

OBJECT RESEARCH



Gertrude Käsebier (American, 1852–1934)

Alfred Stieglitz

1902, printed 1906

Platinum print

Alfred Stieglitz Collection

AIC accession number: 1949.862

Stieglitz Estate number:

Inscriptions: Signed recto, lower right, on image, in yellow pencil: "GERTRUDE KÄSEBIER"; inscribed recto, upper right, on image [possibly on negative]; "ALFRED STIEGLITZ / MCMVI"; inscribed verso, full page, letterpress printed in black ink [upside down]: " I BELIEVE that here are observable the first steps, still somewhat hesitating but already significant, toward an important evolution. Art has held itself aloof from the great movement, which for half a century has engrossed all forms of human activity in profitably exploiting the natural forces that fill heaven and earth. Instead of calling to his aid the enormous forces ever ready to serve the wants of the world, as an assistance in those mechanical and unnecessarily fatiguing portions of his labor,

the artist has remained true to processes which are primitive, traditional, narrow, small, egotistical, and over-scrupulous, and thus has lost the better part of his time and energy. These processes date from the days when man believed himself alone in the universe, confronted by innumerable enemies. Little by little he discovers that these innumerable enemies were but allies and mysterious slaves of man which had not been taught to serve him. Man, to-day, is on the point of realizing that everything around him begs to be allowed to come to his assistance, and is ever ready to work with him and for him, if he will but make his wishes understood. This glad message is daily spreading more widely through all the domains of human intelligence. The artist alone, moved by a sort of superannuated pride, has refused to listen to the modern voice. He reminds one of one of those unhappy solitary

OBJECT RESEARCH

weavers, still to be found in remote parts of the country, who, though weighed down by the misery of poverty and useless fatigue, yet absolutely continues to weave coarse fabric by an antiquated and obsolete method, and this although but a few steps from his cabin are to be found the power of the torrent, of coal and of wind, which offer to do twenty times in one hour the work which cost him a long month of slavery, and to do it better. / It is already many years since the sun revealed to us its power to portray objects and beings more quickly and more accurately than can pencil or crayon. It seemed to work only its own way and at its own pleasure. At first man was restricted to making permanent that which the impersonal and unsympathetic light had registered. He had not yet been permitted to imbue it with thought. But to-day it sees that thought has found a fissure through which to penetrate the mystery of this anonymous force, invade it, subjugate it, animate it, and compel it to say such things as have not yet been said in all the realm of chiaroscuro, of grace, of beauty and of truth. / MAURICE MAETERLINCK"

Dimensions: 30.2 x 23.4 cm (image); 33.6 x 24 cm (paper); 43.2 x 27.9 cm (mount)

Print thickness: N/A

Surface sheen: Low gloss (2.8 GU @ 85°)

Paper tone: N/A

Mount: Original

Mount tone: L*87.97, a*3.07, b*18.27

Ultraviolet-induced (UV) visible fluorescence (recto): None

X-ray fluorescence (XRF) spectrometry:
See below

Fourier transform infrared (FTIR) spectrometry:
N/A

TECHNICAL SUMMARY

This photograph is a platinum print on beige paper. It is adhered overall to the verso of a page from the April 1906 *Camera Work* "Steichen Supplement" edition (no. 14s), which has a full letterpress-printed text by Maurice Maeterlinck. The black margins surrounding the image are the result of contact printing the negative and are typical of untrimmed platinum prints. The title and date were inscribed in the negative, and the artist signed the print at the bottom right in yellow pencil. Glycerin was selectively used to retard the development of the platinum image, this can be seen on the right and left sides of the figure's head and neck. When the surface of the print is viewed under high magnification, the fibers from the paper are visible and the image sits directly on the fibers, with no intermediary binder. This print is matte and does not fluoresce when exposed to long-wave UV radiation. Platinum, iron, lead, and mercury were detected using XRF spectrometry. Common to platinotypes, the residual presence of light-sensitive iron ions could be due to improper washing of the print after processing. Here the iron signal is also coming from the paper substrate, as well as from printing ink on the verso. The presence of lead could have two sources: while lead could have also been used during fabrication of the photographic paper itself, it was also commonly used during the processing of platinum prints, to increase uniform development. The presence of mercury could be the result of the artist's use of mercuric chloride during processing, to create the print's warm tones.

X-RAY FLUORESCENCE (XRF) SPECTROMETRY

XRF spectral readings were taken from the recto of the work and from the mount when available. The elements listed below have been positively identified in the work; elements in bold have been attributed to the processing of the print.

Print: **Fe, Pt**, Hg, Pb

Mount: Ca, Ti, Fe, Ni, Zn

The graph below shows XRF spectra for three distinct measurement areas on the print: the darkest, maximum-density image area (Dmax, purple); the lightest, minimum-density image area (Dmin, green); and the mount, when available (orange). The background spectrum (gray) represents the characteristic contribution of the instrument itself as measured on a Teflon reference and is included in order to discount irrelevant elements from the print's signature. Elements were identified based on the presence of their characteristic peaks. Analysis was performed with a Bruker/Keymaster Tracer III-V+ energy-dispersive handheld XRF analyzer, equipped with changeable Ti and Al filters and a Rh transmission target. Measurements were taken for 120 or 180 LT at 40 kV and 10 μ A. The spectrum below illustrates the significant peaks for this print in the energy range from 3 to 13 keV.

Figure 1. (right)
Locations of XRF measurements



Figure 2. (below)
XRF spectra from the Dmax, Dmin, mount, and background signal produced by the analyzer.

