

WILLIAMINA PARRISH: ARTIST, PHOTOGRAPHER, MENTOUR

A Thesis by

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Bachelor of Arts, Newman University, 2013

Submitted to the Department of History
and the faculty of the Graduate School of
Wichita State University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

May 2022

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The following faculty members have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in History.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My research on Williamina Parrish began nearly two years ago on September 21, 2020 in response to a post on a history social media page, concerning the identity of a subject in a portrait. My personal research project turned into a term paper, and my thesis the following fall. There are many among the faculty and staff at Wichita State University who have aided me in my success. First, I want to thank the chair of my committee, Dr. Robin Henry, who advised me from the early stages of the original term paper and through the process of expanding my research into my thesis. I want to thank Dr. Jay Price for guiding me through the final stages of writing and structuring my research and listening to me patiently as I excitedly recounted new information that I uncovered. I also want to thank my outside committee member Dr. Ksenya Gurshtein, Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art of the Ulrich Museum for providing a perspective from the world of art. I also want to extend my gratitude to Beverly Bishop (Allen) who researched the Potters in the 1980s, for answering questions and providing me with documents that I had difficulty obtaining due to closures related to the COVID-19 pandemic. I would like to thank the following organizations for assisting in my research:

Archives and Manuscripts Department of the New York Public Library.
Missouri Historical Society Library and Archive, St. Louis, Missouri.
Special Collections Department, St. Louis Public Library, St. Louis, Missouri.
Special Collections Department, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Virginia.

Finally, I want to extend thanks to Dr. Brittany Lockard who met with me early in the process, as my research encompassed both art and history. I would also like to thank Dr. George Dehner, the advisor for Phi Alpha Theta, and Mike Heaston for his continuing support of student academic research at Wichita State University.

ABSTRACT

Williamina Parrish was a St. Louis artist active in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century that became known nationally and internationally for use of photography as a medium of art. As a photographic artist she represents a transition between the Victorian period and modern photographic art. Parrish implemented the soft focused style focus popular among Victorian photographers and turn of the century pictorialists — later experimenting with sharp focus popular with modernists. Throughout her career she embraced the sentimentality common in Victorian Art including themes based on the home, nature, and Greek mythology. Parrish did market her work to clients, but because she did not make her living by her photography, she could select her clients. This contrast Parrish to her contemporary Käsebier who operated a commercial studio and Cameron who carried out photography as a part of a Victorian system of reciprocity and did not accept paying clients. Williamina Parrish's role as a transitional artist between Victorian and the modern period is evident in a series of male nude figures in nature produced in 1914. Williamina implemented themes of Greek mythology and nature popular among Victorian artists, while using sharp focus popular with modernists, and exploring the nude male figure as a female artist- something that was less common at the time. Parrish was a founding member of the Salon Club of America and studied under one of the founding members of the Photo-Session Gertrude Käsebier. As an artist she was part of creative social circles and committed to mentoring and promoting fellow creatives, including those in literature and art. Williamina Parrish was connected to a network of artists and writers, with her art receiving less attention than more famous members of her social network making it important to reexamine her work in context to the transition between Victorian and modern photographic art.

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INTRODUCTION

Are not the painter's pigments mere chemical combinations, just as much so as chemicals that the photographer uses? And must not both know anatomy? So then, when the man with the camera combines, as in a miracle, all the laws of optics, chemistry, perspective, anatomy, and composition, is he "not an artist" merely because his canvas is a bit of glass, his brush and palette a camera?¹

Williamina Parrish was a St. Louis based artist who used photography as a medium, exhibiting her work nationally and internationally in the first decades of the twentieth century. Williamina appears as a footnote in history, researched in connection to other well-known figures in her creative circle, including well known local figures and a women's art group in St. Louis. Most of the past research related to Williamina Parrish is associated with the early years of her career through the lens of local history and women involved in the Arts and Crafts movement. From 1904 to 1907 Williamina was part of the Potters, an art collective of young women from upper middle-class families. During the 1920s Parrish frequently attended seances at the home of spiritualist and channeler Pearl Lenore Curran. Curran became a national sensation after releasing several books she claimed had been dictated to her by Patience Worth, a young woman from colonial New England that died in an Indian raid. Williamina remained a lifelong friend with Sara Teasdale, a fellow Potter, who went on to become a nationally known bestselling author. Williamina served as a mentor to Teasdale in the early years of her writing career.²

¹ Williamina Parrish, "Arms and the Man" *Photo Era*, vol.28, no. 6 (June 1, 1912): 251-252, accessed November 7, 2020, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015075021918&view=1up&seq=253&q1=Parrish>.

² See Beverly D. Bishop, "The Potter's Wheel: An Early Twentieth Century Support Network of Women Artists and Writers" (master's thesis, University of Missouri at St. Louis, 1984)., Kathleen Nigro, "The Potters: "Moulded on the Wheel," in *Women in the Arts: Eccentric Essays in Music, Visual Arts and Literature*, Eds. Barbara Harbach

Research on the Potters is valuable in understanding the involvement of upper middle-class women in the arts at the beginning of the twentieth century in St. Louis. Beverly Bishop's 1984 thesis laid a solid foundation for further research and aided the St. Louis area in gaining a greater appreciation for the importance of the arts to their community. The goal here is to examine the work and career of Williamina Parrish beyond the Potters and her connection to other local well-known St. Louisans.

Williamina and her sister Grace were among the eleven founding members of the Salon Club of America founded in 1903 and worked together in the early years of their career, becoming known for their artistic soft-focused photographs. Between 1904 and 1907 the sisters were part of an artist group of upper middle-class young women, known as the Potters. Williamina was the "undisputed leader" of the group, mentoring members including Teasdale and later sought to launch the American career of a painter she met while living in Italy. After studying with Gertrude Käsebier in New York, Williamina and Grace took separate paths working independently of each other, with Williamina living many years abroad. Surviving examples of Williamina's work include portraits, romantic themed scenes featuring women and children, and a series of award winning nude male studies taken in Italy before World War I.³

and Diane Touliatos-Miles (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010); Katharine T Corbett, *In Her Place: A Guide to St. Louis Women's History* (St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press, 1999); Patience Worth Collection, 1913-1937, Missouri Historical Society Library and Archives, St. Louis; Margaret Haley Carpenter, *Sara Teasdale a Biography* (New York: The Schulte Publishing Company, 1960), 89.

³ Margaret Carpenter, *Sara Teasdale*, 106; The Art News, "St. Louis," *The Art News (1923-) March 15, 1924, vol. 22 no. 23* (March 15, 1924): 10, www.jstore.org/stable/25591383; "In the Studio Gallery," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, March 9, 1924, Newspapers.com; Williamina Parrish to Ruth St. Denis, 11 July 1925, Ruth St. Denis Letters Personal Correspondence, IV. Correspondence to Ruth St. Denis, 1925, f.333, Archives & Manuscripts, New York Public Library; Samples of Williamina's work and photographs taken in partnership with her sister Grace are found throughout the Parrish Sisters' Scrapbook, Missouri Historical Society Library and Archives, St. Louis. Others are available to view online in the "Grace and Williamina Parrish Photograph Collection, St. Louis Public Library Digital Collection, <https://cdm17210.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p17210coll2>.

To gain greater understanding of Williamina's experience within turn-of-the-century photographic art it is important to examine debates within photography at the time including, style, technique, monetization, and the origin of these debates. Williamina was an artist using photography as a medium and a woman. Although the focus here is on the work of Williamina Parrish- not women photographers, it is necessary to examine how the intersectionality of gender and social expectations shaped the role of women in photographic art and commercial photography.

Many debates within late nineteenth and early twentieth-century photography originate with the development of the medium. Photography is a European technology introduced to the world in January 1839. A technology race ensued over the next few months between two of the world's colonial superpowers, France and Britain, with both laying claim to the new scientific discovery. The Napoleonic Wars had ended less than twenty-five years earlier and tensions remained between the two nations. Photographic technology developed along two different trajectories, one for commercial and one for artistic purposes. Early French photographic pioneer and inventor Nicéphore Niépce, sought to develop a technique to make portraiture more accessible to meet market demands. English Photographic pioneer, Henry Fox Talbot developed his technique by tinkering on his estate inspired by the sad recollection that the sketches he created on his travels, even with the best technology of the time, did not match the beauty of the surroundings he had experienced.⁴

As details of the competing technologies were unveiled, it was revealed that French artist and inventor Daguerre, who had built on the work of Niepce, and English aristocrat Henry Fox

⁴ "The Niépce Heliograph," Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas, accessed November 23, 2021, <https://www.hrc.utexas.edu/niepce-heliograph/>; H. Fox Talbot Esq. F.R.S., *The Pencil of Nature* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, 1844), np, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/33447/33447-h/33447-h.html>.

Talbot discovered two methods to capture images. Daguerre's method produced a single non-reproducible image, whereas Talbot's method created a reversed image that could be reproduced many times over. Talbot's discovery created the possibility for photographic prints—and so photographic art. With modifications, the principles of Talbot's process would remain in use for more than a century until the photographic negative was replaced by digital photography. Talbot embraced the potential contributions that the new technology could bring to science and art but was hesitant of those that would seek to monetize his discovery. Talbot was part of the class of “gentleman amateurs” who sought to place photography among “high art” rather than among consumer products. This debate originating in England over the difference between commercial “professional” photographers and artist “amateur” photographers continued into the twentieth century.⁵

Further disagreements erupted on the topic of technique. The first paper presented at the inaugural session of the Royal Photographic Society by Sir William Newton advocated for intentionally capturing figures slightly out of focus as an artistic technique. Those involved with sciences and commercial photography relied on “sharp focus” to capture images. Newton's “soft- focus” school sought to emulate painting and remained popular among art photographers, particularly pictorialists until the early twentieth century. Detractors described the style as the “fuzzy school” and actively advocated for “sharp focus” photography.⁶

⁵ “Calotype,” Britannica Online, accessed November 25, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/technology/calotype>; Roger Taylor, *Impressed by Light British Photographs from Paper Negatives, 1840-1860* (New York: Metropolitan Museum, 2007), 22; Michael Bartram, *The Pre-Raphaelite Camera Aspects of Victorian Photography* (Little, Brown and Company, Boston, 1985), 130.

⁶ Sir Wm. J. Newton, “Upon Photography in an Artistic View,” *Journal of the Royal Photographic Society of London, vol. 1*, (1854), 6-7, <https://archive.rps.org/archive/volume-1?>; Robin Kelsey, *Photography and the Art of Chance* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 2015), 62-64; Watchman, “Words from the Watchtower,” *The American Amateur Photographer Vol. 15 (January- December 1903)*, 361, https://www.google.com/books/edition/_/DpZRAAAAYAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&bsq=Newton..

The British tradition of photographic art produced early pioneer, Julia Margaret Cameron who inspired many women to explore photography. Cameron served as a model for respectable women to explore photographic art. Cameron was a lady amateur of the upper class who entered photography later in life and had fulfilled her obligation to society by raising a family. Cameron carved her space out as an extension of upper-class life. Although mostly a male hobby, Cameron had connections to scientific and artistic circles, making her photography an acceptable venture. By interpreting themes from the Bible, English folklore, and frequently photographing women and children, she remained within the scope of socially acceptable themes of art for women. Following gendered roles of the time, Cameron did not participate directly in debates about technique and instead credited her style to an accident found through experimentation. Cameron also produced a series of portraits of famous men, opening a door to women to expand beyond photographing portraits of women and children.⁷

In the United States, photography began as a commercial endeavor and later became popular as a medium for art with the rise of the middle class. Unlike the British who looked down on those of the trades, the United States prided itself on entrepreneurship and business. As a nation with a less than one-hundred-year history, the United States lacked a hereditary leisure class of landed gentry at the core of Britain's art photography movement. In the United States photography was commercialized from the beginning, with women taking part in photography as part of family businesses. Gender stereotypes of the nineteenth century placed women in roles involving children and created an opening wedge for women entering the field of photography by photographing children and babies. Women used this opening wedge to build businesses and

⁷ Kelsey, *Art of Chance*, 70-71-,77-80,91; Violet Hamilton, *Annals of My Glass House Photographs by Julia Margaret Cameron*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997),17-23.

expand photography as a respectable trade. Photographic art was popularized in the late nineteenth century as a leisure activity of the middle class. Amateur photographic societies formed encouraging exhibition of those who created photography for non-commercial purposes. In the late nineteenth century, a new type of photographer emerged—the commercial photographic artist. Women, such as Gertrude Käsebier opened the path for women both as commercial photographers and as artists. Although men and women both participated in the new developing genre of commercial photographic artists, Käsebier served as a role model and mentor to women in photography including Anne Brigman, Williamina and Grace Parrish, and Imogen Cunningham.⁸

Williamina Parrish entered photography at a time of increased opportunity for women in the arts. Organizations that had once been open only to men began to include women, including art societies in the St. Louis area. Photographers such as Francis Benjamin Johnston and Gertrude Käsebier advocated not only for it as an occupation but actively engaged in discussions about style and technique. In this climate, Williamina with her sister Grace formed a group of women artists to hone their respective skills. The group known as the Potters, became local celebrities for their handmade magazines. Members circulated each issue of the *Potter's Wheel* for review and critique. Author Beverly Bishop suggests that the circulated magazine with review was modeled after portfolios circulated by The Salon Club of America, of which Williamina and her sister Grace were founding members. Williamina and her sister Grace

⁸ Taylor, *Impressed by Light*, 69-73; Kathrine Manthorne, *Women in the Dark: Female Photographers in the US, 1850-1900* (Atglen, Pennsylvania: Schiffer Publishing LTD, 2020), 50-58; Richard A. Anthony, "A Popular Craze" *Pittsburg Dispatch* (Pittsburg, Pennsylvania), April 14, 1889, Newspapers.com; William Innes Homer, *Alfred Stieglitz and the Photo-Secession* (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1983), 67-69; Bishop, "The Potter's Wheel," 91-92; Kathleen Pyne, *Anne Brigman, Photographer of Enchantment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), 26, 30-31, 62.

worked together producing portraits and art and were frequently featured in magazines including *Western Camera Notes*, *Photo Era*, and *Camera Craft*.⁹

In 1909 the Parrish sisters traveled to study with Gertrude Käsebier in New York where they acquired additional skills and prestige. After returning from New York Williamina and Grace lived abroad and began to work separately. One of Williamina's most productive years was 1914 when she was living in Italy. Williamina won second place in 1915 with her print *The Faun* at the annual nationwide contest hosted by John Wannamaker in Philadelphia. The following year she won third place at the Wannamaker exhibition with *Bacio Della Luna*. Williamina sought to exhibit in New York and contacted Alfred Stieglitz who rejected her request for assistance. In 1924 the Los Angeles County Museum of Art purchased Parrish's print *Spring Profile* as part of their permanent collection.¹⁰

Throughout her career as an artist, Williamina coached and supported creative people in her circle. She is credited with helping prepare Sara Teasdale's first book for publication including aiding with selection and editing. Williamina remained active in Sara's literary career until she married. Williamina again assisted Sara when she fell ill in 1917. After World War I, Williamina sought assist another artist in starting a career, although this endeavor was less successful. While living in Italy before the war, Williamina became acquainted with the Ronchi

⁹ "A Brief History of the St. Louis Artists' Guild," St. Louis Artists' Guild, accessed October 10, 2020, <https://www.stlouisartistsguild.org/timeline>; Kara Fiedorek Felt, "Before the Kodak Girl." (lecture, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, November 24, 2019), <https://www.nga.gov/audio-video/video/felt-kodak.html>; Bishop, "The Potter's Wheel," 16-17; Carpenter, *Sara Teasdale, a Biography*, 30.

¹⁰ News clipping, "Two St. Louis Sisters Gain Fame in the Field of Photography: Prints Exhibited at Art Museum," May 13, 1911, n.p., in Parrish Sisters' Scrapbook, Missouri Historical Society; John Wannamaker to Williamina Parrish 15 March 15, 1915, n.p., in Parrish Sisters' Scrapbook, Missouri Historical Society; John Wannamaker to Williamina Parrish, 22 March, 1916, n.p., in Parrish Sisters' Scrapbook, Missouri Historical Society; John C. Stick to Williamina Parrish 23, December 1924 n.p., in Parrish Sisters' Scrapbook, Missouri Historical Society; Sarah Greenough, Juan Hamilton ed., *Alfred Stieglitz Photographs & Writings* (Callaway, Washington, National Gallery of Art, 1983), 226.

family. Both the son Nino and his father were painters. During her time in Italy, Nino was a frequent subject of Williamina's photographs. In 1924 she hosted Nino in St. Louis and aided him in securing an exhibition at the Artists' Guild. After the exhibition Ronchi traveled on to New York creating decorative panels for the Denishawn Dance Company. Nino and Williamina's friendship cooled as she became frustrated with his lack of motivation and withdrew financial support. Ronchi had an exhibition in New York in 1933, returning to Europe for a time, but he and Williamina did not reconcile their differences.¹¹

Williamina carved out a space for herself among artistic circles as a mentor and an artist using photography as her primary medium although later in life, she explored painting. By identifying her intent as creative and not monetizing her work, Parrish placed herself among the nineteenth-century tradition of lady or gentlemen "amateurs." The development of Williamina Parrish as an artist and works she created while working with her sister as an artist can be divided into three periods: Finding Their Voice (1898-1908) Growth in Skill (1909-1913) and Finding Separate Paths (1914-Onward). In the early years, Williamina and her sister experimented with use of the camera gaining notoriety for often creatively manipulated images using their skill from other areas of art. The sisters traveled to study in New York after gaining notoriety for their creative photographs inspired by paintings. During their studies in New York and those that followed, the photographs the sisters explored more advanced techniques and themes such as using light and shadow and exploring nude studies. Beginning in 1914, Williamina and Grace began to work independently of each other, with Williamina living abroad

¹¹ Carpenter, *Sara Teasdale*, 99,234; "In the Studio Gallery," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, March 9, 1924, Newspapers.com; The Art News, "St. Louis" *The Art News (1923-)* (March 15,1924, vol.22 no.23) www.jstore.org/stable/25591383; Williamina Parrish to Ruth St. Denis 11 July,1925, Ruth St. Denis Papers, New York Public Library; Thomas S. Linn, "Visiting the New Exhibitions about Town," *New York Times*, January 8, 1933 (ProQuest historical newspapers); Williamina Parrish to Vine Colby (McCasland), 8 January 1934, Sara Teasdale Collection, Accession 8170-d, Special Collections Department University of Virginia, Charlottesville.

often for many years at a time in Italy. It was here where Williamina explored the nude male form in nature as an artistic theme.

