SCHEINBAUM & RUSSEK LTD
Select Contemporary and Vintage Photography

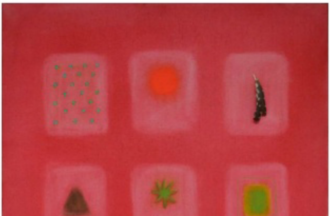
Creative Spirits
Three Painters - Three Photographers

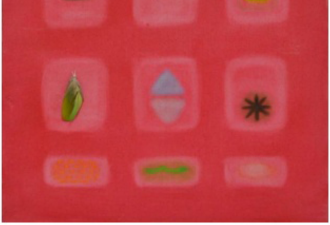
The history of art, music, and literature is filled with passionate love affairs between creative spirits. In understanding relationships for artistic couples, hints may be found in their work. This is the premise behind the idea for today's newsletter. All are artists in their own right while also influencing and supporting each other's work and were partners in life and art.

Janet became fascinated with the idea many years ago… noticing that the three couples we write about today, Alfred Stieglitz and Georgia O'Keeffe, Paul Strand and Rebecca Strand (Salsbury James), and Eliot and Aline Porter were three photographers and three painters, all connected to Stieglitz and except for Stieglitz, all connected to New Mexico.

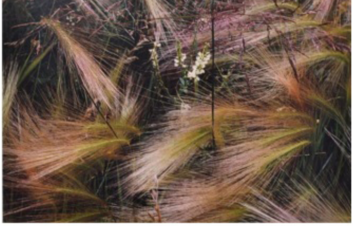
The commonalities of the painters and the photographers are many and can be best understood by studying their relationships, friendships, and works. Janet has been thinking about this topic and exhibition for years and continues to hope that one day she will find an institution to work with her on this project.

In 2017, as an experiment, we mounted an exhibition of the works of Eliot and Aline Porter to see how they paired and resonated with each other. The exhibit was a great success and appreciated by the many visitors that descended on our small gallery space. We knew then that this was the "tip of the iceberg" for what would be a fascinating exhibition.





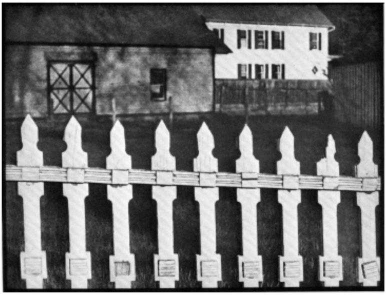
Aline Porter (1909 - 1991)
Party, 1971



Eliot Porter (1901 - 1990)
Foxtail Grass, 1957

So much has been written about Stieglitz and O'Keeffe that it seems an injustice to give them a few paragraphs. I assume many of our readers are already familiar with their stories. I myself have written about them in a few of our earlier newsletters.

But, for today, we will focus on Alfred Stieglitz, his position as artist, gallerist, publisher, and friend, as well as the central character that tied the three couples together. Stieglitz promoted the photographs of Paul Strand in his 291 Gallery and his publication *Camera Work*, as well as exhibiting Eliot Porter's work in 1939. Through Stieglitz, Paul and Rebecca Strand, and Eliot and Aline Porter, were close friends of O'Keeffe.



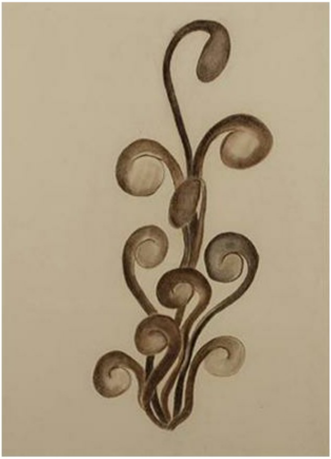
Paul Strand (1890 - 1976)
The White Fence, Port Kent, New York, 1916

