz stood in the snow for three hours to get the right light for The Flatiron Building. What does patience do to a photograph?
2. The Equivalents are photographs of clouds, but Stieglitz said they expressed his emotions. Can you photograph an emotion? What would yours look like?

MORE IMAGES



The Flatiron Building · 1902



Equivalents (series) · 1922–31