Art scholars have argued that the nude male figure in art—particularly as interpreted by women—was rare at the turn of the century and it remains uncommon to the present. Some women did portray the nude female figure, but mainly in indoor settings. Based on surviving examples of Parrish’s work it is likely portrayals of the nude female figure in her later career were inspired in part by Anne Brigman. However, Parrish’s portrayals of the nude male figure were inspired by classical art. Anne Brigman gained notoriety for nude female figures in nature in the early twentieth century. Brigman’s influence is visible in other artists of the time including in early work of Imogen Cunningham and Alfred Stieglitz series of photographs of his second wife Georgia O’Keefe. Photographer, Imogen Cunningham is often credited as an early pioneer exploring the nude male form in photographic art, with other women pursuing this genre decades later. But Cunningham’s photographic series of her husband Roi on Mount Rainier were taken a year later than Williamina Parrish’s photographs from Lake Como, Italy.¹²

Although Cunningham likely drew inspiration from classical art due to titles given to the photographs, Williamina’s technique was uniquely her own. Parrish incorporated the surrounding landscape with the figure as the central theme. By contrast, Cunningham’s Mount Rainier series are landscape scenes accented by a nude figure in the distance. Williamina’s

¹² Alla Parsons, “Why are female artists representing the male nude figure very rare.” *Accademia Letters*, accessed December 22, 2021, https://www.academia.edu/8418830/Why_are_female_artists_representing_the_male_nude_figure_very_rare; Paul Martineau, *Imogen Cunningham a Retrospective* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2020), 6, 30-31; Pyne, *Photographer of Enchantment*. 150-153, 157-164; Grace and Williamina Parrish Photograph Collection, St. Louis Public Library Digital Collections, <https://cdm17210.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p17210coll2>.

“Italian series” also contrasts with earlier periods of her photography.¹³ Early in her career, Parrish was known for her soft-focused, “painterly” photographs. In the ‘Italian series,’ Parrish maintains themes common in classical paintings but employs sharp focus. Although Parrish departs from the soft-focus style in the “Italian series,” some of her later surviving works utilize the soft-focus technique. Parrish’s decision may have been influenced by growing criticism of the soft-focus school but may have also been a stylistic choice in an outdoor setting with full lighting.

Williamina Parrish represents a generation of photographers from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century that explored photography as an artistic medium in the United States. Although photography was adopted for commercial purposes in the 1840s, photography did not gain popularity as an artistic medium until the late nineteenth century. Williamina Parrish was a product of the pre-war era, creating art inspired by classical themes, the Pre-Raphaelites, and the Art and Crafts movement. She remained active and visible at a national level in photography from the turn of the twentieth century until shifting her attention to painting in the 1920s. Although she studied with one of the founding members of the Photo-Secession, Gertrude Käsebier, she was a founding member of an organization established in response to exclusionary practices of the Photo-Secession. Through the years of the early twentieth century, Parrish navigated the conflicts of the photographic art world, including debates involving monetization and technique, or if photography could be art at all.

¹³ A series of six “exhibition worthy prints” of nude male studies are described in the April 21, 1916 and April 28, 1916, issues of *Reedy’s Mirror*. L.A.L., “Miss Parrish’s Moods,” *Reedy’s Mirror*, April 21, 1916, Vol. XXV No. 16, 280-281, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=njp.32101045377478&view=1up&seq=147&skin=2021>; Vine McCasland, “The Art of Misses Parrish and Risqué” *Reedy’s Mirror*, April 28, 1916, 295, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=njp.32101045377478&view=1up&seq=159&skin=2021>. This series of photographs are referred to herein as the “Italian series” for simplification.

CHAPTER 1: PHOTOGRAPHY'S EUROPEAN ORIGINS

Photography's Beginnings in France and Britain

Sir Charles Eastlake, President of the Royal Academy greeted a crowd gathered on Thursday, January 20, 1853, to inaugurate a new society to explore the “uses and advantages of Photography both to Science and Art.” The Photographic Society of London was founded nearly thirty years after the first successful experiments. The Society also launched a journal devoted exclusively to photography including proceedings of the society, papers presented to the council, advancements in photography, and correspondence from photographers to assist members in their pursuit. Women were present at the first meeting and were eligible to be members of the Society.¹⁴

Practice of photographic art in nineteenth century Britain was limited to the upper-class. Although women participated in photography, the majority of photographers were men. The first exhibition devoted exclusively to photography opened in London a few weeks prior to the formation of the Photographic Society of London, on December 22, 1852. Women participated in the event but were a minority. Of the seventy-six photographers who exhibited, only two were women. By the late nineteenth century one of Britain's most famous photographers would be a woman, the “lady amateur” Julia Margaret Cameron. During the early years, British photography was dominated by “gentleman amateurs”, seeking to boost the status of photography to that of fine art prints. A pastime developed and popularized by men of science and leisure on country estates soon also became a consumer product, the work of tradesmen. This triggered debate and

¹⁴ “Introductory Address,” *Journal of the Royal Photographic Society of London*, vol. 1 (1853), 1-4, <https://archive.rps.org/archive/volume-1?>

division between amateur artists and commercial photographers who monetized their work that continued until the early twentieth century. The first commercial photographic studio in the world opened by Richard Beard in London in 1841. Beard remained the only photographer in London until 1847. Ten years later in 1857, one hundred forty-seven photographers are listed as operating in London. Photography had “uses and advantages ...to both Art and Science,” as the process was developed by partnership of artist and scientists. Researchers in Britain and France were motivated by different objectives. French inventors were primarily motivated by commercial interests focused on developing a new technology to monetize. In Britain photographic technology was developed to record surroundings without a specific monetized application in mind. ¹⁵

Photographic technology in France was developed for commercial purposes by scientists and artists. Joseph Nicéphore Niépce was a “gentleman amateur” scientist who sought to create prints by mechanical means as a consumer product. Niépce’s discoveries and inventions were later improved and marketed by artist and attraction owner Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre. Niépce, born into a prominent family in the Burgundy region of France, began experimentation during the 1810s in response to an increased demand for affordable portraits. His experiments in 1816 produced legible prints that faded quickly, what he called “point de vue.” Over the next decade Niépce developed the *héliographie*, or “sun writing” process using a camera obscura and plates treated with chemicals. ¹⁶

¹⁵ Taylor, *Impressed by Light*, 51,133-136; “Richard Beard (1801-1855), Photographer,” National Portrait Gallery, accessed November 30, 2021, <https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/person/mp06664/richard-beard>; Lady Eastlake, “Photography,” in April 1857, *The Quarterly Review* Vol 101, January -April 1857 (London, John Murray, 1857),448, <https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.21559/page/n3/mode/2up>; “Introductory Address,” *Royal Photographic Society of London, vol. 1*,(1853), 1-4.

¹⁶ “The Niépce Heliograph,” Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas, accessed November 23, 2021, <https://www.hrc.utexas.edu/niepce-heliograph/>.

The camera obscura, from Latin darkened (obscura) chamber (camera) was a draftsman's tool often used by artists from the seventeenth century onward, consisting of a wooden box with a lens. Light enters the lens to a mirror held at a 45-degree angle behind the lens. The mirror projects the image onto a piece of paper or canvas inside a darkened enclosure, allowing for the outlines to be traced. Niépce image known as *View from the Window Le Gras* is considered to be the oldest surviving photograph, and was produced in Saint-Loup-de-Varnes, a French commune sometime during 1826 and 1827. Niépce applied a coating of dissolved light-sensitive bitumen in oil of lavender over a polished pewter plate and inserted the plate into a camera obscura positioned near a window in his second-story workroom. After several days of exposure to sunlight, an impression of the courtyard remained on the plate. In December 1827, Niépce acknowledged that technological advancements on the camera obscura would be needed to advance the production of pictures. "It is only, however, with an apparatus of this kind, carried to the greatest perfection of which it is capable, that one can obtain a faithful image of nature and fix it properly." Although he had not experimented with glass plates, Niépce wrote, "I am led to believe that glass would perhaps be even more preferable." Niépce had taken, "the first uncertain step in a completely new direction," by "fixing the image of objects by the action of light, and reproducing them by printing, with the aid of the known process of engraving." In 1829 Niépce partnered with Daguerre to continue developing the new technology. More than twenty heliographic plates and prints produced from 1825 to 1829 survive. The Niépce Heliograph is the only known point de vue to survive and is part of the Gernsheim Collection at the Harry Ransom center at the University of Texas.¹⁷

¹⁷ Scott Billings, "Camera Obscura," History of Science Museum, accessed November 21, 2021, <https://www.hsm.ox.ac.uk/camera-obscura>, Ian Phillips, "The First Photograph Ever Taken was Almost Lost to History," *Insider*, August 19, 2016, <https://www.insider.com/first-photograph-in-history-2016-8>; Ransom Center, "Niépce Heliograph." ; Nicéphore Niépce, *Heliography: Designs and Engravings*, 8 December 1827, Artists

Niépce met Daguerre while traveling through Parris on the way to England in December 1827 just after publicly announcing his discoveries. Daguerre, a Romantic painter, printmaker, stage decorator, and inventor, was the proprietor of the Parisian attraction the Diorama. The Diorama was a three hundred fifty-person capacity room that rotated in front of an opening with a series of slides and panels moved by ropes, with fog and lighting effects. Each show lasted about fifteen minutes. Five years earlier in 1822, Daguerre partnered with Charles Marie Bouton, a fellow set design student, to develop the Diorama. Daguerre and Boulton were both students of Pierre Prevost, who specialized in panoramas. Panoramas were highly realistic painted scenes that patrons would view from a platform, often depicting exotic scenes of faraway places, cityscapes, or historical events and were popular entertainment in the early to middle-nineteenth century. Daguerre advanced the panoramic experience by creating an animated panorama—a darkened room with illuminated screen and immersive experience that transported the viewer to a different reality. Daguerre’s use of translucent and opaque paints, lighting and early special effects techniques were revolutionary in his time and adopted by directors, playwrights, and composers.¹⁸

Daguerre was also interested in the possibility of capturing images using the camera obscura. Daguerre had carried out his own experiments with the camera obscura, but the images had faded after a few hours. The two met again in February 1828 and began exchanging ideas in letters the following year. In December 1829 Niépce and Daguerre signed a contract to advance the development of the new technology. Until Niépce’s death in 1833, the two continued to

Project.com, accessed November 24, 2021. <https://arthistoryproject.com/artists/nicephore-niepce/heliography-designs-and-engravings/>.

¹⁸ Malcolm Daniel, “Daguerre (1787-1851) and the Invention of Photography,” Department of Photographs, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, October 2004, https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/dagu/hd_dagu.htm; “Daguerre and the Invention of Photography,” Nicéphore Niépce House Museum, accessed November 23, 2021, <https://photo-museum.org/daguerre-invention-photography/>; Addison Nuget, “Diorama, qu’est-ce que c’est?” Jstore Daily July 1, 2020, <https://daily.jstor.org/diorama-quest-ce-que-cest/>.

experiment with new processes. In 1832 they developed the physautotype process, an improvement on the photosensitive agent used and reducing the exposure time needed to produce an image.¹⁹

After Niépce's death, Daguerre continued to experiment with different techniques. In 1835 Daguerre further shortened exposure time required to produce an image. Two years later, Daguerre developed a process to permanently preserve the images on metal plates. Daguerre's pictures were shown to members of the French Académie de Science on January 7, 1839 but he did not disclose specific details until later in the year - except to the secretary François Arago. Daguerre presented samples of his work to the Académie de Science as he had failed to find private investors to fund his work. Daguerre announced his invention of the "daguerreotype" nearly three and a half years earlier in the September 27, 1835 issue of *Journal des artistes*. It is likely that he produced his first successful daguerreotypes sometime in 1834. Although Niépce's son Isidore had inherited his father's stake in the partnership, Daguerre arranged several changes to the contract, giving himself greater control and sole right to the new daguerreotype process.²⁰

Daguerre traded the rights to the daguerreotype process to the French government in exchange for lifetime pensions for himself and Niépce's son Isidore. Daguerre granted the French government permission to make his process freely available—except in England due to continued political tensions between the two countries. Daguerre obtained a patent for his

¹⁹ Niépce House Museum, "Daguerre."; "Nicéphore Niépce, Daguerre and the Physautotype," Niépce House Museum, accessed November 25, 2021, <https://photo-museum.org/niepce-nicephore-daguerre-physautotype/>

²⁰ Niépce House Museum, "Daguerre."; Niépce House Museum, "Physautotype."; Nuget, "Diorama"; Daniel, "Daguerre."; Michael Lucibella, "This month in Physics History January 2, 1839: First Daguerreotype of the Moon," January 2013, vol.22, no 1. <https://www.aps.org/publications/apsnews/201301/physicshistory.cfm>; Stephen C. Pinson, "History: 2 1826-1839" in *Encyclopedia of Nineteenth Century Photography* ed. John Hannavy (New York: Routledge, 2008), 675, https://www.google.com/books/edition/Encyclopedia_of_Nineteenth_Century_Photo/Kd5cAgAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=On+January+7,+1839,+members+of+the+French+Acad%C3%A9mie+des+Sciences&pg=PA675&printsec=frontcover.

process in England, limiting the use to licensed photographers. On August 19, 1839, politician and scientist François Arago, disclosed details of the process before a joint meeting of the Académie de Science and Académie des Beaux-Arts. The daguerreotype was produced by treating silver-plated copper sheets with iodine to create a light sensitive surface. The plates were exposed in a camera and developed with mercury vapor. The plate was then washed in saline to preserve the image. The presentation focused on the daguerreotype, only briefly mentioning the process of heliography developed by Niépce, and physautotype developed by Niépce and Daguerre—advances that made the daguerreotype possible. In 1841 Isidore Niépce published a booklet, seeking to reestablish his father's legacy as the inventor of photography, that had been usurped by Daguerre.²¹

Less than twenty-five photographs by Daguerre are known to survive. On March 8, 1839, a fire destroyed The Diorama. Firefighters sought to stop the blaze from spreading to the adjacent building that housed Daguerre's workshop. The fire destroyed many of Daguerre's early experimental works, and notes detailing his inventions. Although few original works of Daguerre remain, his legacy persisted through his method. The Daguerreotype remained popular in the United States until the early 1860s.²²

The French photographic technology of the daguerreotype fulfilled a growing demand in the consumer market for portraiture. Commercial photography flourished as a consumer product in the United States and was further improved by domestic entrepreneurs. By 1853, an estimated three million daguerreotypes were produced annually. Early entrepreneurs, particularly those in

²¹ Pinson, "History:2 1826-1839" 675; Lucibella, "This month in Physics History.," The Franklin Institute. "Daguerreotype Photography," Franklin Institute, accessed November 25, 2021, <https://www.fi.edu/history-resources/daguerreotype-photography>; "Isidore Niépce and Daguerre," Nicéphore Niépce House Museum, accessed November 25, 2021, <https://photo-museum.org/isidore-niepce-daguerre/>.

²² Daniel, "Daguerre.," Nuget, "Diorama.," Donald D. Keyes "The Daguerreotype's Popularity in America," *Art Journal*, (Winter 1976-1977, vol.36 no.2): 116, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/776158>.

science related fields manufactured equipment and opened studios. In the autumn of 1839, Joaquim Bishop, an instrument maker in the chemistry department at the University of Pennsylvania, produced the Bishop Daguerreotype camera and Developing Apparatus. Chemist John W. Draper and inventor Samuel F.B. Morse were early American pioneers to develop and improve photographic processes. Fredrick S. Archer's Wet Collodion Process introduced in 1851 replaced the daguerreotype in the United States by the time of the Civil War.²³

While Niépce and Daguerre in France were developing early photographic processes, an English scientist, unaware of the work in France, had begun developing processes of his own. William Henry Fox Talbot was motivated to develop photographic technology to record the images and the beauty of the world around him by scientific and mechanical means. Talbot, a chemist, mathematician, linguist, Egyptologist, and member of Parliament began his experimentation with photographic processes after a failed attempt to sketch the shores of Lake Como while honeymooning in Italy. He sought to sketch the shoreline using another optical tool, the camera lucida, and commented later of his experience, "I found that the faithless pencil had only left traces on the paper melancholy to behold." His prior experiments with the camera obscura had been no more successful. Talbot pondered, "how charming it would be if it were possible to cause these natural images to imprint themselves durably and remain fixed on paper." In early 1834, Talbot began experimenting with coating paper with light sensitive chemicals. By the summer of 1835, Talbot had some success creating negative images on paper. The negatives

²³ Keyes "Daguerreotype's Popularity;" 116; Robert Taft, *Photography and the American Scene; A Social history, 1839-1889* (New York: McMillan, 1938), 63, https://www.google.com/books/edition/Photography_and_the_American_Scene/ctcMAQAIAAJ?hl=en ; Keyes, "Daguerreotype's Popularity," 116; The Franklin Institute, "Daguerreotype Photography." ; Early Photography, "Wet Collodion Process," Early Photography, Glossary of Films, Plates and Processes, accessed November 25, 2021, <http://www.earlyphotography.co.uk/site/gloss10.html>.

could then be printed on paper, creating a positive image. Talbot kept his work private as he sought to perfect his technique.²⁴

Talbot was born into an upper-class family with elite social connections. He wrote and published his first book, *The Flora and Fauna of Harrow*, in 1812. A graduate of Trinity College, Cambridge, Talbot had published six papers in mathematics before graduating with his Master of Arts in 1825. Prior to assuming his position as Lord of the Manor of Lacock Abbey in 1827, Talbot traveled Europe extensively. In 1824, while in Munich, Talbot became acquainted with William Herschel, a scientist, astronomer, and inventor who would go on to coin the term “photography.” Herschel would serve as an advocate for Talbot’s process, aid in perfecting the technique, and later was a mentor to one of Britain’s most famous nineteenth-century photographers, Julia Margaret Cameron. Herschel and Talbot continued their correspondence and collaborative efforts. Herschel also connected Talbot with others who aided his career. In 1819, Herschel published scientific experiments with silver and salt that laid the foundation of chemistry processes used in early photography by Niépce, Daguerre, and Talbot. Herschel resumed experiments in early 1839 with sodium thiosulphate to dissolve silver salts as a method to fix images. Within a week Herschel made improvements to the photographic processes. Herschel’s paper “On the Art of Photography; or the Application of the Chemical Rays of Light to the Purpose of Pictorial Presentation,” was read to the Royal Society on March 14, 1839, and standardized many of the terms used today including photography, emulsion, and positive and negative images.²⁵

²⁴ Malcom Daniel, “William Henry Talbot Fox (1800-1877) and the Invention of Photography,” Department of Photographs, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, October 2004, https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/tlbt/hd_tlbt.htm; Talbot, *The Pencil of Nature*, n.p.; “Biography William Henry Fox Talbot (1800-1877),” Bodleian Libraries, Oxford University, accessed November 25, 2021, <https://talbot.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/talbot/biography/>.