Eliot Porter (1901 - 1990)
Spruce Trees, Great Spruce Head Island, Maine, 1934

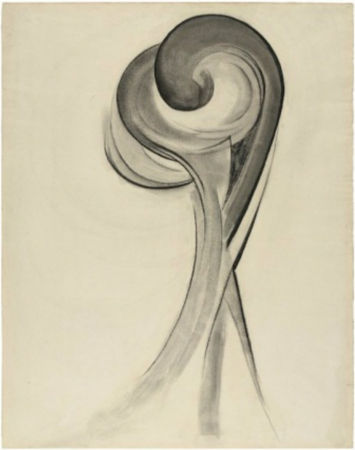
Eliot and Aline moved to Santa Fe in 1938, returning to the east for the war years, and then moving permanently to Santa Fe in 1945. Rebecca and Paul Strand traveled to the Southwest in 1926, visiting Mesa Verde National Park, Santa Fe, and Taos. They had originally planned a European trip but Rebecca felt, "Europe will still be there when we are middle-aged" and instead chose to travel and see the west. Being part of the Stieglitz circle in New York they were welcomed in Taos by Mabel Dodge. Her hospitality was overwhelming to them. Rebecca wrote to Stieglitz and O'Keeffe,

" She's been so lovely - why she has been so kind to us we do not know. Except that she probably is to everybody. She does want you both to come sometime - Georgia should... she would do some great things - Georgia, do come some day."

Rebecca returned to New Mexico with O'Keeffe in 1929 and the two of them stayed in Mabel Dodge Luhan's compound and painted throughout that summer. The Strands returned to New Mexico for the next two years. They divorced in 1933. Rebecca married William James in 1937, a regional businessman, and remained in the Taos area until her death in 1968.



Rebecca Salsbury (Strand) James (1891-1968)
Bean Sprouts, c. 1934
New Mexico Museum of Art



Georgia O'Keeffe (1887 - 1986)
No. 12 Special, 1916
© Georgia O'Keeffe Museum/DACS 2016, photo © 2015 Digital image, The Museum of Modern Art, New York/Scala, Florence

During those early trips to Taos, Paul Strand made his iconic photographs of the San Francisco de Assisi church, known as the Ranchos de Taos Church, and the surrounding landscape. Fascinatingly, it was in Taos that Strand met a young Ansel Adams. Ansel Adams was in Taos working to complete a book project with Mary Austin on the Taos Pueblo, but still struggling with the decision of whether to devote his life to music or photography. That visit changed Adams life. He wrote in his journal:

Paul Strand (1890 - 1976)
Ranchos de Taos Church, 1931
Art Institute Chicago
Copyright Paul Strand Archive/Aperture Foundation

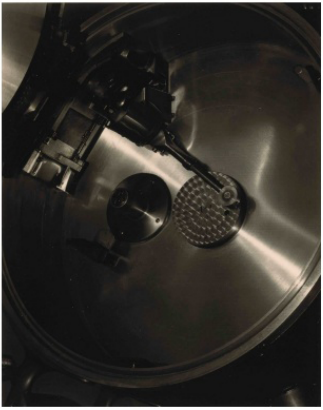
"Arriving unannounced at Los Gallos, I found it so crowded that Mabel had not one guest room left. I was introduced to Paul and Becky Strand, who invited me to stay with them in the extra bedroom of the small adobe guesthouse that Mabel had given them for the summer. I knew photographer Paul Strand by creative reputation, I had seen his photographs in handsome photogravure reproductions in Stieglitz's great photographic journal, Camera Work. Paul was a buoyant spirit and Becky a serene and beautiful woman.

That first evening I dined with the Strands and Georgia O'Keeffe. Strand inquired politely about my Taos Pueblo project, then I inquired if he had any prints to share. He asked if I would like to see his negatives, since he had made no prints that summer nor had he brought prints from New York. Of course I would!

The next afternoon Paul took a white sheet of paper and set it in the sunlight streaming through south window. He placed me squarely in front of the paper and opened a box of 4x5-inch negatives. He handed them to me, admonishing, "Hold them only by the edges."

