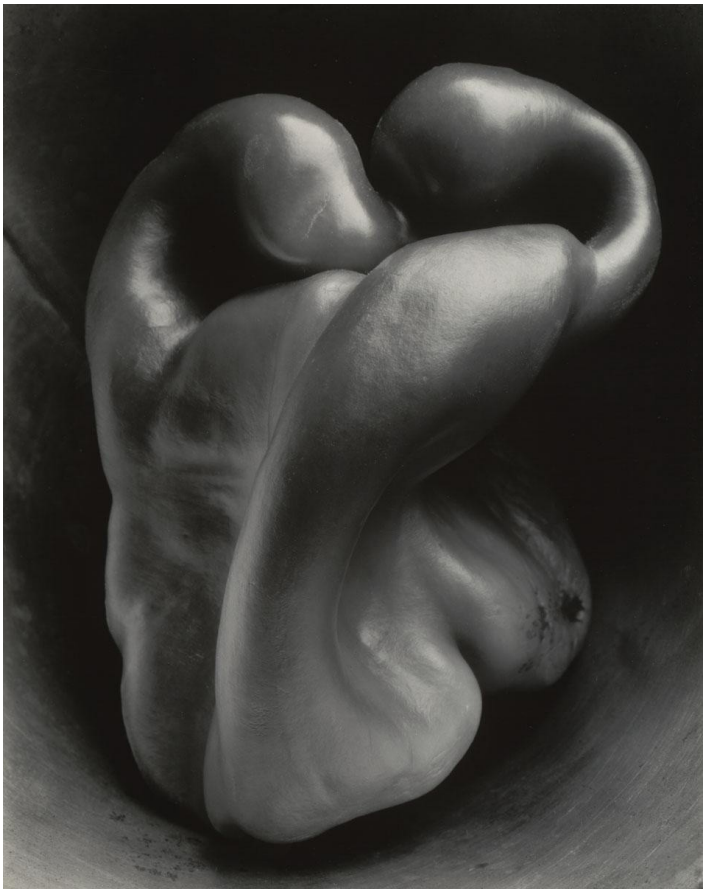
SESSION 21 · UNIT 2/3 BOUNDARY · Feb 23, 2027

Edward Weston & Paul Strand

Weston 1886–1958 · American — Strand 1890–1976 · American

Straight photography's object- and form-first modernism



Pepper No. 30 · Edward Weston, 1930

"To consult the rules of composition before making a picture is a little like consulting the law of gravitation before going for a walk."

— Edward Weston, Daybooks

KEY WORKS

- Pepper No. 30, 1930 — the archetype of straight-photography still life (Weston)
- Nautilus, 1927 — a shell photographed until it reads as pure abstract form (Weston)
- Blind Woman, New York, 1916 — an unposed, confrontational street portrait (Strand)
- Wall Street, New York, 1915 — pedestrians reduced to abstract shapes against a modernist grid (Strand)

CONTEXT

Weston and Strand were close contemporaries who each helped found what came to be called "straight photography" — the position that a photograph should be sharp, unmanipulated, and printed exactly as the camera and lens recorded it, against the soft-focus, painterly Pictorialism that had dominated fine-art photography before them. Weston pointed that discipline at objects — a pepper, a shell, a cabbage leaf, a nude on sand — shot so close and so precisely that the object stops reading as itself and starts reading as pure form. Strand pointed the same discipline outward, at people and streets, composing a blind woman's portrait or a line of Wall Street pedestrians with the same rigor Weston gave a shell. Different subjects, same conviction: that looking hard and printing straight was itself the modern, serious way to make a picture.

WHY THIS PHOTOGRAPHER

Two founders of American photographic modernism and "straight photography," close contemporaries who each pushed an object- and form-first approach to the camera — exactly the discipline this Unit's brief work has been building toward, whether the subject in front of the lens is a pepper or a person.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Weston photographed a pepper until it stopped looking like food and started looking like a body, a shell, a wave. Strand photographed real people and real streets but composed them like abstract shapes. Is a "straight," unmanipulated photograph actually more honest than one that's been altered — or does composing reality this hard count as its own kind of manipulation?
2. Both photographers insisted the camera should record exactly what was in front of it, sharply, with no darkroom tricks and no soft focus. Why would an entire generation of photographers decide that "un-manipulated" was the most modern, most serious way to make a picture — and would you say the same thing today?

MORE IMAGES



Cabbage Leaf · Edward Weston, 1931



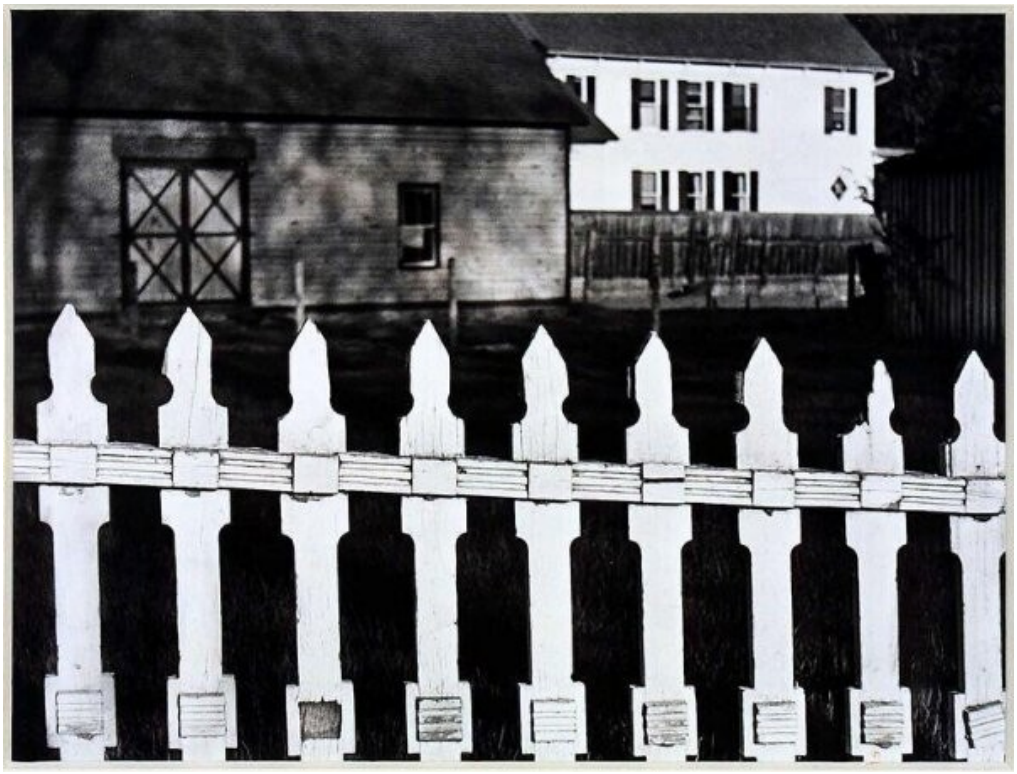
Nautilus · Edward Weston, 1927



Shell and Rock Arrangement · Edward Weston, 1931



Blind Woman, New York · Paul Strand, 1916



The White Fence, Port Kent, New York · Paul Strand, 1916



Wall Street, New York · Paul Strand, 1915