

OBJECT RESEARCH



Alfred Stieglitz (American, 1864–1946)

The Flatiron

1903

Photogravure

Alfred Stieglitz Collection

AIC accession number: 1949.838

Stieglitz Estate number: 130B

Inscriptions: Inscribed recto, on second mount, upper center, upside-down, in graphite: "# 3"; recto, on image, lower left, in graphite: "AS"; unmarked verso

Dimensions: 32.7 x 16.7 cm (image); 40.3 x 21.5 cm (paper); 46.7 x 31.7 cm (first mount); 51.1 x 37.2 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 selected this one to be enlarged as a photogravure and included in *Camera Work*. Many years later, he used a similar negative to make a gelatin silver print, also now in the Alfred Stieglitz Collection at the Art Institute (1949.707). The gelatin silver print is a contact print—uncropped and printed at the exact size of the negative—with a cooler tonality and higher contrast. This differs from the photogravure, which was cropped to emphasize its vertical shape and has a warmer tone and matte surface to provide a softer effect, in keeping with Pictorialist aesthetics.

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.