

Paul Strand: Photography and Film for the 20th Century

19 March – 3 July 2016

Supported by the American Friends of the V&A

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In March 2016, the V&A will present the first retrospective of the American artist Paul Strand (1890-1976) in the UK for over 30 years. Revered as one of the greatest photographers of the 20th century, Strand defined the way fine art and documentary photography is understood and practiced today.

Part of a tour organised by Philadelphia Museum of Art, in collaboration with Fundación MAPFRE and made possible by the Terra Foundation for American Art, the V&A exhibition will reveal Strand's trailblazing experiments with abstract photography, screen what is widely thought of as the first avant-garde film and show the full extent of his photographs made on his global travels beginning in New York in 1910 and ending in France in 1976. Newly acquired photographs from Strand's only UK project will be shown – a 1954 study of the island of South Uist in the Scottish Hebrides – supplemented by further works already in the V&A's own collection.

Paul Strand: Photography and Film for the 20th Century will encompass over 200 objects from exquisite vintage photographic prints to films, books, notebooks, sketches and Strand's own cameras to trace his career over sixty years. Arranged both chronologically and thematically, the exhibition will broaden understanding to reveal Strand as an international photographer and filmmaker with work spanning myriad geographic regions and social and political issues.

Martin Barnes, curator of the exhibition said: *"The V&A was one of a handful of UK institutions to collect Paul Strand's work during his lifetime and the Museum now houses the most extensive collection of his prints in the UK. Through important additional loans, the exhibition will not only explore the life and career of Strand, but also challenge the popular perception of Strand as primarily a photographer of American places and people of the early 20th century."*

The exhibition will begin in Strand's native New York in the 1910s, exploring his early works of its financial district, railyards, wharves and factories. During this time he broke with the soft-focus and Impressionist-inspired 'Pictorialist' style of photography to produce among the first abstract pictures made with a camera. The influence of photographic contemporaries Alfred

Stieglitz and Alvin Langdon Coburn as well European modern artists such as Braque and Picasso can be seen in Strand's experiments in this period. On display will be early masterpieces such as *Wall Street* which depicts the anonymity of individuals on their way to work set against the towering architectural geometry and implied economic forces of the modern city. Strand's early experiments in abstraction, *Abstraction*, *Porch Shadows* and *White Fence* will also be shown, alongside candid and anonymous street portraits made secretly using a camera with a decoy lens, such as *Blind Woman*.

The exhibition explores Strand's experiments with the moving image with the film *Manhatta* (1920 - 21), the first time it has been screened in its entirety in the UK. A collaboration with the painter and photographer Charles Sheeler, *Manhatta* was hailed as the first avant-garde film, and traces a day in the life of New York from sunrise to sunset punctuated by lines of Walt Whitman poetry. Strand's embrace of the machine and human form is a key focus of the exhibition. In 1922, he bought an Akeley movie camera. The close-up studies he made of both his first wife Rebecca Salsbury and the Akeley during this time will be shown alongside the camera itself. Extracts of Strand's later, more politicised films, such as *Redes (The Wave)*, made in cooperation with the Mexican government are featured, as well as the scarcely-shown documentary *Native Land*, a controversial film exposing the violations of America's workforce.

Strand travelled extensively and the exhibition will emphasise his international output from the 1930s to the late 1960s, during which he collaborated with leading writers to publish a series of photo books. As Strand's career progressed, his work became increasingly politicised and focused on social documentary. The exhibition will feature Strand's first photobook *Time in New England* (1950), alongside others including a homage to his adopted home France and his photographic hero Eugène Atget, *La France de profil*, made in collaboration with the French poet, Claude Roy. One of Strand's most celebrated images, *The Family, Luzzara, (The Lusetti's)* was taken in a modest agricultural village in Italy's Po River valley for the photobook *Un Paese*, for which he collaborated with the Neo-Realist writer, Cesare Zavattini. On display, this hauntingly direct photograph depicts a strong matriarch flanked by her brood of five sons, all living with the aftermath of the Second World War.

The images Strand took during his 1954 trip to the Scottish Hebrides reveal his methodical and meticulous approach to photography, much like a studio photographer in the open air. Strand conjured the sights, sounds and textures of the place steeped in the threatened traditions of Gaelic language, fishing and agricultural life of pre-Industrial times. The intimate set of black and white photographs include the V&A's newly acquired image of a brooding youth, *Angus Peter MacIntyre, South Uist, Hebrides*; the patinated geology of *Rock, Lock Eynort, South Uist, Hebrides* and the all-encompassing expanse of the Atlantic Ocean depicted in *Sea Rocks and Sea, The Atlantic, South Uist, Hebrides*.

From the late 1950s to the mid-1960s, Strand photographed Egypt, Morocco and Ghana, all of which had gone through transformative political change. The exhibition will show Strand's most compelling pictures from this period, including his tender portraits, complemented by remarkable street pictures showing meetings, political rallies and outdoor markets. The exhibition will conclude with Strand's final photographic series exploring his home and garden in Orgeval, France, where he lived with his third wife Hazel until his death in 1976. The images are an intimate counterpoint to Strand's previous projects and offer a rare glimpse into his own domestic happiness.

- ENDS -

Notes to Editors

- Tickets will go on sale in January 2016. Admission £9 (concessions available). V&A Members go free. Advance booking is advised – this can be done in person at the V&A; online at vam.ac.uk/paulstrand; or by calling 0800 912 6961 (booking fee applies)
- *Paul Strand: Photography and Film for the 20th Century* is part of an international tour organized by the Philadelphia Museum of Art in collaboration with Fundación MAPFRE and made possible by the Terra Foundation for American Art. It is curated by Peter Barberie, the Brodsky Curator of Photographs, Alfred Stieglitz Center at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, with the assistance of Amanda N. Bock, former Project Assistant Curator of Photographs
- The exhibition is adapted for the V&A by Martin Barnes, Senior Curator of Photography, V&A
- The nine newly acquired photographs from Paul Strand's 1954 *Tir A'Mhurain* series were purchased for the V&A with assistance from the Photographs Acquisitions Group
- The exhibition is accompanied by a substantial scholarly catalogue, *Paul Strand: Master of Modern Photography*, published by the Philadelphia Museum of Art in collaboration with Fundación MAPFRE; it is distributed in the trade by Yale University Press. The publication was supported by Lynne and Harold Honickman and The Andrew W. Mellon Fund for Scholarly Publications at the Philadelphia Museum of Art

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About the American Friends of the V&A

The American Friends of the V&A was incorporated in 1984 and has traditionally supported London's Victoria and Albert Museum. The AFV&A works to strengthen the Museum's international presence and encourage the American public to engage with this leading cultural

institution. The AFV&A are delighted to be supporting *Paul Strand: Photography and Film for the 20th Century*.

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For further PRESS information about *Paul Strand: Photography and Film for the 20th Century* please contact Laura Mitchell in the V&A press office on +44 (0) 20 7942 2503 or email l.mitchell@vam.ac.uk (not for publication).

A selection of press images are available to download free of charge from pressimages.vam.ac.uk



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