²⁵ Sonny Maley, “Book Of the Month, February 2007, William Henry Fox Talbot *The Pencil of Nature* London:1844, Sp. Coll Photo A18,” February 2007,

After three years, Talbot returned to his work in the fall of 1838, and began preparing a paper to present to the Royal Society early the next year. News from Paris of Daguerre's discovery was delayed due to poor weather, reaching Britain five days later. Reports from correspondents were unclear, with the first detailed account arriving on January 19, 1839. Although Talbot was not ready to share his work, he forwarded samples of his pictures to the Royal Institution. Talbot's pictures were presented as part of a public lecture hosted by Michael Faraday on the evening of January 25, 1839, introducing the British public to photography.²⁶

In a letter dated January 25, 1839, to Herschel, Talbot announced that his paper would be read the following week before the Royal Society, "respecting a New Art of design which I discovered about five years ago...the possibility of fixing upon paper the image formed by a camera obscura; or rather, I should say; causing it to fix itself." Talbot presented his paper titled "Some Account of the Art of Photogenic Drawing" January 31, 1839, before the Royal Society and presented further technical and chemical details on his process February 21, 1839. Presenting his research at a scientific organization such as the Royal Society, aided Talbot in solidifying his claim for a patent and gaining notoriety for his inventions. Talbot continued to improve on his process. On February 8, 1841, Talbot was issued a patent for "Improvements Obtaining Pictures, or Representations of Objects." Talbot wrote a letter to the *Literary Gazette* the following week

<https://www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/library/files/special/exhibns/month/feb2007.html>; Bodleian Libraries, "Biography William Henry Fox Talbot." ; Kelsey, *Art of Chance*, 92; "Sir Fredrick William Herschel," The Paul Getty Museum, accessed November 25, 2021, <https://www.getty.edu/art/collection/artists/1881/sir-john-frederick-william-herschel-british-1792-1871/>; "Sir John Fredrick William Herschel," International Photography Hall of Fame, accessed November 26, 2021, <https://iphf.org/inductees/sir-john-frederick-william-herschel/>; Günther Buttman, *Shadow of the Telescope; A Biography of John Herschel*, trans. B.E.F. Pagel, David S. Evans ed. (London: Lutherworth Press, 1970), 136-137, https://www.google.com/books/edition/The_Shadow_of_the_Telescope/LHVY4HxTlpcC?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=Talbot+presentation+January+31,1839&pg=PA134&printsec=frontcover.

²⁶ Bodleian Libraries, "Biography, William Henry Fox Talbot,"; Taylor, *Impressed by Light*, 3-4. The new technology likely stirred excitement however only one firsthand account survives. Taylor argues the account is questionable as it was written fifty years later. See Taylor- *Impressed by Light*, 4, fn. 9.

describing his process and advocating for the new type of photograph in art and science. Talbot was, “confident that such an alliance of science with art will prove conducive to the improvement of both.”²⁷

In March Talbot wrote to Herschel of his new process he had named the Calotype, and included an account of the process, and a “specimen” which had been produced in one minute. The Calotype, the name given to the new technique by Talbot, was derived from the Greek word *kalos* meaning beautiful. Talbot continued, “I have taken a patent for the Calotype, but nevertheless intend that the use of it shall be entirely free to the scientific world.” Talbot sought to share his information with the Royal Society but was uncertain the paper would be reprinted due to the patent. The process went through six stages, iodizing paper, exciting the paper, exposing the paper, “bringing out” or developing the negative, and fixing the negative to remove excess chemicals, after which a print could be produced. The process produced a less sharp image than the daguerreotype as the image was imprinted on the fibers within the paper rather than on the surface. However, it was possible to make multiple copies, unlike the daguerreotype that produced a single positive image on a metal plate.²⁸

Talbot sought to use his family and social connections to market his invention including obtaining permission to photograph locations closed to the public and subscription books

²⁷ Letter from Talbot to Herschell dated 25 January, 1839, *The Correspondences of William Henry Fox Talbot Project*, University of Glasgow, accessed November 26, 2021, <http://foxtalbot.dmu.ac.uk/letters/transcriptName.php?bcode=Hers-JF&pageNumber=40&pageTotal=142&referringPage=2>; Buttman, *Shadow of the Telescope*, 134; Taylor, *Impressed by Light*, 13-15.

²⁸ Letter from Talbot to Herschell dated 17 March, 1841, *The Correspondences of William Henry Fox Talbot Project*, University of Glasgow, accessed November 26, 2021, <http://foxtalbot.dmu.ac.uk/letters/transcriptName.php?bcode=Hers-JF&pageNumber=87&pageTotal=142&referringPage=4>; Taylor, *Impressed by Light*, 14-16; “Calotype,” Britannica Online, “Popular Photographic Print Processes: Calotypes (Talbotypes),” Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Reading Room, accessed November 25, 2021, https://www.loc.gov/rr/print/coll/589_calotype.html.

marketed to elite audiences. Talbot's half-sister Caroline Mount-Edgumbe, was a Lady-in-Waiting to Queen Victoria. Talbot was granted a permit in 1841, "to walk on the slopes and take drawings." His art book "Sun Pictures in Scotland" available by subscription in 1845 contained twenty-three original prints. One hundred copies were produced with only twenty copies surviving in book form. Victoria is the first name listed of the subscribers. Author and photographic historian Roger Taylor notes that although Talbot was an inventor, he had little experience in business. Talbot's research and discoveries were influenced by social expectations for those of his education and social class—not by entrepreneurial spirit or capitalism. Taylor speculates that if Talbot's associations had not been limited to those of the elite social class, he was part of, he may have had more commercial success with his inventions, by being able to evaluate his work more objectively in context of a competitive marketplace.²⁹

Although Talbot did not achieve commercial success and further innovations such as Fredrick S. Archer 's Wet Collodion Process using a coated a glass plate replaced the Calotype, Talbot's negative-positive process would remain in use until the advent of digital photography. Talbot also understood the potential applications for photography. In his art photography book, *Pencil of Nature*, Talbot uses photography to produce a "Fac-simile" of a printed page containing statutes of Richard the Second in Norman French. Talbot advocated for the historical value of photography to preserve images of family for posterity, and frequently photographed architecture in conjunction with an explanation of the historical significance of the locations. One of Talbot's most interesting, suggested uses of photography was cataloging valuables.

²⁹ "William Henry Fox Talbot (1800-77) The Round Tower, Windsor Castle 1945 print from a c.1841 negative," Royal Collection Trust, accessed November 26,2021, <https://www.rct.uk/collection/700498/the-round-tower-windsor-castle>; "William Henry Fox Talbot(1800-77) Abbotsford 1844," Royal Collection Trust, accessed November 26, 2021, <https://www.rct.uk/collection/2600330/abbotsford>; "Sun Pictures in Scotland," National Library of Scotland, accessed November 26, 2021, <https://www.nls.uk/exhibitions/treasures/scotland-and-the-photobook/sun-pictures/>; Taylor, *Impressed by Light*,22.

Talbot suggests that photography would produce a more effective inventory for valuables than a written inventory. If the items were stolen Talbot suggests that the photograph, “would certainly be evidence of a novel kind.”³⁰

Motivated by capturing beauty of the landscape, Talbot created a technology with multiple applications. Unlike the inventors in France, Talbot’s experiments were not motivated by the desire to create a product for monetization. The objective of Talbot’s photographic technology was to preserve images from the surrounding environment, creating a tangible object to capture the intangible. Talbot’s invention was created to perform a function without preconceived barriers that limited its application—unlike the daguerreotype. The daguerreotype had been created for one purpose—to mechanize and automate the portraiture process. Talbot’s method allowed for repeatability, making the photographic print possible and photography a viable medium for art.

However, debate continued what role was appropriate within art for an “unthinking machine.” In 1857, author and art critic Lady Elizabeth Rigby Eastlake, published an article commenting on the development and application of photography in Britain. Lady Eastlake had been associated with photographic circles as a frequent sitter for early photographers David Octavius Hill and Robert Adamson. Later she married Sir Charles Eastlake, the first president of the Royal Photographic Society. By 1857, photography had become a “household word and want” present everywhere from “the most sumptuous saloon, and in the dingiest attic.”

Photography had been implemented “by love, business, and justice,” and could be found, “in the

³⁰ “Fredrick Scott Archer 1813-1857,” International Photography Hall of Fame, accessed November 25, 2021, <https://iphf.org/inductees/frederick-scott-archer/>; “Invention of photography- Talbot, An oak tree in winter,” British Library Collection, accessed November 27, 2021, <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/invention-of-photography>; Talbot, *Pencil of Nature*, Plate IX Fac-simile of an “Old Printed Page,” Plate XIV “The Ladder,” n.p.; Examples of Talbot’s suggestions of using photography for historical purposes see *Pencil of Nature*, Plates XV-XVI, XIX

pocket of the detective, in the cell of the convict, in the folio of the painter and architect, among the papers and patterns of the millowner and manufacturer,” and with soldiers on the battlefield. Eastlake expressed doubts of photography as art, instead arguing for applications in which the detail and impartiality of an “unreasoning machine,” would be of value. Eastlake describes the role of photography as a tool not intended to, “supersede much that art has hitherto done, but only that which it was both a misappropriation and deterioration of art to do.” Photography would guarantee accuracy and speed the process of reproducing hieroglyphic texts discovered in Egypt, instead of misappropriating the skills of an artist for the project. Portraiture was another proper application for photography. “Portraits, as is evident to any thinking mind, and as photography now proves, belong to that class of facts wanted by numbers who know and care nothing about their value as works of art.” To Eastlake, “the desire for art resides in a small minority, but the craving...for cheap, prompt, and correct facts in the public at large.” Photography fulfilled this role, therefore freeing those who were artists to pursue art, instead of using their artistic talents for purposes of documenting.³¹

Photography as Art – Women in Photography in Britain

In the first few decades after the invention of photography most of its notable practitioners—both men and women—came from the landed gentry and leisure classes. The daughters of William Nevill, 4th Earl of Abergavenny, Lady Caroline Emily Nevill, Lady Henriette Augusta—later Mostyn, and Lady Isabel were known by photographic circles as, “The Trio” and were members of the Photographic Exchange Club. Lady Augusta Nevill and her sister

³¹ “Elizabeth Rigby (Lady Eastlake),” The J. Paul Getty Museum, accessed November 28, 2021, <https://www.getty.edu/art/collection/objects/39621/hill-adamson-elizabeth-rigby-lady-eastlake-british-1843-1847/>; Eastlake, “Photography,” 442-468.

Lady Isabel were two of the seventy-six photographers to take part in the “Recent Specimens of Photography” exhibition in December 1852. Caroline Augusta and Isabella exhibited portrait photographs at the January 1854 Photographic Society of London exhibition. The Photographic Exchange Club album in 1855 included landscape and architectural photography by Carolyn and Augusta.³²

Mostyn was particularly known for her photographic studies of trees and submitted a photograph of an old oak tree on the grounds of Eridge Castle, the Nevill family home, to the Photograph Exchange Club in 1858. Subjects of her photography also included the castle that was part of the family estate, and rural scenes of a manor house and village post office thought to be in Birling, Kent. Although she and her sisters were known to have produced photographs of family and friends, it is unknown if any survive. Mostyn was active in photography until the early 1860s when she took on greater family responsibilities, but she remained a lifelong patron of the arts. Following the death of her husband in 1861, Mostyn focused her attention on management of her share of the family estate and revitalized Llandudno, North Wales into a tourist resort. Mostyn was the president of the Gwynedd Ladies Art Society and founded the Llandudno’s Mostyn Art Gallery to provide a space for the ladies’ society to display art.³³

Another British woman of the elite upper-class would become one the most well-known female photographers of the nineteenth century and serve as a model for women entering photography. One of the nineteenth century’s most well-known British photographers began experimenting with a camera at forty-nine. Julia Margaret Cameron was the second of seven daughters of James and Adeline Pattle, a wealthy and prominent Anglo family in Calcutta. Her

³² Taylor, *Impressed by Light*, 353,87,51; Lori Pauli, “The Old Oak Tree: Augusta Mostyn,” National Gallery of Canada, January 15,2021, <https://www.gallery.ca/magazine/your-collection/the-old-oak-tree-augusta-mostyn>.

³³ Taylor, *Impressed by Light*, 95; Pauli, “The Old Oak Tree.”

father James was an official in the East India Company. Her mother's family were French royalists. Julia's mother and her sisters traveled between homes in India, England, and Paris, often spending time with their maternal grandmother, Therese Josephe Blin de Grincourt, at Versailles. In 1838, when Julia was twenty-three, she married Charles Hay Cameron, a jurist and member of the Indian Law Commission of the Supreme Council of India. Julia Cameron assumed the role of hostess for Anglo-Indian government functions from 1844 to 1848 for Governor General of India, Lord Henry Hardinge, as his wife had not accompanied him.³⁴

The Cameron family returned to England in 1848 after Charles retired from his post in India, first settling in London. Julia's sister Sarah Prinsep formed a salon, hosting gatherings around the literary circle of William Makepeace Thackeray. Frequent visitors included artists and writers including artist G.F. Watts, Pre-Raphaelite artists John Evert Millais, Dante Gabrielle Rossetti, art critic John Ruskin, and poets Robert Browning and Henry Wordsworth Longfellow. These social gatherings connected Cameron to influential people that later aided in her photography career. In 1860 the Cameron's moved to Freshwater on Isle of Wight, a fashionable rural community, home of Tennyson and location of a vacation home of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert.³⁵

Cameron took up photography after receiving a camera as a gift from her daughter Julia and son-in law Charles Norman in December 1863. Cameron's husband and the three oldest sons traveled to Ceylon, now Sri Lanka, to oversee the coffee plantations which provided the family's

³⁴ Hamilton, *Annals of My Glass House*, 22.

³⁵ Hamilton, *Annals of My Glass House*, 17-23; Joanne Lukittsh, "Cameron [Pattle], Julia Margaret," Grove Art Online, updated January 20, 2016, <https://doi.org/10.1093/gao/978188446054.article.T013434>; "Julia Margert Cameron- Biography and Legacy," The Art Story, accessed December 11, 2011, <https://www.theartstory.org/artist/cameron-julia-margaret/life-and-legacy/>; "Charles Hay Cameron," The J. Paul Getty Museum, accessed December 11, 2021, <https://www.getty.edu/art/collection/objects/58656/julia-margaret-cameron-charles-hay-cameron-british-1864/>; "Catalogue Description, Correspondence and papers of Lt-Gen (later Field Marshal) Sir Henry Hardinge," National Archives of the United Kingdom, accessed December 12, 2021, <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/afb57ec4-680c-4648-9d9e-7bb815ac33b2>.

wealth. Cameron's daughter Julia suggested photography as a hobby. "It may amuse you, Mother, to try to photograph during your solitude at Freshwater." Cameron converted a coal house on the property into a dark room and a "glazed-foul house" to a studio. After experimenting for three weeks, Cameron created her first successful portrait in January 1864 of Annie Philpot, the daughter of a local Freshwater resident. Cameron would produce nearly nine hundred photos over the next eleven years until retiring with her husband to Ceylon in 1875.³⁶

Although the Cameron's were in a precarious financial position by 1866, and described as nearly penniless, she rejected commercial photography, instead focusing on photographic art. Cameron followed in the path of the gentleman amateur photographer, through tinkering to develop her technique and distanced herself from commercial portrait photography. Cameron recounts a request to be photographed by a woman who assures Cameron she can arrive with her dress uncrumpled. Cameron rejects the request, "not being a professional photographer," but if she had photographed the young woman, Cameron would have, "much preferred having her dress crumpled." Photography historian Robbin Kelsey notes that through this anecdote Cameron is reinforcing her social class and distance between herself and commercial photographers. Cameron chose her clients and had aesthetic preferences of an artist.³⁷

Cameron did accept pay from elite clients, often following the upper-class model of reciprocity. She was paid for a series of photographs of Charles Darwin and his family in 1868.

³⁶ "Annie," The J. Paul Getty Museum, accessed December 11, 2021, <https://www.getty.edu/art/collection/objects/58647/julia-margaret-cameron-annie-british-january-1864/>; "British Ceylon (1796-1900)," Britannica Online, accessed December 11, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Sri-Lanka/British-Ceylon-1796-1900>; "Julia Margert Cameron," The Camelot Project, University of Rochester, accessed December 12, 2021, <https://d.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/creator/julia-margaret-cameron#>; Julia Margaret Cameron, "Annals of my Glass House," in Beaumont Newhall ed. *Photography Essays and Images: Illustrated Readings in the History of Photography*, (New York: Museum of Modern Art; New York Graphic Society, 1980), 135-138, <https://oscarenfotos.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/cameron-annals-of-my-glass-house.pdf>; Malcom Daniel, "Julia Margert Cameron (1815-1879)," Department of Photographs, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, October 2004, https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/camr/hd_camr.htm.

³⁷ Kelsey, *Art of Chance*, 71-75.

The Darwin's rented a house from the Cameron's for a six-week vacation on the Isle of Wight. The exchange is described as giving them photographs as "presents" and Cameron accepting the payment. Tennyson also insisted on paying Cameron for her work. "I do not mean to let you ruin yourself by giving the photographs away." Cameron also gave albums of photographs to friends and those positioned to loan the family money. Photographing famous clients also aided Cameron in gaining prestige and helped establish photography as a replacement for painted portraits.³⁸

Critics and scholars have often held a less than favorable views of Cameron's work due to apparent imperfections in the photographic process and non-traditional use of focus that they perceived as showing a lack of skill. In February 1865 the Royal Photographic Society of London criticized Cameron's "out-of-focus portraits of celebrities" at a recent exhibit in Scotland. The article continued, "We must give this lady credit for daring originality... In these pictures all that is good in photography has been neglected, and the shortcomings of the art are prominently exhibited."³⁹ In Cameron's obituary the Royal Photographic Society described Cameron's work.

Her photography was of a peculiar description, the manipulatory part often carelessly executed, and the optical definition, as judged by the usual standards, faulty in the extreme. Yet with all this some of her productions possessed a merit which was recognized by some of our principal artists. Mrs. Cameron frequently exhibited at Exhibitions of the society, and the pictures always commanded attention from the public that visited it.⁴⁰

³⁸ Jan Marsh, "Julia Margaret Cameron, Extended Catalog Entry," National Portrait Gallery, accessed December 28, 2021, <https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portraitExtended/mw57480/Julia-Margaret-Cameron>; Helmut Gernsheim, *Julia Margaret Cameron Her Life and Photographic Work* (New York: Aperture Monographs, 1975), 37; Kelsey, *Art of Chance*, 71.

³⁹ "Exhibition of the Photographic Society of Scotland and Its Medals," *Journal of the Royal Photographic Society of London*, vol. 9, (1865), 196-197, <https://archive.rps.org/archive/volume-9/724612>.

