



Steichen: A Biography

Penelope Niven

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Not since 1929 has there been a biography of Edward Steichen, photographer, painter, and a pivotal yet enigmatic figure in twentieth-century art and culture on two continents. Steichen, who died just short of his ninety-fourth birthday, was fifty and internationally famous when *Steichen the Photographer* was written by his brother-in-law, the poet and biographer Carl Sandburg. Now Penelope Niven, whose highly acclaimed biography of Sandburg appeared in 1991, has written the first comprehensive biography of Steichen.

Here, she illuminates the full story of Steichen's avant-garde life in Paris and New York and his roles in introducing modern art to the American audience, in shaping aerial reconnaissance photography in World War I and navy photography in World War II, in revolutionizing American fashion and portrait photography through his years as chief of photography at *Vanity Fair* and *Vogue*, and in creating the unprecedented photographic exhibition *The Family of Man*, which has touched a global audience of millions since it opened in 1955.

Searching the world over for Steichen's letters, paintings, and photographs, Niven has reconstructed his major, pioneering achievements. Steichen's enduring contributions to the fine art of photography have not been fully recognized because they have not, until now, been fully documented and placed within the context of his times and his turbulent, romantic, and often tragic personal life.

With the help of public and private papers and interviews, Niven builds a compelling portrait of the charismatic, complex, very human man behind the camera. We explore Steichen's gardens and his artful love of nature, manifested in his obsessive achievements as a master breeder of delphinium. We step inside his intimate, private world--and view his passionate attachment to his mother, his sister, and his two daughters; the heartrending battles of his first marriage; and his alleged and actual love affairs. This biography also explores Steichen's catalytic relationships with August Rodin, Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, Alfred Stieglitz, Gertrude and Leo Stein, and Carl and Lilian Steichen Sandburg.

"Steichen was a rebel, stubbornly independent and largely self-taught, who also believed passionately in the fundamental intersections of art and life," Penelope Niven writes. As this biography reveals, Edward Steichen's life, like his art, was brilliantly original, dramatic, and unforgettable.

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