They were glorious negatives: full, luminous shadows and strong high values in which the subtle passages of tone were preserved. The compositions were extraordinary: perfect, uncluttered edges and beautifully distributed shapes that he had carefully selected and interpreted as forms – simple, yet of great power. I would have preferred to see prints, but the negatives clearly communicated Strand's vision.

My understanding of photography was crystalized that afternoon as I realized the *great potential of the medium as an expressive art. I returned to San Francisco resolved that the camera, not the piano, would shape my destiny."*



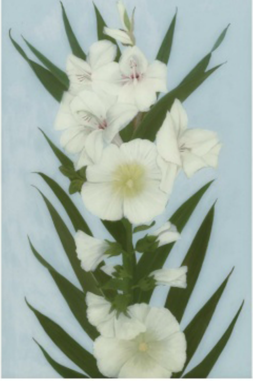
Paul Strand (1890 - 1976)
Akeley Motion Picture Camera, New York, 1922
Copyright Paul Strand Archive/Aperture Foundation

Paul Strand (1890 - 1976)
Porch Shadows, 1916
Art Institute Chicago
Copyright Paul Strand Archive/Aperture Foundation

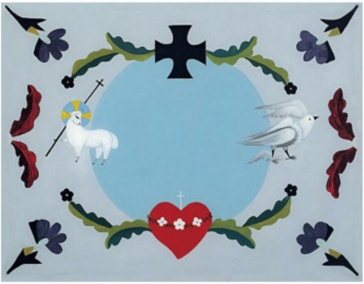
Paul Strand was both filmmaker and photographer and worked alongside Alfred Stieglitz to establish photography's acceptance as an art form and innovate photography's subject matter to a more modernist style. His compositions were a revelation to the many photographers on both coasts of the country, influencing the "photo secessionists" in the east and the "straight" photographer's of the west. In many ways, he was the bridge that unified American photography.

Paul Strand became known for practicing what was referred to as straight photography, made "without tricks of process or manipulation." After first visiting the Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession at the age of seventeen, he eventually befriended Stieglitz and showed him his early, Pictorialist-inspired work. Stieglitz advised Strand to move away from the soft-focus style and use a smaller lens aperture to create sharper photographs. Combined with the influence of Cubism and abstract art, this would lead to a breakthrough in Strand's work, resulting in a remarkable series of abstract photographs.

In 1916, Stieglitz gave Strand a solo exhibit at 291, he also devoted the last two issues of *Camera Work* to Strand's photographs, praising them as "the direct expression of today" and devoid of any "-ism."



Rebecca Salsbury (Strand) James (1891-1968)
White Hollyhocks and Polar Ice Gladiolas , c. 1930-40



Rebecca Salsbury (Strand) James (1891-1968)
Divine Lamb and Taos Blue Sky , n.d.
New Mexico Museum of Art

In 2019 Aria Darcella and Benjamin Galopin wrote on their site, CR Muse, an article about the relationship between Rebecca Salsbury James and Georgia O'Keeffe entitled, *Rebecca Salsbury James, Self-Made Woman Looking Back at the Artist who Painted in Reverse and Called Georgia O'Keeffe a Friend.*

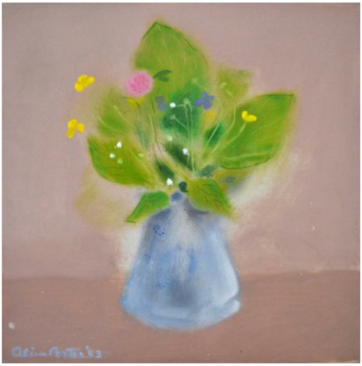
"This is not to say that the two women were rivals. In fact, quite the opposite was true. O'Keeffe is said to have been the first to encourage James to paint. The pair even traveled to New Mexico for the first time together—a trip that would be influential to both of their lives and work. But in the male-centric art world of the early 20th century, there was little room for several women, and O'Keeffe dominated the light.