⁴⁰ "Obituary, Mrs. Julia Cameron," *Journal of the Royal Photographic Society of London*, vol 20 (1880), 56-57, <https://archive.rps.org/archive/volume-20?>.

Despite disapproval of Cameron's technique by art establishment figures, her work was popular among "principal artists" and "the public. These negative reviews were largely written by men within photography, who presumed variations from their prescribed preferences were symbolic of a lack of skill. Specifically, it is doubtful they were willing to accept that female artists could deviate from prescribed styles as a conscious creative choice. Cameron may have been reluctant to delve into debates to defend her style for several reasons. First, she was an artist using photography as a medium, choosing who and what she photographed making criticism less relevant. Secondly, she may have avoided public technical debate in conformance with accepted social roles for women of the upper-class at the time.

In a 1975 biography, photography historian Helm Gernsheim argued that that Cameron's style was a result of lack of technical training. Cameron was too concerned on the "spiritual quality" and paid little attention to whether the sitter moved, if the image was sharp, or if the plate had imperfections or damage. Gernsheim says of Cameron, "Lacking technical training, she had a complete disregard for technical perfection." Victorian portraiture required long exposure times, with many photographers implementing use of headrests and other devices to reduce involuntary shifting of sitters. Cameron refused to use headrests, guaranteeing blurs in photographs. Cameron often used sharp focus on areas of photographs deemed of secondary importance by art critics. In the photograph *A Dantesque Vision*, Kelsey notes that the face of the model is indistinct while the bark of the tree on which the model is leaning is depicted in detail.⁴¹

Although Cameron describes her signature style of soft-focused pictures as a "fluke", her work should be reevaluated in context of popular photographic styles of the time. Cameron's work is part of a larger body of photographic art produced in the nineteenth and early twentieth

⁴¹ Gernsheim, *Julia Margaret Cameron*, 70; Kelsey, *Art of Chance*, 68, 340.

century as part of the soft-focus school that grew into Pictorialism. Cameron's photographic style was likely not a result of inexperience – but a deliberate effect created to emulate paintings.

Cameron corresponded with David Wilke Wynfield, a painter and amateur photographer known for his “out-of-focus” portraits. Art scholar and curator Violet Hamilton notes that Cameron was likely familiar with photographic techniques before receiving her first camera as a gift.

Cameron's brother-in-law Lord Somers was an amateur photographer. Cameron and two of her sons had been photographed by family friend Lewis Carol in 1858. In 1863, Cameron and her household were photographed by Oscar Gustave Rejlander during a trip to photograph Tennyson and his family. Hamilton notes that Cameron may have assisted Rejlander for this series and likely was familiar with the print making process during this time. Cameron was also a close friend of Herschel, a leading scientist in developing photographic processes, and corresponded with him regularly regarding advances in photography.⁴²

Cameron would have been familiar with the debates occurring within photography at the time including photography as a science or as art and sharp compared to soft focus. Taylor notes that these divisions often corresponded with divisions between those who preferred traditional art and those who preferred the new Pre-Raphaelite style. Sir William Newton, official miniature painter to Queen Victoria, founding member and vice president of the Photographic Society of London, was an early advocate of the soft-focus school. Newton advocated for “the suggestions that nature offers” instead of a pursuit of chemical and optical perfection. Newton's paper, “Upon Photography in the Artistic View,” was read at the first meeting of the Royal Photographic Society and published in the March 1853 issue.⁴³ Newton's suggestion was to use the camera as a tool to create photographs that resembled paintings and capture the character of

⁴² Hamilton, *Annals of a Glass House*, 25-26; Art Story, “Biography of Julia Margert Cameron.”

⁴³ Taylor, *Impressed by Light*, 72-73.

the environment—instead of using the camera as a device to document surroundings in defined detail.

I do not consider it necessary that the whole of the subject should be what is called in *focus*; on the contrary, I have found in many instances that the object is better obtained by the whole subject being a little *out of focus*, thereby giving a greater breadth of effect, and consequently more *suggestive* of the true character of nature.⁴⁴

Both commercial and scientific photography relied on clarity, that sacrificed artistic effect. Watercolorist and photographer William Lake Price criticized landscape photographers for the preference towards sharp focus photography. The thoughtless mechanical nature of the process produced images that contained “painfully elaborate details, instead of broad effects of light glancing through the landscape.” The debate over sharp and soft focus continued through the late nineteenth and into the twentieth century. Author Michael Bartram states that, “The highly deliberate artistry which infused photography towards the end of the century with the Linked Ring Brotherhood in Britain and the American Photo-Secession favored general mistiness of image, but there developed gradually a reaction against this.” The debate continued until the 1930s between factions led by William Mortenson, an advocate of the soft-focus style and the f.64 group, modernists that advocated for sharp focus counting Ansel Adams among their members. Although by the middle-twentieth century the modernists and sharp focus photography prevailed, the soft- focus style remained popular among art photography circles in the late nineteenth and early-twentieth century including among members of the Brotherhood of the Linked Ring.⁴⁵

The Brotherhood of the Linked Ring founded in 1892 was formed as a result as a growing schism between members and leadership of the Royal Photographic Society of London.

⁴⁴ Newton, “Upon Photography,” 6.

⁴⁵ Kelsey, *Art of Chance*, 62; Bartram, *Aspects of Victorian Photography*, 130.

The leadership under President James Glaisher had placed a greater focus on technology and technique rather than promotion of photography as an art form. Tensions had been building since the 1860s within the Royal Photographic Society as members of the council and president had put a greater focus on the science and technology of photography. Papers focused on the art of photography were rarely presented with the annual exhibition being the only space for those who were focused on photography as an art form. The society faced objection from scientist who were dissatisfied by a lack of representation at exhibitions and deemed sessions centered on photographic techniques, “unworthy of a Learned Society.” These tensions boiled over during preparations for the Society’s exhibition in 1891 concerning late entries received from photographer George Davison. Committee members including Henry Peach Robinson and several others decided to include the photographs in the exhibition as years previously there had been exceptions. The society’s new assistant secretary, H.A. Lawrence had the prints removed from the exhibition. During the following council meeting a vote of censure passed on Robinson, after which Robinson and Davison walked out of the meeting. Robinson had been a member of the organization for thirty-three years.⁴⁶

In May 1892 a group of fifteen photographers including H.P. Robinson, George Davison, and Henry H. H. Cameron, the youngest son of Julia Margaret Cameron founded the Brotherhood of the Linked Ring. The Linked Ring hosted seventeen annual photographic salons from 1893 to 1909 when the organization was dissolved. The group’s membership was international but by invitation only, so considered prestigious. Membership required nomination by an existing member in good standing and unanimous approval by the other members of the organization. Author Nicole Hudgkin notes that the sponsorship process made it unlikely for a

⁴⁶ Margaret Harker, *The Linked Ring: The Secession Movement in Photography in Britain, 1892-1910* (London: Heinemann, 1979), 52-64.

woman to be selected for membership. Only women of notoriety, wealth, or those with male family members in the organization who would advocate for their inclusion were likely to become members. In October 1900 the Linked Ring invited the first women to join the organization. American art and commercial photographer Gertrude Käsebier and Mrs. Cadby, a well-known British photographer and wife of a member of the Linked Ring, were approved unanimously.⁴⁷

Although the first women were approved as members of the Linked Ring in 1900 and women remained a minority in the organization, some who were not members were selected to exhibit their work at shows sponsored by the organization. Zaida Ben-Yúsun was praised for her work displayed in an 1896 exhibition sponsored by the Linked Ring. Yúsun was born and educated in England, later moving to the United States and establishing a portrait studio on Fifth Avenue in New York in 1897. In 1901 she was featured by Benjamin Frances Johnston in a series about of young women photographers in the *Ladies Home Journal*. In 1899 art critic Sadakichi Hartmann gave a mixed review of her work. Hartmann focused on her “bohemian lifestyle” and described her work monotonous compared to internationally known photographers F. Holland Day and Rudolf Eickemeyer Jr. However, Hartmann did compliment her ability to “capture a likeness while producing an individual impression,” and mentioned that Yúsun had commented that she sought to become the Julia Margaret Cameron of America.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Harker, *The Linked Ring*, 87. Nicole Hudgins, “No Girls Allowed? Gender in Victorian Photographic Societies. 1850-1890,” *Revue 'histoire Culturelle*, October 5, 2021, <https://revues.mshparisnord.fr/rhc/index.php?id=693>.

⁴⁸ Harker, *The Linked Ring*, 64, 86-87, 123; Beverly W. Branan, “Zaida Ben-Yusun (1869-1933) Introduction & Biographical Essay,” Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Reading Room, accessed January 4, 2022, <https://loc.gov/rr/print/coll/womphotoj/ben-yusunessay.html>; Gillian Barrie Greenhill, “The Outsiders: the Salon Club of America and the Popularization of Pictorial Photography” (doctoral thesis, Pennsylvania State University, 1986), 133.

By 1908 Americans began to dominate the salons hosted by the Linked Ring with sixty percent of the entries coming from the United States. F.J. Mortimer, editor of the magazine *Amateur Photographer*, began to organize the “Salon des Refusés” of photographs not admitted to the salon. Concerned with the drastic increase in entries from abroad—particularly the United States—they changed the rules in the following years to put a greater focus on British artists. This change led to the resignation of Americans Alfred Stieglitz and Clarence White from the Linked Ring. Other tensions had begun to develop among the Linked Ring in a dispute over the structure of exhibitions. The “Perfectionists,” led by Davison, advocated for a closed structure of exhibition open to members of the group or by invitation and excluded all but the most advanced pictorialists. The “Latitudinarians,” led by Mortimer, advocated for an open exhibition, inviting all interested photographers to submit work for selection “with a more sympathetic hearing for new men and original work than the RPS offered.” The Brotherhood of the Linked Ring was dissolved in February 1910 with the “Perfectionists,” going to form the “London Secession” and the “Latitudinarians” forming the London Salon Club. The “London Secession” dissolved after hosting only one exhibition in 1911, but the London Salon Club remains active to present, recently celebrating its 110th anniversary.⁴⁹

The First London Salon of Photography hosted by the “Latitudinarians” opened September 2, 1910 and is described as representing “the high-water mark in what may be called “sound pictorial photography,” from America, Austria, Germany and England. Among the American exhibitors were Williamina and Grace Parrish. A deputy of the London Salon Club

⁴⁹ Edward Draper, “The Linked Ring, British 1892-1909,” *Pictorialist Organizations and their Photographic Artists(blog)*, April 9, 2019, Platinum Prince, <https://platinumprince.com/pictorialist-organisations/2019/4/8/the-linked-ring>; Harker, *The Linked Ring*, 123-124; Greenhill, “The Outsiders,” 133.

contacted the Parrish sisters in July requesting them to submit one or two of their most recent pictures to the exhibition. Two of their figure studies were displayed among the 140 prints at the exhibition and were described as showing “great individuality and remarkable power of execution.”⁵⁰

⁵⁰ E.O. Hoppe F.R.P.s., “London Letter,” in *Photo Era Volume 25 July – December 1910*, 259, https://www.google.com/books/edition/Photo_era/tBRLAQAAMAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1 ; Agent of London Salon of Photography to The Misses Parrish, New York, 15 July 1910, n.p. in Parish Sisters’ Scrapbook, Missouri Historical Society.

CHAPTER 2: PHOTOGRAPHY IN THE UNITED STATES: COMMERCE AND ART

Photography developed along a different trajectory in Britain than in the United States. In Britain, photography was primarily art and later overtaken by commercial interests. The gentleman amateur had been viewed as the higher form of the craft using the new technological novelty as a vehicle to create high art. Commercial photographers were looked down on as tradesmen- having more in common with a lithographer or engraver. The technology associated with photography in England had been developed by the landed gentry, men of leisure as they tinkered on their estates. The 1851 revised occupation classification system of the British census reflected the view that photography was an art, placing its practitioners higher up in social status than tradesmen or entrepreneurs. Although intended to capture all occupations in Victorian England from the “brain to brawn” for statistical purposes, Roger Taylor notes that it came to be thought of as, “an index of social status.” The fourteen classifications were further divided into subclasses, “based on the characteristics of employment.” Class 1 included the queen and royal family, with subclasses including officers of the East India Company, members of the legislature, local government, and civil servants. Class 2, was for the military with Class 3 for those of the “three learned professions-clergy, law and medicine.” Photography in the 1851 census was placed under Class 4 along with, poets, historians, painters, sculptors, musicians, architects, natural philosophers and “professors and teachers of literature and science.” By comparison those who “translated works of art” such as engravers, lithographers, singers, actors, and musicians, who interpreted or performed art were placed in Class 11. These persons “engaged in the higher class of mechanical arts that place them in contact with artists and men of science from who they derived materials and inspiration.” However, as the numbers of commercial

photographers continued to increase, photography became more clearly associated with entrepreneurship than art.⁵¹

In the United States, photography was a commercial endeavor from the beginning. Author Katherine Manthorne notes that by the later nineteenth century, urban women had fewer options for employment as immigrants filled jobs in domestic service and in the textile industry. The photography industry provided respectable work for “self-supporting” women, a social stratum of respectable women, who due to financial reversals had to seek paid employment. In the early years, both men and women had to teach themselves through reading manuals and experimentation. Manthorne argues that this “leveled the playing field, since no one had the advantage in terms of training.”⁵²

As photography began as a commercial endeavor in the United States, many early organizations were focused on professional commercial photography. Daguerrean Societies were formed in the United States during the 1840s and 1850s with a focus on professional aspects of the trade including manipulation and pricing. The National Photographic Association, founded in 1868 sought to advance photography as art, but concentrated on matters in commercial photography as a trade, including seeking to prevent the approval for the patent of the Ambrotype. At least some of the organizations in the United States focused on commercial photography prevented women from joining. Manthorne notes that the National Photographic Association barred women from becoming members.⁵³

⁵¹ Taylor, *Impressed by Light*, 69-73.

⁵² Manthorne, *Women in the Dark*, 17-20.

⁵³ “Photographers Efforts at Union” *Photography*, (10 August 1893 vol. V no 248),495-497, https://www.google.com/books/edition/Photography/_FxQAQAAMAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=National+Photographic+association+founded+when+and+where&pg=PA496&printsec=frontcover; Professional Photographers of America Documentary, “The History of Professional Photographers of America, PPA: 150 Years of dedication to

In the nineteenth century, one could become a photographer without a diploma or formal internship and the industry was open to both men and women. Despite the field of photography being open to all, Author Nicole Hudgkin argues that early leaders sought to, define photography as alongside skilled and scientific professions, “masculine,” and that photographic clubs “conformed to the rules and behavior of other male homosocial clubs in the nineteenth century.” Objections raised by members of a photographic organization when it was recommended to include women, may shed light on the decision of the National Photographic Association. Concerns appearing in a letter to the editor column included female members having a key and access to all rooms at any hour—leading to possible implications of impropriety by club members, and that smoking, and drinking were permitted in club spaces. Hudgkin notes that men connected freedom of movement with possibility of sexual impropriety. A similar argument had been used to exclude women from full access to universities. Despite the field of photography being open to all, and women being permitted to become members of some organizations including the Royal Photographic Society, Hudgkin notes that it “did not prevent a masculine monopoly over its leadership, precisely as was found in state-sponsored painting, geography or science.”⁵⁴

By the last two decades of the nineteenth century, organizations formed in the United States focused on photography as a form of art, catering to those not engaged in commercial photography. Societies for amateur art photographers in the United States were more welcoming of women, just as their English predecessors. By 1889, Amateur Photographers of The Buffalo Camera Club had two female members. Women took part in these clubs, exhibited their work,

Photographers,” accessed February 12,2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5C0_OM5ieh4; Manthorne, *Women in the Dark*, 12-13.

⁵⁴ Hudgins, “No Girls Allowed?”

and won awards from the beginning of these organizations. The Boston Society of Amateur Photographers founded in 1881, later the Boston Camera Club, from its first exhibition included women. Mrs. J.H. Thurston was awarded a second prize for a photo along with Mr. Theodore Dunham. The Boston club partnered with clubs in Philadelphia and New York to develop joint exhibitions. By the fifth annual show in 1892, well-known artists were selected to serve as judges, seeking to place photography in the realm of fine art, defining photography in the United States as an art form.⁵⁵

Photography gained popularity as a medium for art in the United States and abroad at the close of the nineteenth century. In her 1897 book *Occupations for Women*, author Frances Willard notes the growth of, “photography as an art has steadily advanced,” since the 1889 Paris Exhibition. Magazines began to offer prizes for the best amateur photographs submitted. In 1896 the *Youth’s Companion* received over six thousand photographs in response to offering prizes for the best eight photographs submitted by amateurs. Although only three of the eight prizes were awarded to women, the top prize was awarded to a woman. Miss Emma Farnsworth, of Albany New York was awarded first prize. Two other young women, one from Wisconsin and one from Kentucky are noted among the prize winners. Willard does not mention how many photographs were submitted by men compared to women. Therefore, it is not possible to determine the percentage of women who won awards for their work or the ratio of men to women participating in amateur photography contests. However, it is certain that women were involved in photographic art from the early stages, often being recognized for their exceptional work.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Benjamin Kimball, “The Boston Camera Club” *The New England Magazine* n.s. v.8 (1893), 186-189,200. <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=njp.32101064987991&view=1up&seq=196&skin=2021>.

⁵⁶ Frances E. Willard, *Occupations for Women, a Book of Practical Suggestions for the Material Advancement, the Mental and Physical Development, and the Moral and Spiritual Uplift of Women* (Cooper Union, New York: The

Images of women were central to a marketing campaign for a new version of the camera designed for household use by those untrained in photographic processes. In 1893 Kodak launched a new marketing campaign to coincide with the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. The Kodak Girl was a young, independent, fashionable tourist. The advertisement depicts two young women in the foreground with buildings of the World's Fair in the background. One wears a camera on a strap worn across her body, and the other carries an umbrella and a reticule. The advertisement focuses on the portability of the product, not the quality or composition of the images that could be produced. This version of the camera was not for the scientist, or artist "gentleman amateur" but a mass-produced consumer product- one of many new inventions marketed to the middle class to enjoy expanded leisure time.⁵⁷

Take a Kodak with you to the World's Fair." It's the only practical camera for the purpose. Others are too bulky, too clumsy. As neither plates nor films can be bought on the grounds, the visiting amateur must carry his supplies with him. With Kodak this is easy. The roll of film capable of taking one hundred pictures weighs but a few ounces.⁵⁸

The Kodak Girl, one of the most iconic consumer product campaigns of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, was created in response to a lack of commercial success of a technological advance intended for commercial photographers. George Eastman introduced rolled paper film in 1885 and expected the new advance would replace glass slides. The popularity of glass plates persisted, prompting Eastman to market the product to the public as a consumer product. Eastman continued to seek to simplify the photographic process and

Success Company, 1897), 244-246,

https://www.google.com/books/edition/Occupations_for_Women/SGQuAAAAYAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1.

