

OBJECT RESEARCH



Alfred Stieglitz (American, 1864–1946)

The Flatiron

1903, printed 1920/39

Gelatin silver print

Alfred Stieglitz Collection

AIC accession number: 1949.707

Stieglitz Estate number: 130A

Inscriptions: Unmarked recto; inscribed verso, on second mount, upper left, in graphite: "1 [in rectangle]"; verso, on second mount, lower left, diagonally, in graphite: "9 [encircled]"; verso, on second mount, lower left, in graphite: "130 A"

Dimensions: 12 x 8.4 cm (image/paper/first mount); 32 x 24.8 cm (second mount)

Print thickness: N/A

Mount: Original

CONTEXT

In 1903 a great winter storm left New York City covered with a layer of fresh snow. Alfred Stieglitz seized his hand camera and brought it to Madison Square Park—located blocks from the Camera Club of New York, a frequent haunt of the photographer—where the newly erected Flatiron Building could be seen looming behind the trees. As he later recalled, “I suddenly saw the Flat-Iron Building as I had never seen it before. It looked, from where I stood, as if it were moving toward me like the bow of a monster ocean steamer, a picture of the new America which was in the making.”¹ Later, when his father asked him why he had photographed “that hideous building,” he told him, “That is the new America. It is to America what the Parthenon is to Greece.”²

Stieglitz shot several negatives of the scene over the next few days, and he initially printed one as a photogravure (see 1949.838 in the Alfred Stieglitz collection at the Art Institute of Chicago). Many years later, he made this gelatin silver print from a similar negative. Whereas the earlier photogravure was cropped to emphasize its vertical shape and possesses a warmer tone and matte surface, the later work is a contact print—uncropped and printed at the exact size of the negative—with the cooler tonality and higher contrast characteristic of gelatin silver paper. The later print is in keeping with Stieglitz’s shift to straight photography.

¹ Alfred Stieglitz, “I Photograph the Flat-Iron Building,” *Twice a Year* 14/15 (Fall/Winter 1946/47), reprinted in Richard Whelan, ed., *Stieglitz on Photography: His Selected Essays and Notes* (Aperture, 2000), p. 113.

² *Ibid.*, p. 114.