James was born in London to American parents in 1891. Her mother was a singer and her father was the manager of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. After the death of her father, the family moved to New York City. It is unclear what James' artistic leanings were before she met Strand (she never received formal training), but after they married, she was thrust into a world of creatives who pulled her in.

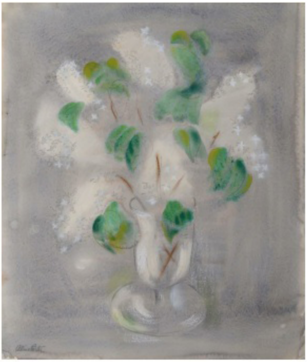
James and O'Keeffe met through their husbands. Strand was the protégé of Stieglitz, and the couples became close. Whether or not Strand was inspired by Stieglitz, who often photographed O'Keeffe, he began to take photos of James. Eventually, both men had a series of photographs of her, ranging from stoic portraits to intimate nudes.

The painting style that James came to work in, and later become known for, is based in folk art. Her work may have looked simplistic, but its execution was quite difficult. She painted in reverse on glass, a folk art method that required her to "think in reverse" of a normal painter when it came to filling in her colors: highlights and details came first, and the background last. Looking at paintings like "Fire and Air" or "White Hollyhocks and Polar Ice Gladiolas," one can see her technical skill—the way the *paint is blended, one might never guess she was building in the opposite direction.*

Unfortunately, critics were often dismissive, calling her work "decorative." Stieglitz said her early work lacked "creative seeing." Although he eventually included her in shows, her pieces were relegated to the back, where they didn't receive much attention. Like O'Keeffe, she found new energy in New Mexico. After divorcing Strand in 1933, she moved there permanently, continuing to paint."



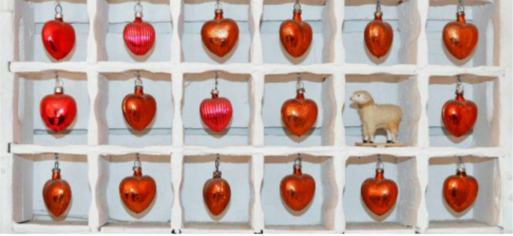
Aline Porter (1909 - 1991)
Untitled, 1983



Aline Porter (1909 - 1991)
White Lilacs, n.d.

Eliot and Aline Porter married in 1936 and moved to Santa Fe in 1938 at the suggestion of Aline's brother, Peter Kilham who had introduced them and told them of the welcoming art community in Santa Fe. Peter was an artist and inventor. As an interesting side bit of trivia, Peter was the inventor of the hummingbird feeder that many of us have hanging outside our homes here in Santa Fe! The Porters returned east during the war years and returned in 1945 and lived in Tesuque, NM. Here we have another bit of trivia, especially for those of you in Santa Fe. Ernest Knee originally built the house the Porter's lived in, in Tesuque. As well as being an incredible builder and designer, Knee was also a photographer. Another little known fact is the iconic Santa Fe style doors we see in and around town were originally designed and built by Knee.

Aline Porter was both a painter and assemblage artist. Her love of flowers graced most of her canvases. Aline's gallery, the Betty Parsons Gallery in New York, wrote "these flowers, so radiant with the passion of the spirit rise from the canvas like the secrets of Eros."

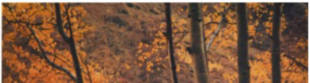


Aline Porter (1909 - 1991)
Untitled Assemblage, 1980

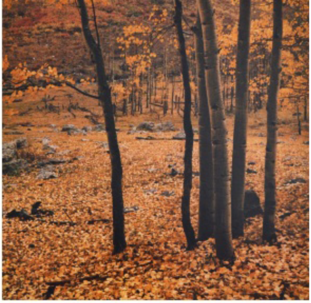
Aline was also recognized for her exquisitely constructed boxes. Her boxes often contained her treasures from both the Porter summer home on Great Spruce Head Island in Maine and their home in Tesuque, New Mexico.