⁵⁷ Kodak, advertisement, "Take a Kodak with you to the World's Fair," *Duke Digital Repository*, <https://repository.duke.edu/dc/ea/K0529>; John P. Jacob, ed. *Kodak Girl from the Martha Cooper Collection* (Göttingen, Germany: Steidl, 2011), 66.

⁵⁸ Kodak advertisement, "Take a Kodak with you."

introduced the Kodak Number I in 1888 for twenty-five dollars. The camera with film inside had to be returned to be developed at a cost of ten dollars per roll. One writer noted that prior to the introduction of the dry plate process in 1879 photography had been limited to professionals. By 1889, he speculated “there are fully ten times as many amateurs as there are professionals.” This growing demographic from professionals and businessmen with free time during the day, to clerks who practiced their hobby on weekends or when on vacation, provided a fertile marketplace for the hobbyist Kodak user. Early advertisements focused on male audiences promoting the Kodak as a “tourist’s’ camera.” The Kodak “is carried like an ordinary field glass, and with it may be photographed objects moving, or at rest, landscapes, animals, interior rooms or cathedrals.” The advertisement concluded with a testimonial from Prince Henry D’Orleans. With Kodak “doing the rest” the new generation of hobbyists were freed from stained hands and hours of chemical processing endured by those working in commercial photography or lady and gentlemen amateur artists. The women depicted in the advertisement would have the enjoyment of photography without stains on their hands and dresses or hours of toil processing prints.⁵⁹

Women In Commercial Photography in the United States

By the launch of the Kodak Girl campaign, women in the United States had been engaged in commercial photography for four decades and had even begun joining photography clubs formed in response to the growth of amateurs interested in photography. In 1894 photography

⁵⁹ Jacob, *Kodak Girl*, 9-10; Richard A. Anthony, “A Popular Craze,” *Pittsburg Dispatch* (Pittsburg, Pennsylvania), April 14, 1889, Newspapers.com; Kodak, advertisement, “Kodak,” *The Graphic: An Illustrated Weekly Newspaper*, London, Greater London England, June 22, 1889, Newspapers.com.

was still considered a predominately male occupation alongside undertakers, attorneys, and insurance salespersons. An article in the *Chicago Tribune* lists five women that were operating photography studios of their own in 1894 with dozens of others employed retouching, mounting, and burnishing. In all, forty- four entries appear for women photographers in a compilation of Chicago directory listings for photographers from with storefronts in Chicago from 1847 to 1900. It is likely many more women were involved with photography as part of family business. Mrs. Matousek, mentioned in the *Chicago Tribune* article as operating a photography studio located on Blue Island Avenue does not have an individual listing. A listing appears for Mathias Matousek, who operated a photography studio located at 635 Blue Island from 1887 to 1894 before moving to another location in 1895 where it remained until 1900. The 1891 listing includes the name Anna M. in parenthesis.⁶⁰

Women operated photography studios from almost the beginning of commercial photography in the United States. The first listing for a photography studio in Chicago is a daguerreotype studio operated by John Hunter listed in 1849 and 1850. By 1853, Chicago had six studios for daguerreotypes and photography, including the studio of Miss A.L. Miller located at 77 Lake Street. Only a few studios operated by women opened in Chicago over the next decade and a half. During the 1880s nearly, a dozen studios opened. Twenty-six photography studios—more than half of the forty-four entries for photography studios—operated by women first appear listed between 1890 and 1899.⁶¹

⁶⁰ *Chicago Tribune*, “Women Who Do Men’s Work,” *The Chicago Tribune* 11 November 11, 1894, Newspapers.com; Chicago Historical Society, *Chicago Photographers 1847 Through 1900 As Listed in Chicago City Directories* (Chicago: Chicago Historical Society North Avenue at Clark Street, Print Department ,1958), np, http://livinghistoryofillinois.com/pdf_files/Chicago%20Photographers%201847%20through%201900,%20as%20listed%20in%20Chicago%20City%20Directories.pdf; Entry for “Matousek, Mathias” in *Chicago Photographers 1847 through 1900*, np.

⁶¹ *Chicago Photographers 1847 Through 1900*, np.

In 1880 the population of Buffalo New York was around 155,000 compared to Chicago's Population of 503,000. A listing of photographers operating in Buffalo, New York taken from City Directories from 1858 to 1881 contains twelve entries for women with one possibly being a duplicate listing for the same individual. From 1858 to 1881 Buffalo had close to the same number of listings for female photographers as Chicago with one third of the population. However, more women in Buffalo appeared to be working in photography as part of a family enterprise, rather than operating their own businesses. Of these entries, six are associated with family businesses, possibly taking over operations for a period after the death of a spouse. For example, Mrs. Jane Meredith is listed in 1881 as operating a photography business at 619 Michigan, the same location of a photography business of Thomas Meredith who remained listed in the same location since 1873.⁶²

An 1889 article in the *Buffalo Courier* from Buffalo, New York titled "Women's Work, Employment of the Sex in Photograph Galleries," interviewed photography gallery owner Mr. McMichael, who operated a gallery on Main Street. During the summer McMichael employed three full-time female employees and hired more during peak seasons. Mc Michael said of his employees, "We have employed women for 18 years and prefer them in this work to men. They have as a rule a finer artistic sense and a more delicate touch." H. McMichael first appears listed at 246 Main in 1871. McMichael is listed in the same location in 1872, and then from 1877 to 1881. By the interview in 1889, McMichael had been listed as operating a photography business for eighteen years-the same number of years he had hired female employees. A young woman in

⁶² Entry for "Buffalo, New York" Population.us, accessed December 21,2021, <https://population.us/ny/buffalo/>; Entry for "Chicago, Illinois." Population.us, accessed December 21, 2021 <https://population.us/il/chicago/>; Chris Andrie, "Photographers 1855-1881 Buffalo, New York," Usgennet.org, accessed December 27,2021, <http://www.usgennet.org/usa/ny/county/erie1/buffalo/photo.htm>. Anna/ Annie Butler may be the same person listed under different names. An Entry for "Anna Butler" appears listed in the Buffalo, New York City Directory from 1858-1861. An entry for "Annie Butler" appears 1868 and 1869.

the printing department who had been in the photography business for four years and a newer employee retouching negatives discussed the diversity of their work, from printing, retouching the negatives, to operating the camera. Married women and widows remained part of the photography business in Buffalo up into the late 1880s. A gallery operated by Mr. Powelson on Main Street had been operated by his widow for a period of time before being sold to the current owner. The wife of the current owner assisted her husband in operations of the gallery.⁶³

Other studio owners had a less favorable view of women in the photography business. One photographer interviewed stated that he preferred male employees and had not employed women for several years. “I prefer men for this reason that to them their work is usually necessary to their living. With a woman it is different. She usually makes her work simply as a makeshift until such a time as she shall marry.” The studio owner agreed that some of his female employees in the past had been with him many years and been “capable and faithful.” However, another former employee he had paid well, had quit her job to get married shortly after being fully trained.⁶⁴

The experiences and views of Mr. McMichael and the unnamed owner represent two opposite and extreme views of women in the photographic industry. Art historian Kathrine Manthorne notes that many women worked in the photographic industry in a variety of positions. Colorists who hand colored select areas of a photograph could convert a small area in their homes to do piecework from home after putting their children to bed. Men began to feel

⁶³ *Buffalo Courier*, “Woman’s Work” Employment of the Sex in Photographic Galleries,” *Buffalo Courier* (Buffalo, New York), July 14, 1889, Newspapers.com; Andrlle, “Photographers 1855-1881”

⁶⁴ *Buffalo Courier*, “Woman’s Work.”

economically threatened as the number of women in the industry continued to increase and sought to condemn them as performing inferior work.⁶⁵

Manthorne suggests that location also contributed to the success of women in photography, with women in the growing towns in the Midwest and West having more opportunities. Women such as Candace Reed often participated in photography as part of a family enterprise and took over the business after the death of a spouse. Candace Reed began assisting her husband in his photography business and continued to operate the business after his death with her brother and sister. She continued to operate her studio until at least 1862, when she left for Tennessee to volunteer as a nurse in field hospitals. After the Civil War, she returned to her studio. Few images survive from Reed's thirty-year career as a fire ravaged her studio in 1878, destroying much of her work. Like many commercial photographers of the time, Reed specialized in portraits. Surviving examples of her work show a diversity beyond typical portraiture, including street scenes, wedding portraits, postmortem images, and portraits of babies and children.⁶⁶

The one genre of photography in which women were celebrated and dominated the industry was in portraiture of babies and small children. Women were thought to instinctually know how to calm and pose children while quickly pressing the shutter. The genre was recommended as financially lucrative. If a customer was pleased with the results, they would likely return annually and bring other children in for pictures. Manthorne notes that women were the primary consumers of portrait photography, displaying photos in parlors and saving them in heirloom photo albums. One of these early photographers, Emily Stokes of Boston centered her

⁶⁵ Manthorne, *Women in the Dark*, 82-85.

⁶⁶ Manthorne, *Women in the Dark*, 25-26.

business on photography of babies and children. Stokes had been a photographer in England before immigrating to the United States and catered to Boston's elite. Stokes also became the photographer for class portraits from female colleges including Wellesley College.⁶⁷

The demand for portraits of babies and children created an opening wedge in photography for women by providing them an opportunity to show their skills and artistry. Frances Willard in the 1897 book *Occupations for Women*, described why photography was well suited for women. "Nearly two-thirds of a photographers' patrons are women and children," and women of "pleasing manners.... obliging disposition and artistic sense," were most adept in posing clients. Willard argued that women had a natural understanding of "colors in dress, and all the details that make up the artistic photographs of women and children." "Photography is especially adapted to a woman's artistic taste and delicate touch."⁶⁸

Willard notes that photography has expansive applications and opportunities beyond the market of portraiture of children and women in which women had excelled. Willard gives the example of the portraits of famous men created by Julia Margaret Cameron, photojournalist Frances Benjamin Johnston, a growing number of talented award winning "amateur photographers," and opportunities presented by using photographs as illustrations. Willard suggests women wanting to "leave the army of amateurs and enter the professional area," work for a photographic studio to learn details of the business before opening a studio of her own.⁶⁹

Willard defines the division between amateur and professional based on monetization, notoriety, and notable clients. For example, Willard describes Miss Alice Hughes of London, as,

⁶⁷ Manthorne, *Women in the Dark*, 50-58.

⁶⁸ Willard, *Occupations for Women*, 242-248.

⁶⁹ Willard, *Occupations for Women*, 242-248.

“The most celebrated woman photographer in the world,” and the most expensive photographer in London. Hughes photographed many notable clients including, “nearly all our American girls who married Englishmen, from Lady Randolph Churchill to Lady Terence Blackwood.” Being a professional as defined by Willard did not require a separate storefront. Miss Hughes built her studio, “over the garden and from the drawing-room one descends to it by three or four steps,” and displayed “no outward sign or windows” to suggest that the location was a workspace or studio. Photojournalist Miss Johnston, “ranks among the list of leading photographers of the country,” for her photography in newspapers and magazines. Along with newspapers and magazines, Johnston had been hired as an official photographer to document the activities of the 1893 Chicago World’s Columbian Exhibition. Mrs. Emily Stokes, a professional photographer interviewed by Willard entered the field of photography in the niche market of photographing women and children, “aiming to produce the true child portrait.” Stokes, who catered to Boston’s elite families described her clients as, “among the very best of our citizens, people of culture here and in England.”⁷⁰

Photography as Art- An American School

American photographic art was influenced by the British tradition. Pictorialism, particularly the soft-focus school advocated by Newton to emulate painting, popular from the mid-nineteenth to early twentieth century was a British cultural export. Photography historian Margaret Harker notes that during the nineteenth century, Britain was the undisputed leader in photography. In his 1907 book, *Art and the Camera*, Anthony Guest described “the pictorial

⁷⁰ Willard, *Occupations for Women*, 242-248; Manthorne, *Women in the Dark*, 120, 58.

development of photography is entirely of English origin.” The Brotherhood of the Linked Ring provided a model to form photographic societies with the focus on photography as fine art. In 1902, the Photo-Secession was formed in New York to advocate for photography as fine art. The five founding members included Alfred Stieglitz, Gertrude Käsebier, Edward Steichen, Clarence H. White, and Alvin Langdon Coburn. In a later schism between Stieglitz and Käsebier, Steichen allied with Stieglitz, while White and Coburn would leave the group to join Käsebier in forming the Pictorial Photographers of America, allied with F. Holland Day, who Stieglitz perceived as a rival.⁷¹

The Photo-Secession was not the first attempt to form a national organization for photography or showcase the work of American artists nationally or internationally. Photographer F. Holland Day sought to build recognition for the new emerging style in the United States by gathering three hundred samples of work from various artists and contributing one hundred of his own prints for an exhibition in Europe. Day sought to exhibit the works at the gallery of the Linked Ring utilizing family connections. However, his efforts were thwarted by a cable from Stieglitz to a friend of his within the Linked Ring. Day presented the works to the Royal Photographic Society where the works were accepted and exhibited from In October and November 1900 under the title “New American School of Photography.” All prominent American photographers were represented—except for Stieglitz who had refused to contribute prints to the effort. Stieglitz opposition to Day’s efforts were based on Day’s proposal for a national organization, the “American Association of Pictorial Photographers” based in Boston, instead of New York. Day lived in Boston and had secured a space within the Museum of Fine

⁷¹ Anthony Guest, *Art and The Camera* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1907), 28, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.fl2l1d1&view=1up&seq=64>; “The Photo-Secession,” Tate Museum.org, accessed December 28, 2021, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/t/photo-secession>; Homer, *Alfred Stieglitz and the Photo-Secession*, 68.

Arts for the group to use. Although Day sought to include Stieglitz and even offered him a role leading the organization, Stieglitz refused to be part of an organization in which he would not hold absolute control.⁷²

Alfred Stieglitz advocated for a separate American school of art photography since the 1890s. Stieglitz as an editor of several photographic magazines-became a tastemaker in turn of the twentieth century photography, deciding who would receive recognition in photographic art. Stieglitz was born in to an upper-middle income family of German immigrants. Alfred's older brother Edward enjoyed success as an amateur painter and frequently hosted gatherings featuring music, literature reading and guests of artistic circles. In 1881, Alfred's father moved the family to Germany-allowing for the children to study in Europe and travel the continent. While attending university in Berlin to study engineering, Stieglitz began experimenting with photography. Stieglitz studied photochemistry with Dr. Hermann Wilhelm Vogel and began to work as an independent photographer before his return to the United States in 1890. In 1887, Stieglitz submitted a group of his photographs taken in Italy to a competition by the magazine *Amateur Photographer* and was awarded first prize.⁷³ Gaining notoriety for his work while living and working abroad aided Stieglitz in establishing a future career in photography and as an art critic after returning to the United States.

Upon the return of the Stieglitz family to New York, Alfred's father purchased an interest in the Heliochrome Engraving Company. Alfred operated the business with two of his former roommates from Berlin from 1890 to 1895. Stieglitz married the sister of one of his business partners in 1893, having one child. The business was unprofitable, with Stieglitz living on an

⁷² Homer, *Alfred Stieglitz and the Photo-Secession*, 40-41.

⁷³ Homer, *Alfred Stieglitz and the Photo-Secession*, 3-16

allowance from his father for many years after. Stieglitz photography from the early 1890s focused on the scenes around him in the city. Critics later drew comparison between his photograph, *Winter – Fifth Avenue* taken in February 1893 and later work by New York Realists, later known as the Ashcan school. Stieglitz became the editor of *The American Amateur Photographer*, and New York based periodical in 1893. This gave Stieglitz a platform to reach a broader audience with his ideas on the direction photography should take in the United States. In a 1944 interview Stieglitz described photography of the 1890s as, “either villainous commercial trash or, in the hands of the amateurs, cheap, artsy stuff done in imitation of painting.” As editor of the *American Amateur Photographer*, Stieglitz became “famous or infamous” for his critique of most of the photographs submitted by amateurs to the magazine in hopes of publication, “Technically perfect, pictorially rotten.” Stieglitz resigned after the January 1896 issue due to conflict with owners of the journal. The previous year Stieglitz resigned from the photo engraving business that his father had purchased an interest in.⁷⁴

In May 1896, Stieglitz had an opportunity to operate *Camera Notes*, a quarterly periodical for the financially ailing New York Camera Club. The position at the magazine allowed Stieglitz to organize those with a similar view of the future of photography. With full control of the magazine, Stieglitz recruited co-editors and art critics who wrote for the magazine and supported his viewpoints. Letters from readers suggest that many members of the New York Camera Club did not support the new direction of the magazine. Stieglitz remained with the journal until 1902.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Homer, *Alfred Stieglitz and the Photo-Seccession*, 16-17,19-39

⁷⁵ Homer, *Alfred Stieglitz and the Photo-Seccession*, 34-37.

In 1902, Stieglitz started his own magazine, *Camera Work* with a focus on American photographic art. Stieglitz opened the Little Galleries, later Gallery 291 on Fifth Avenue to serve as a gallery of the Photo-Secession in 1905. After a visit to Paris with Steichen in 1907, Stieglitz became more interested in modern art by Auguste Rodin and Henri Matisse than photography. He hosted a final photographic exhibit of his own work at the gallery in 1913. Prominent members began departing from the Photo-Secession in 1912, after Stieglitz became increasingly more critical of the soft-focus Pictorialist style of photography, first advocated by Newton that was practiced by many group members. Stieglitz had decided that the style of photography in the future would be in the sharp focus style. Former members of the Photo-Secession including Gertrude Käsebier formed The Pictorialist Photographers of America in 1915 and allied with Stieglitz archrival F. Holland Day. With the closing of Gallery 291 and the ceasing of publication of *Camera Work* in 1917 a new chapter would begin in Stieglitz life. The fifty-three-year-old first photographed aspiring artist Georgia O'Keefe in his gallery in 1917. O'Keefe would become Stieglitz second wife, a foremost advocate of his photography and contributions to art. After his death in 1946, O'Keefe spent three years organizing her late husband's papers, photography, and other items—distributing them to prestigious archives to guarantee his legacy.⁷⁶

Although less well known by the late-twentieth century, Gertrude Käsebier was equal in notoriety with Stieglitz at the beginning of the twentieth century and was a leading pioneer of a new genre merging art and commercial photography. Gertrude Käsebier, born Gertrude Stanton, in Fort Des Moines, Iowa, entered photography later in life after having a family. When she was twenty-two Gertrude married Eduard Käsebier, a shellac importer from an aristocratic German

⁷⁶ Homer, *Alfred Stieglitz and the Photo-Secession*, 34-37, 111, 138-143, 67, 155, 41-42, 68, 148; “Georgia O'Keefe, 1918, Alfred Stieglitz” Metropolitan Museum of Art, accessed January 9, 2022, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/271570>; Greenough, Hamilton ed., *Alfred Stieglitz Photographs & Writings*, 8.

family. The two had a troubled marriage but remained married although often living apart, as divorce during the late-nineteenth century was deemed scandalous. When the children reached their teens, her husband supported her in attending school for art. At age thirty-seven she enrolled in Pratt Institute of Art where she studied painting between 1889 to 1893. In 1894 at age forty-two she took up the study of photography in earnest after winning a fifty-dollar prize for best photograph from the *Quarterly Illustrator* and the runner-up in the *New York Herald* contest. Käsebier travelled and studied in Europe for a year. In Germany she studied with chemist Hermann Wilhelm Vogel, one of Stieglitz mentors, before returning to New York due to her husband's ill health. Käsebier took up portrait photography to support her family during her husband's illness and continued working after he recovered. Käsebier apprenticed to a neighborhood portrait photographer Samuel H. Lifshy before launching a studio of her own in late 1897 or early 1898. Her first studio was in a room on the upper floor of the Women's Exchange, an organization that aided "gentlewomen" who supported themselves through sale of food and crafts. Biographer Barbra Michaels notes that Käsebier was not part of the exchange but "benefited from the genteel clientele and congenial atmosphere."⁷⁷

Käsebier sought to establish herself commercially and as an artist. In November 1896 Käsebier exhibited photographs at the Boston Camera Club. Michaels notes that Käsebier was likely inspired by the influence of her instructor Arthur W. Dow who had ties to the art community in Boston. In February 1898, one hundred fifty of Käsebier's prints were shown at the Pratt Institute as part of the "Art Studies in Photography" exhibition. Käsebier set herself apart by lecturing on photography's commercial potential for women and its creative potential-

⁷⁷ Beverly W. Branan, "Gertrude Käsebier 1852-1934, Introduction & Biographical Essay," Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Reading Room, accessed December 15, 2021, <https://www.loc.gov/rr/print/coll/womphotoj/kasebieressay.html>; Barbra Michaels, *Gertrude Käsebier The Photographer and her Photographs* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1992), 14-24, 25-28, 29.

condemning the “artlessness” of contemporary commercial photography. In a lecture accompanying an exhibition of her work at the Photographic Society of Philadelphia in 1898 she advised, “women of artistic tastes to train for the unworked field,” of photography. Käsebier drew comparisons between composition of paintings and photographs, advocating for a shift away from elaborate backdrops common in Victorian commercial portrait studios. “One of the most difficult things to learn in painting is what to leave out... The same applies to photography.” Käsebier advocated to a new approach to portraiture by creating, “not maps of faces, but pictures of real men and women as they know themselves, to make a likeness that are biographies, to bring to each photograph the essential personality that is variously called temperament, soul, humanity.” Author Tom Hopkins, writing about the collection of the Royal Photographic Society of London, observed that Käsebier’s description of her objectives were reminiscent of statements by Julia Margaret Cameron. When capturing portraits of notable men Cameron described, “my whole soul endeavored to do its duty towards them, in recording faithfully the greatness of the inner as well as the features of the outer man.”⁷⁸

At the First Philadelphia Photographic Salon in 1898, the maximum number of prints allowed to be exhibited by an artist was ten. Käsebier had the honor of being one of a few photographers to have ten prints selected including prominent New Yorker Alfred Stieglitz. Käsebier also kindled a friendship and professional relationship with F. Holland Day. Day, a publisher, bibliophile, educator, historian, and a rising star in photography had three photographs included in 1895 at the London Photographic Salon. The same year the Brotherhood of the Linked Ring selected Day as a member, making him the third American to receive this honor

⁷⁸ Michaels, *Gertrude Käsebier*, 26-29; Hopkins, *Treasures of the Royal Photographic Society 1839-1919* (New York: Focal Press, 1980), 33, 16.

following Rudolf Eickemeyer Jr. and Alfred Stieglitz. At the First Philadelphia Salon in 1898 where Day and Käsebier became acquainted, Day had eight works selected including photographs from *The Seven Words*, a series of photos depicting the crucifixion of Christ. The two would remain close friends for the next twenty-five years, with Day being a frequent guest at Käsebier's summer vacation cottage in Newport, Rhode Island.⁷⁹

In June 1898, Käsebier introduced herself to Alfred Stieglitz who had assumed the role of editor for the journal of the New York Camera Club, located one block away from her studio. The two worked closely together for the next ten years. Käsebier joined the New York Camera Club with Stieglitz hosting a solo show of her work in February of 1899. Stieglitz endorsed and aided in publicizing Käsebier's work and included her in the charter members of the Photo-Secession formed in 1902. Prior to partnering with Stieglitz, Käsebier had become one of the most well-known photographers in the United States. In 1900, Käsebier was one of the first two women, and the first American woman to be elected to membership of the Linked Ring.⁸⁰

Tensions mounted between Stieglitz and other photographers who participated in exhibitions he sponsored, including Käsebier. Many among even the elite Photo-Secession were photographers by occupation, relying on income from the sale of photographic prints. Stieglitz failed to return exhibited prints and pay artists for prints sold at exhibitions he managed. Like the "gentlemen amateurs" of the nineteenth century, Stieglitz viewed that art should be produced without out the goal of financial gain, with him condemning those who monetized their work. This would later alienate Stieglitz from Steichen and painter Max Webber. Stieglitz, also like the

⁷⁹ Michaels, *Gertrude Käsebier*,49; Patricia J. Fanning, *Through an Uncommon Lens: The Life and Photography of F. Holland Day* (Amherst: University Press of Massachusetts,2008), xvii-xxiii, 147; Trevor Fairbrother, *Making a Presence F Holland Day in Artistic Photography* (Andover, Massachusetts: Addison Gallery of Art, 2012); 53.

⁸⁰ Michaels, *Gertrude Käsebier*,45,87; Homer, *Alfred Stieglitz and the Photo- Secession*, 65.

“gentlemen amateurs” of the nineteenth century, was of independent means, living off an allowance from his father and funds from his first wife Emmy’s inheritance.⁸¹

By 1907 art critics allied with Stieglitz including Charles Henry Caffin published articles in *Camera Work* openly critical of Käsebier’s photography. Six years earlier, Caffin had devoted a chapter in his book *Photography as Fine Art* praising to the work of Käsebier. Caffin described Käsebier’s photography as the “artistic commercial portrait.” Although a commercial photographer, “unquestionably she is an artist,” and was one of, “a few who succeed in this respect and produce truly artistic work.” Stieglitz was the only other photographer Caffin examined in depth and devoted an entire chapter to except for Käsebier. In a letter to Day she described her situation; “Stieglitz has certainly loosed all his dogs of war on me and why I do not know. It is a poor return for my years of loyalty.”⁸²

During 1907, Käsebier was also facing financial hardship due to failing investments and temporarily being without a studio. She had funds in the Knickerbocker Bank when it failed and lost her studio space, as the tenant she had been subletting from lost his lease for non-payment. Although she was able to quickly relocate a few blocks away, Käsebier was without studio space during the holidays, one of the most lucrative times of the year for her business. Business records associated with Käsebier’s studio have not survived, however Biographer Barbra Michaels, estimates Käsebier’s annual income from photography in the years from the turn of the twentieth

⁸¹ Michaels, *Gertrude Käsebier*, 120; Homer, *Alfred Stieglitz and the Photo- Secession*, 16-17.

⁸² Michaels, *Gertrude Käsebier*, 120-125; Charles Henry Caffin, *Photography as a Fine Art, The Achievements and Possibilities of Photographic Art in America* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1901), 55-56, https://www.google.com/books/edition/Photography_as_a_Fine_Art/_c1AAAAIAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1.

century to 1907 at between \$4,000 to \$6,000 annually, placing her by modern standards securely within the middle class.⁸³

From 1907 to 1912 when she resigned from the Photo-Secession, Käsebier put a greater focus on her commercial endeavors. In May 1907 Käsebier joined the Professional Photographers of New York, an organization for commercial photographers. Her husband fell ill again in 1908 and died the following year making it more imperative for Käsebier as a self-supporting widow to focus her energies on commercial endeavors. Käsebier offered free classes to women photographers in association with the Women's Federation of The Photographers' Association of America in late 1909 and early 1910.⁸⁴

As part of an elite transcendent class of highly skilled women, Käsebier gained access to masculine spaces based on her professional status prior to becoming a widow. Some women of the middle and upper classes may have used their status as a widow to gain greater access to male spaces. By contrast, Käsebier as a respected artist was free to cultivate friendships and professional relationships with fellow artists, and mentor both male and female students. Käsebier's student to achieve greatest success was Alvin Langdon Coburn. Coburn was an American-born British photographer and a cousin of F. Holland Day, who had gained renown for his work prior to studying with Käsebier at age twenty. Coburn was the youngest person to be admitted to the Brotherhood of the Linked Ring and a founding member the Photo-Secession.⁸⁵

⁸³ Michaels, *Gertrude Käsebier*, 125,74. Calculator located at usinflation.com. Michaels figures of \$60,000 – \$90,000 were based on numbers from 1992. Based on Inflation the equivalent of \$122,000-\$183,000 placing Käsebier securely in the upper middle class.

⁸⁴ Michaels, *Gertrude Käsebier*, 125-128, 122-138.

⁸⁵ Michaels, *Gertrude Käsebier*, 97-110, 60; "Alvin Langdon Coburn, American Photographer," Britannica Online, accessed April 24,2022, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Alvin-Langdon-Coburn>; "Art Term, The Photo-Secession," Tate Museum.org, accessed December 28,2021, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/t/photo-secession>.

Käsebier last exhibited with the Photo-Secession at the 1910 exhibition in Buffalo, New York at the Albright Gallery. Only prints chosen by Stieglitz were exhibited so groups such as the Photo-Pictorialists of Buffalo boycotted the exhibition. The work exhibited of Käsebier was retrospective with fourteen of the twenty-two prints from her early career prior to 1908. Stieglitz pressured exhibitors to sell prints at “sacrificial prices,” then in his business style delayed paying the artists. One of Käsebier’s prints was sold at about one-third of the price the print had sold for in the past. In addition, Joseph T. Keiley, an art critic allied with Stieglitz, and writer for *Camera Work*, leveled harsh criticism of Käsebier’s prints, apparently retracting the praise he had bestowed on her work previously.⁸⁶

The tensions between Stieglitz and Käsebier had several elements. Käsebier was an artist but had always been a commercial photographer. Like the “gentlemen amateurs” of the nineteenth century, Stieglitz rejected monetization of photographic art. Barbra Michaels notes that, to Stieglitz, “the commercial goals of professional photographers’ organizations were at odd with the Photo-Secession’s aesthetic aims.” Stieglitz was a man of independent means- whereas Käsebier worked to supplement the family income during her husband’s illness and became self-supporting after she was widowed. Secondly, Stieglitz had also begun losing interest in photography after his visit to Paris with Steichen in 1907. The gallery Stieglitz had obtained to advocate and showcase American photographic art had been transitioned to focus on modern art. Third, Stieglitz had become increasingly more critical of traditional techniques in photographic art, including those who adhered to Newton’s school of soft focus. Stieglitz, instead, advocated for sharp focus - a style in the Victorian period popular with some landscape artists and the sciences including botany, who sought to record places and objects. Finally, author Kathleen

⁸⁶ Michaels, *Gertrude Käsebier*, 134-136.

Pyne suggests that tensions between Stieglitz and Käsebier may have involved his desire to “replace” her with a female artist who presented themes associated with sexual liberation. Stieglitz shifted his attention to promotion of Anne Brigman’s photographs of the nude female form in nature. Käsebier was in a class of respectable self-supporting matrons, using her skill as a photographer to exhibit art that upheld the traditional Victorian view of women as mothers. Stieglitz sought to, “give a modern feminist face to show his cultural break from the past.” Pyne points to the strategic campaign launched by Stieglitz to undermine Käsebier through directing negative reviews and exclusion from Photo-Secession activities.⁸⁷

After resigning from the Photo-Secession in January 1912, Käsebier continued to work as a commercial photographer, bringing her daughters into her studio business. Her daughter Hermine and granddaughter Mina continued to operate the studio after her death and until World War II when they were forced to close the studio due to supply shortages. She lectured and mentored young photographers who continued to seek out her advice- including Imogen Cunningham. The Library of Congress purchased a collection of fifteen of Käsebier’s photographs in 1926. Five years before her death in 1934, the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Science held a retrospective exhibition featuring thirty-five of her photographs.⁸⁸

Käsebier remained connected to the art community and photography after leaving the Photo-Secession including loaning her collection of Auguste Rodin drawings and sculpture to be exhibited at the 1913 Armory Show. An acquaintance, Arthur B. Davies- the president of the American Association of Sculptors and Painters, organized the Armory Show. Although wealthy collectors, art dealers and Americans who traveled abroad were familiar with emerging styles

⁸⁷ Michaels, *Gertrude Käsebier*, 87; Homer, *Alfred Stieglitz and the Photo-Secession*, 138-143, 67; Kelsey, *Art of Chance*, 62, 159; Pyne, *The Photographer of Enchantment*, 125-128.

⁸⁸ Michaels, *Gertrude Käsebier*, 139-160.

from Europe such as Cubism, most Americans were unfamiliar with abstract art. The exhibition, envisioned and advocated by American modernist of the Ashcan school, sought to exhibit progressive works of American and European painters, “favoring such work usually neglected by current shows and especially interesting and instructive to the public.” However, during the selection process Davies excluded many of the artists who sought to organize the show- instead favoring other modernists he had discovered abroad. The exhibition can be described as revolutionary not only in content, but in audience. Art was being exhibited not just to the elite who purchased and commissioned art, but as a public spectacle for the masses and is credited with changing the artistic taste of popular culture towards the abstract.⁸⁹

Patronage by women such as Käsebier allowed them to have some voice in what was exhibited at the Armory Show. By loaning her collection of Rodin to the Armory Show, Käsebier was able to negotiate the inclusion of a piece of her granddaughter Mina’s artwork. Records of the show are incomplete but at the time displays of “primitive” art was in vogue. Mina recounted her experience attending the show with her “Granny” and watching her grandmother lead a group discussion about the perceived influences of her work. After the discussion Käsebier told her friends, “Oh, I like it very much. You see she made it for my birthday.” Mina recalls her grandmother “chuckled all the way home... but assured her it was worthy to be hung.” Michaels suggests that Käsebier may have been “testing” the public appreciation for modern art and disliked or did not appreciate Cubism.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Michaels, *Gertrude Käsebier*, 139-41; Susan Stamberg, “In 1913, A New York Armory Filled With Art Stunned The Nation,” *National Public Radio*, November 11, 2013, <https://www.npr.org/2013/11/11/243732924/in-1913-a-new-york-armory-filled-with-art-stunned-the-nation>; Robert A. Slayton, *Beauty in the City The Ashcan School* (Albany, New York: State Universe of New York Press, 2017), 7-11.

⁹⁰ Michaels, *Gertrude Käsebier*, 140-142.

Käsebier's notable works include her portraits and portrayals of motherhood. In the late 1890s Käsebier photographed Sioux Indians traveling to New York as part of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. In the following years, Käsebier produced a series portraying American Indians as individuals or in small groups in traditional attire. The original negative of her most famous portrait of this series, *The Red Man* is in the collection of Library of Congress. Käsebier created portraits of prominent men including Mark Twain and Booker T. Washington and clients including the children of Louis Comfort Tiffany.⁹¹

Käsebier was a wife and mother who exhibited romantic depictions of motherhood, children, and family life. Käsebier was following the path paved by early female photographers that had created an opening wedge into commercial photography through portraits of children and mothers with children. A print of one of her most popular photographs *The Manger* exhibited at the Philadelphia Salon in 1900, sold for a price unheard of at the time, one-hundred dollars. The print was purchased by English actress, Ellen Terry who had posed for Lewis Carroll and Julia Margaret Cameron in her youth and met Käsebier while performing in New York. The print sold for a substantial price compared to Käsebier's studio rates. Käsebier's rate for work in her studio was ten dollars for a setting fee with two prints, and five dollars for each additional print.⁹²

Barbra Michaels notes that most photographers specializing in mother and child portraits seek to express the bond of the baby or child to the mother. Mothers in Käsebier's portraits are protective but not restrictive. In many of Käsebier's depictions, the mother looks at the child

⁹¹ Homer, *Alfred Stieglitz and the Photo-Secession*, 62-64; Branam, "Gertrude Käsebier (1852-1934)"; Michaels, *Gertrude Käsebier*, 67-70, 52

⁹² C. Jane Gover, *The Positive Image Women Photographers in Turn of the Century America* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1988), 111-113; Michaels, *Gertrude Käsebier*, 74.

affectionately, often obscuring the woman's face. The children look, "out or away from its mother in curiosity." In 1899, while Käsebier was exhibiting at the Boston Arts and Crafts Exhibition, Day, a Boston resident, introduced Käsebier to painter Francis Watts Lee. Käsebier's portrait of Lee's wife Agnes, and daughter Peggy, created in 1899 would become one of Käsebier's most famous mother and child photographs, titled *Blessed Art Thou Among Women*. Shortly after the photograph was taken, Peggy died, and the Lee's other daughter was deafened by the same illness. Out of respect for the Lee family, Käsebier waited to exhibit the photograph until the following year. Käsebier's 1904 photograph of Agnes Lee, titled *The Heritage of Motherhood* seeks to capture a mother's heartache after the loss of a child. Mrs. Lee is seated with eyes, closed in a dark colored shawl in a barren landscape near the edge of a turbulent body of water.⁹³

Käsebier's greatest contribution was as one of the pioneers of a new path—the commercial photographic artist—blurring the lines between commercial photography and art. In the world view of the those of the nineteenth-century gentlemen amateur tradition such as Stieglitz, one was an artist or a commercial photographer, but could not be both. Käsebier was a professional photographer, as defined by Willard monetizing her work, gaining notoriety, and having many celebrity clients. Along with operating her commercial studio, she created photographs to display at art exhibitions. Although a commercial photographer, she was one of the first women to be inducted into the Linked Ring, an exclusive London based organization for photographic artists.

⁹³ Michaels, *Gertrude Käsebier*, 76-79,49-52,61.

Unlike women at the time who often pursued careers after the death of a husband, Käsebier achieved international fame as a photographer and operated her own business as a married working woman. She engaged actively in the technical and professional side of photography, opening her portrait studio in 1896 during her husband's first serious illness to support the family. Käsebier continued to operate her business after her husband recovered and created most of her famous works prior to her husband's death in 1909. Käsebier created a path for following generations of commercial photographers, who were often married with children-juggling family, career matters, and operating a business.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ Michaels, *Gertrude Käsebier*, 24-29, 61-64, 127-129.