"The paintings of Aline Porter are as fresh and appealing as a carefully arranged bouquet from her Tesuque garden. She was surrounded in life by artists ranging from her husband, Eliot Porter, the extraordinary photographer, and his brother Fairfield, to her great friend, Georgia O'Keeffe. Porter could have borrowed O'Keeffe's life dictum, "Take a space and fill it in a beautiful way," to characterize her paintings, her meticulously constructed box assemblages, her doll houses, and indeed her home hidden away on a verdant lane in Tesuque. That home was as carefully composed as one of her lyrical paintings, with such visual surprises as the floor of one small room painted shocking pink.

Aline Porter's work was obviously done for her private enjoyment, but she was persuaded to show her paintings and constructions by gallery owners as important as New York's Betty Parsons who said of her work, "Aline Porter animates a flower with inner light and power. The paintings sing with the bloom of life." The redoubtable Agnes Martin, who shows us the power of reduction in her famous "stripe" paintings, placed her Aline Porter painting were she could enjoy it everyday, Indeed, Aline Porter's paintings give us the same pleasure as a vase or a pot of flowers and are always a delight to the eye and a refreshment for the senses."
-Robert Ewing, former director of the Fine Arts Museum, Santa Fe.



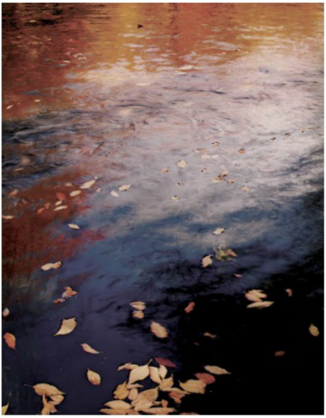
Eliot Porter (1901 - 1990)
Maine, 1938



Eliot Porter (1901 - 1990)
Yellow Aspens, New Mexico, 1951

Eliot Porter's photography was recognized by Alfred Stieglitz and was exhibited in Stieglitz's *An American Place* gallery in December of 1938, the last exhibition held at the gallery. The exhibit was a turning point in Porter's life. He left a profession of scientific research at Harvard and relocated to New Mexico to devote his life to photography. The relationship between Aline and Eliot Porter and his artistic endeavors cannot be underscored more than in this quote by Eliot:

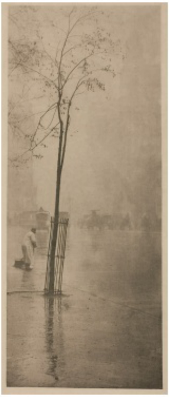
In retrospect, from my experience it appears highly desirable to order one's life in accord with inner yearnings no matter how impractical they may seem and not to be bound to an unfitting vocation by practical considerations. Nevertheless I would not have been able to make the change, regardless of how urgent the need, had I not had the support of a sympathetic wife, who, being an artist herself, understood my concerns.



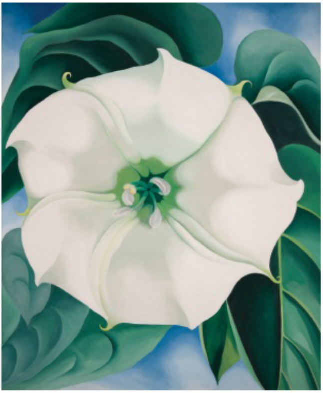
Eliot Porter (1901 - 1990)
Spruce Trees in Fog,
Great Spruce Head Island, Maine, 1954

Eliot Porter (1901 - 1990)
Pool in a Brook, Pond Brook,
Near White Face New Hampshire, 1953

Of course, as many of you know, Eliot went on to hold the place within the history of photography as the father of color photography. His groundbreaking publication for both color photography and the beginning of the conservation movement was the Sierra Club's *In Wildness is the Preservation of the World.* In this 1962 publication, Eliot's photographs are paired with excerpts of Thoreau's writings, which was suggested by Aline, when she noticed that his photographs reminded her of Thoreau's writings. That book became the book that changed our understanding forever of how we perceive nature and was a revelation to the art world- a book of color photography!