CHAPTER 3: WILLIAMINA PARRISH: ARTIST, PHOTOGRAPHER, MENTOUR

At the turn of the twentieth century, St. Louis was part of a national creative energy that aided in developing and advancing the careers of women writers and artists. The St. Louis Artists' Guild was founded in 1886 as a modification to an existing organization, The St. Louis Sketch Club founded by male art students at Washington University Art School. The new organization was inclusive of women, promoting exhibiting and appreciation for a variety of mediums of art including photography, painting, and other visual arts. St. Louis was also home to clubs advancing literature and the arts including the Tuesday Literary Club, Photographic Society and the St. Louis Decorative Arts Society. Advances in technology made cameras more accessible and easier to use, making photography accessible to a larger audience. In addition, women photographers gained greater visibility on the national stage after the Chicago World's Fair in 1893.⁹⁵

Artist and photographer Williamina Parrish came of age at the beginning of the twentieth century—a time of expanded opportunities for women in the arts. Williamina and her younger sister Grace Parrish studied photography in New York and were founding members of the Salon Club of America. Although Williamina Parrish is mentioned as a footnote in turn-of-the-century art history, during her lifetime she built a substantial resume of awards for photography with her sister and independently, being exhibited nationally and internationally. One of her prints is part

⁹⁵ St. Louis Artists' Guild, "A Brief History.;" Lee Jolliffe, "The Magazine as a Mentor: A Turn-of-the-Century Handwritten Magazine by St. Louis Women Artists" *American Periodicals*, 1997, vol. 7 (1997): 51-52. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20771102>; "History, Cultural Icon," Kodack.com, accessed June 22,2021, <https://www.kodak.com/en/company/page/history>; Felt, "Before the Kodak Girl." Lecture.

of the permanent collection of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Upon her death in 1941, she was described as a St. Louis artist and painter, but as an amateur photographer.⁹⁶

Over her nearly forty-year career, Williamina Parrish explored a variety of creative mediums as an artist, with her greatest success in photography, and served as a mentor to writers and artists. Although she began her career in photography as a self-taught amateur in partnership with her sister Grace, it is more accurate to examine her career as an artist that used photography as a medium. Williamina was most successful as a photographer, with her work being exhibited nationally and internationally. By contrast, her paintings are mentioned in local St. Louis newspapers, with little evidence that they were exhibited outside of the areas in which she resided. Through periodicals and archives, over 180 examples of the work of Williamina and Grace Parrish remain, providing an adequate sample to convey development of style, and the differences between the works they created together and separately.

Women photographers, such as Williamina and Grace Parrish gained greater attention after the World's Columbian Exposition, also known as the Chicago World's Fair in 1893. Francis Benjamin Johnson of Washington, D.C. was one of three photographers hired by the government to document the event. Celebrating new technology, progress, and the "City Beautiful Movement," the Chicago Fair featured a dedicated building devoted to the modern art

⁹⁶ News clipping, "Two St. Louis Sisters." n.p. in Parrish Sisters' Scrapbook, Missouri Historical Society; Sadakichi Hartman "The Salon Club and the First American Photographic Salon at New York," *American Amateur Photographer*, vol. XV, no. 7 (July 1904), 296, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nyp.33433056958782&view=1up&seq=308&q1=Parrish>; "Spring Profile," Los Angeles County Museum of Art Website, accessed October 20, 2020, <https://collections.lacma.org/node/194061>; *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, "Williamina Parrish Dies, Funeral Monday," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, January 4, 1941, Newspapers.com.

form of photography and displays within other pavilions featuring work by twenty female photographers, both “devoted amateurs” and professionals.⁹⁷

Technological advances made cameras easier to use and more accessible to middle and upper-class households. The mass market release of the Kodak camera in 1888 and nitro-cellulose film the following year both by George Eastman revolutionized photography by reducing picture taking to a one step push button process, for the purchase price of twenty-five dollars. Professionals developed printed and reloaded the camera with film, at the Eastman factory, removing the need for technical knowledge of chemicals or technical functions. Kodak urged those in the consumer market to “press the button” and let “Kodak... do the rest.”⁹⁸

Naomi Rosenblum notes that the economic decline of the 1890s had made it more difficult to operate a studio as a separate business, leading to the popularity of taking portraits in the home of clients. The failure of the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad in February of 1893 marked the beginning of an economic depression that would cripple the United States for the next four years. Five hundred banks failed, fifteen thousand businesses went bankrupt, and the unemployment rate reached nineteen percent nationally with regionally higher rates, including Michigan where unemployment reached forty-three percent.⁹⁹

With the work shifting from a storefront to the private home, it became more socially acceptable for women to pursue photography as a profession. Inspired by the Arts and Crafts movement, photographers sought to fashion individualized creative and artistic portraits. Women were viewed as particularly adept to portraiture as they, “avoided a strictly mechanical

⁹⁷ Felt, “Before the Kodak Girl” Lecture.

⁹⁸ Kodak, “History, Cultural Icon.”; Gover, *The Positive Image Women Turn of the Century*, 7.

⁹⁹ Naomi Rosenblum, *A History of Women Photographers* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1994), 73-75; “Panic of 1893,” American History.net, accessed May 1, 2022, <https://american-history.net/19th-century-america/19th-century-america-famous-events/panic-of-1893/>.

approach,” and were believed to have an intuitive sense of arranging hair and garments tastefully, while making clients comfortable. Economic challenges may be a factor in home operated photography businesses in some locations, but not in other areas. During the 1890s Chicago saw a significant increase in women working in photography studios than in previous decades. This is likely due to the rapid population increase that occurred during the 1880s. Chicago’s population more than doubled between 1880 and 1890 as a growth in manufacturing jobs attracted immigrants from Europe and African Americans from the American South. In 1890, the population of Cook County, Illinois where Chicago is located was forty and a half percent foreign born. Seventy-eight percent classified as white on the census were children of immigrants or foreign born.¹⁰⁰

The Parrish sisters were among the women who began practicing photography out of a makeshift studio in their home during the late 1890s. Williamina and Grace Parrish were born into an upper middle-class family, daughters of Dinks L. Parrish, a haberdasher that later launched a successful laundry business, and owned show horses. By 1901, the sisters had gained notoriety for their work in St. Louis. The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* celebrated the sisters as, “Two of the cleverest young amateurs in St. Louis.” The sisters operated a studio in the family home located at 5607 Cabanne Place and had an elaborate collection of costumes for use in their photography. In one series of experimental photos, Williamina Parrish photographed her sister Grace in costumes portraying the “nine muses.”¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Rosenblum, *A History of Women Photographers*, 73-75; Chicago Historical Society, *Chicago Photographers*, n.p.; “Chicago’s Social Geography,” Encyclopedia of Chicago, Chicago History Museum, accessed March 22, 2022, http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/11409_em.html#:~:text=Between%201880%20and%201890%20C%20the,new%20industries%20created%20new%20neighborhoods.

¹⁰¹ *Western Camera Notes*, “The First Minneapolis Photography Salon,” *Western Camera Notes*, vol. VI, no. 3 (March 1903), 70, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=umn.319510027999417&view=1up&seq=140&q1=Parrish>; *St. Louis Globe Democrat*, “D.L. Parrish, Laundry Owner, Horse Show Patron, Dies at 72,” *St. Louis Globe*

The Parrish sisters were artists but understood the practicality of marketing their work to those who sought professional portraits. The Parrish sisters focused on the value and convenience they could provide compared to professional photographers. The caption above the article showing samples of their work was captioned “Work Done by the Misses Parrish at Their Home Studio, that Equals Work Done by Professional Photographers of Many Years’ Experience.”¹⁰² Although artists, they may have considered following the path of women like Gertrude Käsebier who monetized her creative studio portraits.

The Parrish sisters became involved in photography about 1897 and were awarded first prize on the photograph titled, *Testing the Vintage* in the *Harper’s Round Table Small Picture Contest* the following year. In 1900, the Parrish sisters submitted the same photo under the name of *Gesundheit* to Browning, King & Company’s *Illustrated Monthly*, once again winning first prize. By 1903, the Parrish sisters began to attract national attention when they exhibited three of their photographs at the First Minneapolis Photography Salon, sponsored by the Minneapolis Camera Club. *Western Camera Notes*, a monthly magazine of pictorial photography, featured *Sleeping Girl*, one of the photographs exhibited at Minneapolis in the February 1903 issue. Although the Parrish sisters’ work had not been exhibited at salons previously, *Western Camera Notes* predicted, “further success for these two conscientious workers.”¹⁰³

Democrat, May 2, 1927, Newspapers.com; *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, “Amateur Photography Which Has in Many Cases Become High Art A Fad in St. Louis,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, January 27, 1901, Newspapers.com.

¹⁰²*St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, “Amateur Photography.”

¹⁰³ *Western Camera Note*, “The First Minneapolis Photography Salon,” March 1903, 70; *Western Camera Notes*, “Editorial,” *Western Camera Notes*, vol. VI, no. 6, (June 1903), 155, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=umn.319510027999417&view=1up&seq=303&q1=Parrish>; Albert Lee, Editor of Harper’s Round Table to Miss Williamina Parrish, 6 May 1898, n.p. in, Parrish Sister’s Scrapbook Missouri Historical Society; Browning & King Co.’s *Illustrated Monthly* to Miss Williamina Parrish, 10 April 1900, n.p. in, Parrish Sister’s Scrapbook, Missouri Historical Society; *Western Camera Notes* “The First Minneapolis Photography Salon,” *Western Camera Notes*, vol. VI, no. 2 (February 1903), 25, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=umn.319510027999417&view=1up&seq=72&q1=Parrish>.

In June 1903 *Western Camera Notes* reproduced eight of their photographs and interviewed Williamina about her and her younger sister Grace's work. The Parrish sisters had been experimenting with photography for "about six years." Although they had begun with a small Eastman Pocket Kodak, Williamina clarified that they had, "never allowed anyone else to "do the rest," as the Kodak company had advocated to those beginning photography. Williamina and Grace were involved in every stage including processing the negatives and printing the finished photographs. "I really believe that no one can be really sincere in his work and wish to improve who leaves any of the portion of the work to others," said Williamina about the photographic process. Williamina and Grace, researched photography techniques, read photographic articles, and studied pictures of well-known amateur photographers. The sisters experimented, finding techniques they preferred that differed from those recommended by, "the little Kodak books." *Western Camera Notes* described the Parrish sisters' method; "the camera has been used rather as a means to an end than a chief factor in their picture making." The Parrish sisters' style was a product of combining glass plate negatives with brushwork and a partially printed picture. The photograph "Babbie" appearing in the June 1903 issue of *Western Camera Notes*, is an example of a photograph using these techniques. This style of art photography gained them notoriety, with their work being frequently reprinted in widely circulated magazines including, *Browning King Magazine*, *Photo Era*, *Camera Craft*, and *Western Camera Notes*.¹⁰⁴

Williamina clarifies her view of herself as an artist, using photography as a medium. "We think all the arts go hand in hand and unless one has a love and appreciation for them all, one can

¹⁰⁴ *Western Camera Notes*, "Contents," *Western Camera Notes*, vol. VI, no. 6 (June 1903), 1, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=umn.319510027999417&view=1up&seq=275&q1=Parrish>. Carpenter, Sara Teasdale, 30; *Western Camera Notes*, "Editorial," 155-156.

never accomplish anything artistic.” Williamina described the commitment which she and her sister had for photography, “your art will certainly suffer if you give to her only half of your affections and the other half to “society” or frivolous amusements.” Often young women born in the upper-middle class joined local clubs, civic organizations, and participated in the arts as an extension of community involvement. By contrast, Williamina viewed herself as an artist and focused her energies exclusively on the arts.¹⁰⁵

Williamina and Grace Parrish were founding members of the Salon Club of America founded in December of 1903. Solitary pictorial workers Louis Fleckenstien of Wisconsin and Carl Rau of Minnesota, sought to create an organization for a younger generation of pictorial photographers. New talent was emerging in photography, but the younger generation struggled to gain recognition for their work. The original group of eleven photographers had recently been chosen by juries to exhibit in Philadelphia and Chicago. The Salon Club of America was founded as an alternative to Stieglitz’s Photo-Secession. Although membership was still exclusive, it sought to be more democratic than the Photo-Secession controlled completely by Stieglitz. The Salon Club sought to encourage younger pictorialists, adopting the slogan “many schools of art and all good,” and attracted members excluded from the Photo-Secession from across the country. Each month, members prepared a portfolio of their most recent work to be reviewed by other photographers. Members prepared mounted prints with a brief description of their work. The portfolio was forwarded to the director of the organization, then through the list of members that would offer written critical review of the photograph, forwarding it to the next group member.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ *Western Camera Notes*, “Editorial,” 156.

¹⁰⁶ Hartman “The Salon Club,” 296; Greenhill, “The Outsiders,” 23-25, 152.

The sisters had attracted national attention, but sometimes to mixed reviews. Poet, art critic, and frequent contributor to Alfred Stieglitz magazine *Camera Work*, Sadakichi Hartmann felt the Parrish sisters' work showed a lack of experience, with an occasional exceptional photograph. Hartmann said of the Parrish sister's photography in a 1904 issue of *American Amateur Photographer*, "Their work still bears earmarks of diletantism [sp]. Their *Sleepy Girl*, however, shows decided talent." Hartmann predicted the Parrish sisters would have a bright future based on his understanding that they had been working in photography, "hardly more than two years." By 1904, the sisters had been practicing photography for seven years, and operating a studio in a part of their residence for at least three years. "I expect a great deal of them. But at present were it not that they were young, their prints would not interest one very much," wrote Hartmann. "The day will come however, when I will have to pay full homage to their impeccable mastery of art," he concluded.¹⁰⁷

The Potters

In November 1904 the Parrish sisters and six other young women in their late teens and early twenties, from upper middle-class families, formed an artist's group for the purpose of "mutual help, criticism and accomplishment." From November 1904 to October 1907 the artist group known as the "Potters" met on Friday afternoon in the family homes of group members. Williamina, known as Will or William¹⁰⁸ to the Potters, was the undisputed leader, with an

¹⁰⁷ Hartmann, "The Salon Club," 300-302; *Western Camera Notes* "Editorial," 155-156; *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, "Amateur Photography."

¹⁰⁸ Williamina was named after her great-grandfather. The name was intended as a diminutive form of the name William. This may explain why those closest to her including her sister often referred to her as Will or William. Letter From Betty McCormick (Williamina and Grace's niece) to Margaret Carpenter dated December 11, 1956 "Will was named for her great grandfather William Gardiner born 1796 – 1893 Auchtermuchy, Scotland... little William)." Margaret Haley Carpenter Papers, 1898-1985, Accession 10656, b. 17, Special Collections Department, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

interest in discovering and developing talent in others. Grace said of her sister in later years, “William had a *gift* for bringing out the best in other people, and I can name five or six people who owe her more than they can repay.” Five of the original members followed professional careers in writing. Vine Colby McCasland pursued a career as a writer with articles appearing in *The Mirror*, *Theater Magazine*, other journals, and as a writer of short stories. Edna Wahlert McCourt wrote short stories and poetry for several poetry and literary magazines. Cecilia Harris worked as a newspaper reporter in Lincoln, Nebraska, later moved to New York to work for a charity organization before settling in Wisconsin and working as a freelance writer. Petronelle Sombart pursued a theater career in New York, later studying in Milan, before returning to work for *Poet Lore* magazine translating Italian drama and verse. Sara Teasdale was the most commercially successful, becoming one of the most widely read American poets, prior to her death in 1933.¹⁰⁹

Modeled after club yearbooks and inspired by the Arts and Crafts movement, the group produced a series of handmade monthly magazine from November 1904 to October 1907. The group combined their skill to create a single handbound issue that was circulated among family and friends with a blank booklet for readers to comment. A total of thirty-six issues of the magazine, *The Potter’s Wheel* were produced during the years the group were active. Beverly Bishop suggested that the Parrish sisters experience with the circulating monthly portfolio with peer review of the Salon Club may have served as inspiration for *The Potter’s Wheel*.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Jolliffe, “The Magazine as Mentor,” 53-55, 61-63; Carpenter, *Sara Teasdale*, 106; News Clipping, “Fair Daughter of St. Louis Preparing for Stage in New York,” n.p., in Parrish Sisters’ Scrapbook, Missouri Historical Society; William Drake, *Sara Teasdale Woman & Poet*, (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1989), vii.

¹¹⁰ Jolliffe, “The Magazine as Mentor,” 56-57; Bishop, “The Potter’s Wheel,” 16-17.

The Potter's Wheel featured poems, photography, and illustrations by the members. Will served as the editor, leader and oversaw the production of the monthly magazine, mentoring and coaching the others. Williamina attended Washington University's School of Fine Arts, from 1905 to 1907. She enrolled in design classes, winning several awards, and was asked by school director Halsey C. Ives to be the photographer for the school's 1906-1907 Prospectus. The design courses focused on book cover design, drawing for illustration, stained glass design, designing posters for advertising, and decorative composition and embroidery—all skills used in creating issues of *The Potter's Wheel*.¹¹¹

Will was a dominate figure requiring all seven other members to contribute at least one piece of original artwork for each issue. If they were falling behind on deadlines Will would, “go camp out at their homes and . . .make their lives miserable.” Will also offered practical suggestions for the success of members, including recommending the more marketable name for the then fledging writer Sadie Teasdale, the member of the Potters to become most commercially successful.¹¹²

It is likely that Williamina recognized Sara's creative potential and was drawn to her with a desire to mentor her. Sara Teasdale and Williamina Parrish met during the summer of 1903 through mutual friend Caroline Risque, for model of the Parrish sisters, writer, illustrator, but who was most well known as a sculptor. Will was five years older than Sara. Under Will's mentorship Sara produced her first publishable work. In less than two years, the handmade magazine circulated for “mutual help, criticism and accomplishment” gained local attention. On

¹¹¹ Bishop, “The Potter's Wheel,”3,34-35. Jolliffe, “The Magazine as Mentor,” 53.

¹¹² Frances S. Porcher, “The Potter's and the Potter's Wheel.” *The Mirror* (April 5,1906):5, in Lee Jolliffe, “The Magazine as Mentor: A Turn -of-the Century Handwritten Magazine by St. Louis Woman Artists.” *American Periodicals, 1997, Vol.7 (1997):* 61, <https://www.jstore.org/stable/20771102>; Jolliffe, “The Magazine as Mentor,”61.