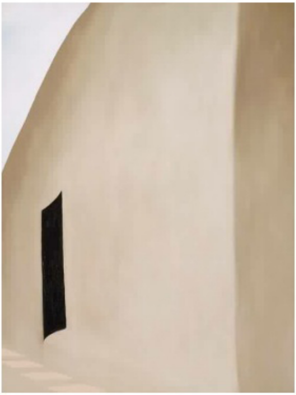
Alfred Stieglitz (1864 - 1946)
Spring Showers, 1900-01



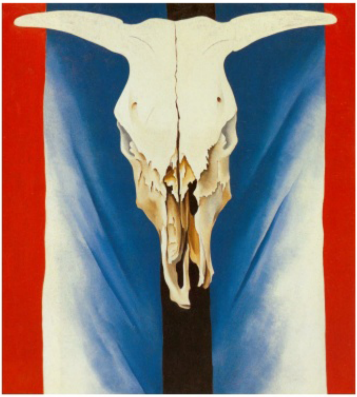
Georgia O'Keeffe (1887 - 1986)
Jimson Weed/White Flower No. 1, 1932
Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art,
Bentonville, Arkansas, 2014.35

Alfred Stieglitz's influences on the art of photography are many. His own artistic works (discussed in a previous newsletter) were just one of the hats he wore. In his gallery, he exhibited many of the 20th Centuries greatest avant-garde artists for the first time in America. In his journal, *Camera Work*, produced from 1903 – 1914, he, through the publication of articles and critiques about the medium, introduced many artists and artistic ideas to a select group of subscribers.

Born in Hoboken New Jersey, and educated both in New York and Berlin, he had the opportunity to study and work with Hermann Wilhelm Vogel, his chemistry Professor at the Technische Hochschule. Vogel's research at the time was developing chemistry processes for developing photographs. Stieglitz's time in Berlin helped to ignite his growing interest in his artistic endeavors. At the turn of the century Stieglitz returned to New York and through his involvement with the Camera Club of New York went on to establish the Photo-Secession, then the publication of *Camera Work* and the opening of his gallery. In 1917 Stieglitz exhibited the works of Georgia O'Keeffe, and in 1918 O'Keeffe moved to New York at his suggestion and invitation and began her career as a full-time artist. They developed both a professional and personal relationship and married in 1924. Stieglitz and O'Keeffe lived together in New York until 1929, which was when O'Keeffe started spending part of the year in New Mexico. They remained married during the years O'Keeffe lived in New Mexico. He died in 1946. O'Keeffe spent many years living in Abiquiu, New Mexico at her Ghost Ranch home and later in the village of Abiquiu. She died in Santa Fe in 1986.



Georgia O'Keeffe (1887 - 1986)
Patio with Black Door, 1955
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston



Georgia O'Keeffe (1887 - 1986)
Cows Skull: Red, White, and Blue, 1931
The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Of the six artists we briefly discuss today, Alfred Stieglitz is the only one never having visited New Mexico. It is believed that he was known to say, " I never traveled west of Hoboken". For much of his lifetime, his years were spent traveling between New York City and Lake George, New York.

Please consider this week's newsletter a brief introduction to the possibility of the many layers and overlaps in the lives of these three artist's couples and an exhibition that exists now in the mind of Janet. We hope one day to bring this to you for real.

The video we present today comes from The Georgia O'Keeffe Museum and highlights O'Keeffe's work and life.

We have updated our website and created a new section for Works by Various Artists. This page includes a wonderful variety of photographs. We will be posting new inventory on this page as it arrives at the gallery.

We again want to thank you for the feedback. Your emails and calls mean the world to us and continue to motivate. We have had some wonderful responses.

Many of you have also asked about accessing our previous emails. We have added a new page on our website entitled “History of Photography” . All our past and future weekly mailings will be located there for viewing. Please feel free to share them and encourage interested parties to join our mailing list under “contact” .

Thank you, please stay safe, healthy, productive, and involved.

Please visit our website **www.photographydealers.com** to view our current inventory.