April 5, 1906 an article titled, “The Potters and the Potter’s Wheel,” was published in *Reedy’s Mirror*, providing visibility and introducing the city to the creative work and talents of group members. While reviewing copies of the *Potter’s Wheel*, Mr. Reedy at the *Mirror* selected a prose sketch of Teasdale’s for publication,¹¹³ purchased the selection, and purchased several photographs by the Parrish sisters. Teasdale’s first work to be published, “The Crystal Cup,” first appeared in the March 1906 issue of the *Potter’s Wheel* and was published in the *Mirror* on May 17, 1906. Sara gathered her writings and submitted some of them to Reedy at the *Mirror*. Her first poem to be accepted by the *Mirror* “The Little Love” appeared in the November 22, 1906 issue.¹¹⁴

Teasdale continued to produce monthly content for the *Potter’s Wheel* and submit poems to literary magazines as she worked towards publication of her book. The poem “Guenevere” appeared in the April 1907 issue of the *Potter’s Wheel* and was published in the *Mirror* on May 30, 1907, later to be widely reprinted in magazines and newspapers. In 1907, Teasdale submitted a collection of twenty-nine poems for publication, including works inspired by actress Elenora Duse, to Poet Lore Company of Boston who agreed to a printing of the book at her expense. Teasdale’s parents paid \$290¹¹⁵ for the publication of one thousand copies. Will worked with Sara in preparing her first book for publication, including poem selection and editing words and lines in the poems. In September 1907, Teasdale’s first self-published book of poetry, *Sonnets to Duse and Other Poems*, was released. Sara sent the first copy of her book to Will with the

¹¹³ Drake, *Sara Teasdale Woman & Poet*, 31.

¹¹⁴ Drake, *Sara Teasdale Woman & Poet*, 16,31-33; Jolliffe, “The Magazine as Mentor,” 53,62; Carpenter, *Sara Teasdale*, 85-86,89.

¹¹⁵ As a point of reference, the Model T Released the following year in 1908 was priced at \$825, equivalent to about \$18,000 today. Based on this comparison - the cost would be similar to \$6,300- See ‘This Day in History October 01 1908 Ford Motor Company unveils the Model T,’ History.com, accessed November 30, 2020. <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/ford-motor-company-unveils-the-model-t>

inscription, “To William -without whom as all dedications say but this one *truly*-this book would never have been written-from her Sara.” When the Potters disbanded in November 1907, Teasdale was twenty-three years old and building a reputation as a poet.¹¹⁶

Will’s overbearing nature created conflict between her and Sara although they remained lifelong friends. Bishop notes that Williamina, “had especially intense relationships with other women,” including fellow Potter Caroline Risqué. When in 1909 Risqué got engaged to a man she met on a trip, Parrish reacted with intense jealousy. Williamina wrote to the young man and included personal correspondence between her and Risqué to dissuade the suitor. Fellow Potter, Vine Colby McCasland described Will as devoted to guiding Caroline’s talents. Will would, scold her and “be furious with her for ‘her own good’”. Carolyn became “very resistive indeed under this constant tutelage,” as Will shut her off from other friendships. By 1916, tensions between Williamina and Carolyn had dissipated as they held a joint exhibition at the Noonan-Kocian Gallery in St. Louis.¹¹⁷

Will remained active in aiding Sara’s literary career until at least her marriage eight years later in 1914 and assisted in handling correspondence with publishers while Sara was ill in 1917. Although Will and Sara remained friends for nearly thirty years and Sara was known to confide in Will, only a few correspondences remain in archives.¹¹⁸ Will destroyed “all the letters from Sara, except a few innocuous ones.” In a 1918 letter, Teasdale thanked Will for her

¹¹⁶ Drake, *Sara Teasdale Woman & Poet*, 35-38; Carpenter, *Sara Teasdale*, 99.

¹¹⁷ Bishop, “The Potter’s Wheel,” 61, 66-69; Vine McCasland, “The Art of Misses Parrish and Risqué” *Reedy’s Mirror*, April 28, 1916, 295; Vine Colby McCasland to Margaret Carpenter June 10, 1954, Margaret Carpenter Papers, University of Virginia, Charlottesville.

¹¹⁸ Other surviving correspondence were destroyed by Will’s niece. Vine Colby McCasland mentions that Williamina’s niece Betty McCormick, burned eight bags of Williamina Parrish’s letters and mementoes. See Vine Colby McCasland to Margaret Carpenter August 17, 1966, Margaret Carpenter Papers, University of Virginia Charlottesville. Betty disposed of all contents of the house after her parent’s death in 1955. Betty McCormick to Margaret Carpenter 5 August 1955, Margaret Carpenter Papers, University of Virginia, Charlottesville.

assistance in her early edits. “Dear Willie...I was looking over some of my earliest poems the other day and God forgive me for their being so poor!” Teasdale continued, “Your marks of correction were in all cases an improvement.”¹¹⁹

Teasdale’s career blossomed in her years after the Potters. She was invited to join the Poetry Society of America in 1910, an organization of professional poets with invitation only membership. A section of poems called “Songs Out of Sorrow” from Teasdale’s *Love Songs* shared the National Art Club Prize of the Poetry Society of America in 1917. *Love Songs* was awarded the nation’s top prize in 1918 for the best book in poetry. The prize awarded by Columbia University, was a forerunner of the Pulitzer Prize for poetry. Prior to her death in 1933, she was one of the most widely read American poets.¹²⁰

After the Potters

The Parrish sisters provided photographic illustrations for a book of poetry by H. E. Harman, titled *In Love’s Domain and Call of the Woods*, published in 1909. Henry Elliot Harman founded several trade journals and was an author of “Southern prose and verse” with a focus on “themes of nature.” The Parrish sisters are not credited for their photographs in the 1909 edition. In fact, no credit is given for the source of illustrations in the book. The Parrish Sisters’ scrapbook contains a clipping of the title page, with “Illustrations by W and G Parrish” in pencil. It is uncertain how many of the illustrations appearing in the book were by the Parrish sisters, but at least five of the most elaborate, of which the sisters must have been particularly

¹¹⁹ Drake, *Sara Teasdale Woman & Poet*, 33-38; Carpenter, *Sara Teasdale*, 234; Vine Colby McCasland to Edna Wahlert, 27 October 1945, Sara Teasdale Papers, Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis; Sara Teasdale to Williamina Parrish 13 April 1918, Sara Teasdale Papers, Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis.

¹²⁰ Drake, *Sara Teasdale Woman & Poet*, 64, vii; Carpenter, *Sara Teasdale*, 240.

proud, appear in the scrapbook with the associated poem. The scrapbook also contains a note card from H.E. Hartman bears the message, “For Misses W and G Parrish whose artistic pictures helped me so much in making a beautiful book.” Williamina was likely proud of the accomplishment of illustrating a book as the pages were included in the scrapbook representing the best work she and her sister produced. From the illustration credit added in pencil on the title page in the scrapbook, it is also likely that Williamina was disappointed that she and Grace were not credited for their contributions in print and only sent a thank you note.¹²¹

The following year, the Parrish sisters traveled to New York to study for two years, returning to St. Louis in the Spring of 1911. Williamina and Grace studied in the studio of Gertrude Käsebier, one of the founding members of the Photo-Secession School. Käsebier began as a pictorial photographer and is credited by art historian William Innes Homer as elevating commercial portrait photography to an art form, influencing both professional and pictorial photographers. Käsebier was a member chosen for the council by Stieglitz when the Photo-Secession was founded in 1902. Stieglitz also included a sizable group of Käsebier’s prints at the American Pictorial Photography exhibit at the National Art Club in March of that year. Käsebier resigned from the Photo-Session in 1912, the first well known photographer to do so, after Stieglitz and his allies criticized her artistic development in his journal *Camera Work*. Käsebier went on to aid in founding the Pictorial Photographers of America in 1916 and serve as its

¹²¹ Images from *In Love’s Domain and Call of the Woods*, n.p. in Parrish Sisters’ Scrapbook, Missouri Historical Society; H.E. Harman, *In Love’s Domain and Call of the Woods* (Charlotte, North Carolina: Stone& Barringer Company, 1909), vi-vii, https://books.google.com/books/about/In_love_s_domain.html?id=VWs6AQAAIAAJ; “Henry Elliot Harman-Obituary,” Find A Grave.com, accessed July 5,2021, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/17962640/henry-elliott-harman>; H.E. Harman to Misses W and G Parrish, 16 February 1911, n.p., in Parrish Sisters’ Scrapbook Missouri Historical Society.

honorary vice-president. Käsebier continued operating her photo studio with her daughter until 1927, occasionally appearing as a guest lecturer ¹²²

Although an article specifies the Parrish sisters studied under both Stieglitz and Käsebier, the Parrish sisters are known to have worked directly with Käsebier. The Parrish sisters knew of Stieglitz and may have asked for advice but are not known to have worked with him directly. An article in the *Censor* alleged that Käsebier allowed them “free run of her studio while she was out of town.” An article about Käsebier in a 1910 issue of *Bulletin of Photography* is accompanied by a photograph taken of her by the Parrish sisters. The Museum of Modern Art biography of Käsebier lists Williamina and Grace Parrish among the “photographers who worked or apprenticed in Käsebier’s studio.” The Parrish sisters produced business cards to announce their return from New York, specifying they had studied two years with Käsebier. ¹²³

The Parrish sisters likely sought additional skills and prestige by studying in New York to solidify their status. Throughout their career as photographers, the Parrish sisters operated in a space between amateur artists and professional commercial photographers. Gustav Kobbe, a widely-known author, founder of the *Lotus* magazine and art and music critic for the *New York Herald* placed the Parrish sisters among professional photographers. In an article in the *New York Herald* from October 2, 1910, Kobbe list the “the Parrish sisters, of St. Louis,” among, “women photographers who are known in photo-art circles both here and abroad.” Kobbe continues, “Indeed, could all the women who are doing fine work as professional photographers,

¹²² News clipping, “Two St. Louis Sisters.” n.p., in, Parrish Sisters’ Scrapbook, Missouri Historical Society; Homer, *Alfred Stieglitz and the Photo-Seession*, 67-69, 154.

¹²³ *Censor*, January 1912, in Beverley D. Bishop, “The Potter’s Wheel: An Early Twentieth Century Support Network of Women Artist and Writers” (Master’s thesis, University of Missouri, St. Louis, 1984), 91; News clipping, “Gertrude Käsebier, Maker of Photographs,” *Bulletin of Photography* June 10, 1910, n.p. in Parrish Sisters’ Scrapbook, Missouri Historical Society; “Art and Artists, Gertrude Käsebier American, 1852-1934,” Museum of Modern Art Website, accessed June 6, 2021, <https://www.moma.org/artists/3008>; Parrish Sisters’, Business Card, n.p. in Parrish Sisters’ Scrapbook, Missouri State Historical Society.

be mentioned the list would be a long one.” Later in the article Kobbe then praised a list of talented amateurs concluding that “from their ranks most of the professional women photographers have graduated.” In the same article, Kobbe described Käsebier as, “...the most prominent woman photographer in the world to-day.”¹²⁴

In 1910, the Parrish sisters were studying with the most “prominent” female photographer in the world and had risen to a level to be placed among professionals. The following year, three of the Parrish sisters’ prints were accepted by the International Exhibition held at the Albright Art Gallery in Buffalo, New York. In a review of the exhibition in Buffalo, Alfred Stieglitz’s, *Camera Work* described the Parrish sisters’ print *The Haunted Room* as, “one of the most striking things in the exhibition.” Followed by the success in Buffalo, the Parrish sisters returned to St. Louis, to two exhibitions featuring their work. Five prints were exhibited at the American Art Salon at the “Art Museum in Forrest Park,” including *Haunted Room* which was praised at the Buffalo exhibition. In addition, the sisters exhibited prints at, “No. 3612 Washington boulevard from May 15th to 30th, sponsored by the Society of Applied Arts.”¹²⁵ Williamina and Grace had increased their skill and gained techniques through study in New York. It is also likely that the art community in St. Louis was excited for the return of their “hometown heroines” who

¹²⁴ “Gustav Kobbe,” Find A Grave.com, accessed July 7, 2021, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/101268798/gustave-kobbe>; Chattanooga Daily Times, “Gustav Kobbe Killed by Blow from Seaplane, Noted Author in Canoe, Struck by Passing Machine,” *Chattanooga Daily Times* (Chattanooga, TN) July 28, 1918, Newspapers.com; Gustav Kobbe, “Untitled Article,” *New York Herald*, October 2, 1910, n.p. in Parrish Sisters’ Scrapbook, Missouri Historical Society.

¹²⁵ Kobbe, “Untitled Article,”; Alfred Stieglitz, “The Exhibition at the Albright Gallery-Some, Facts, Figures, and Notes,” *Camera Work – A Photographic Quarterly Numbers 33-36, 1911* (Nendeln: Liechtenstein, Kraus Reprint, 1969), 61-62, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uva.x002129490&view=1up&seq=68&skin=2021>; Joseph T. Keiley, “The Buffalo Exhibition,” in *Camera Work – A Photographic Quarterly Numbers 33-36, 1911* (Nendeln: Liechtenstein, Kraus Reprint, 1969), 23, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uva.x002129490&view=1up&seq=34&skin=2021>; News clipping, “Two St. Louis Sisters.” n.p. in Parrish Sisters’ Scrapbook, Missouri Historical Society.

had returned from studying in New York, leading to an offer to an exhibition at the museum in Forrest Park.

Haunted Room was to be reproduced at a later date in Stieglitz's *Camera Work* magazine, but the Parrish sisters do not appear in the pictorial guide chronicling illustrations and plates from the magazine during the years of publication from 1903 to 1917. Tensions building between Stieglitz and the Parrish sisters' mentor may have been a contributing factor-or this could be part of a larger pattern of delaying behavior that artists including Anne Brigman experienced when dealing with Stieglitz. In the same article that had reviewed *Haunted Room* favorably, Joseph T. Keiley an art critic and ally of Stieglitz, had harshly criticized Käsebier's work. Keiley described Käsebier's exhibition pieces as showing, "artistic irresponsibility and indifference to technique; its curious impulsiveness...that finer, bigger self that cannot always find voice and resents any seeming lack of appreciation on the part of others." The following year Käsebier resigned from the Photo-Secession, later aiding in forming the Pictorial Photographers of America.¹²⁶ Although Stieglitz viewed the work of the Parrish sisters' favorably at the time, Williamina later faced criticism from Stieglitz, that may have contributed to the slowing and eventual halting of her career as a photographer.

In the years after studying in New York, Williamina's career as a photographer continued to prosper. Her confidence had grown over the last ten years as an artist by evidence of an article in *Photo Era* during the summer of 1912. She argued that artist could be satisfied with their work and that photography was a legitimate medium for art. A "great soul" she argued did not fall prey

¹²⁶ News clipping, "Two St. Louis Sisters." n.p. in, Parrish Sisters' Scrapbook, Missouri Historical Society; Alfred Stieglitz, Marianne Fulton Margolis, ed., *Camera Work: A Pictorial Guide with Reproductions of All 559 Illustrations and Plates, Fully Indexed*. (New York: Dover Publications Inc. 1978),176, <https://archive.org/details/cameraworkpictor00stierich/page/n5/mode/2up>; Pyne, *Photographer of Enchantment*, 133-138; Keiley, "The Buffalo Exhibition," 27; Homer, *Alfred Stieglitz and the Photo-Secession*,67-69.

to a “self-deprecatory attitude,” and would not, “attempt what is beyond him technically.” “To create a great work of art,” she continued, “it is necessary to be both a great soul and a great artisan, for if either is missing a great work of art will not materialize. Perfect technique with no soul is devoid of merit as a soul-thought crudely expressed.” For those who argued against art as a medium such as Rodin she argued that those who, “created photographic art” need to study the same elements as artists, composition, perspective light and shade.¹²⁷

Williamina and Grace practiced photography in St. Louis before returning to New York in the summer of 1912. In the fall of 1912, the sisters left for Europe beginning their travels of the continent in Paris. By the outbreak of the war in August 1914, Williamina was in Milan and Grace was in London, where she remained until at least 1916, returning to St. Louis from Europe in 1917. Williamina is reported to have returned to St. Louis in November 1914, remaining in the area for three years. However, a clipping from a family scrapbook in a private collection, referenced by Beverly Bishop places Williamina in Italy in October 1915 as a private governess to the family of Nina Ronchi in Milan. Williamina and Grace became acquainted with the Ronchi family while studying in Italy and had stayed in their home. Both the father and son were painters. Williamina does not specify the impacts of the war on the Ronchi family but does mention that Nino served in the war, and he was affected negatively by his experiences. During the 1920s Williamina sought to aid Nina’s older brother Nino, in launching a career as an artist in the United States. After returning to the United States, the Parrish sisters worked with the Red Cross in St. Louis and traveled back to Europe to work with the Red Cross in France and Italy from 1919 to 1920.¹²⁸

¹²⁷ Parrish, “Arms and the Man,” 251-252.

¹²⁸ *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, “Society,” *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, October 7, 1912, Newspapers.com; *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, “Many St. Louisans Now Abroad Send Word of Safety,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* August 6, 1914,

During the years they spent in Europe, Williamina and Grace began to work more independently of each other, allowing both to develop their own styles. As an artist using photography as a medium, one of Williamina's most successful years was 1914, when she produced two prize-winning photographs.¹²⁹ At the tenth annual Wanamaker Exhibition in March 1915, Williamina's photograph *The Faun* won second place and a fifty-dollar prize. The annual photographic contest, hosted by John Wanamaker in Philadelphia, attracted some of the best pictorial photographers and was chosen out of over eleven hundred submissions. The following year in 1916, over fourteen hundred photographs had been submitted, the criteria for submission, and prize winning was stricter than in previous years- with judges rejecting "imitation paintings and manipulated prints." Williamina's photograph, *Bacio Della Luna* won third place, a twenty-five-dollar prize, and her entry *Siegfried* was recognized with a five-dollar prize.¹³⁰

Williamina sought to take her career as an artist a step further by reaching out to Alfred Stieglitz to exhibit her work in New York. In March 1917 she wrote to Stieglitz, who had been a judge at the 1916 Wanamaker show, concerning locations to exhibit her work, including possibly at his Little Gallery. Stieglitz had been a major organizer of The International Exhibition of Pictorial Photography in Buffalo, New York at the Albright Art Gallery in November 1910.

Newspapers.com; *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, "Woman Writes of Refugees' Distress," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, August 21, 1914, Newspapers.com; *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, "Society," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, January 26, 1916, Newspapers.com; *The Censor*, November 1917, n.p., in Parrish Sisters' Scrapbook, Missouri Historical Society; *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, "In the Studio Gallery," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* March 9, 1924, Newspapers.com; Williamina Parrish to Ruth St. Dennis 11 July 1925, Ruth St. Denis Papers, New York Public Library; Bishop; "The Potter's Wheel," 81-82.

¹²⁹ Items titled as "Nude man setting beside a stream" and "Nude man setting on a rock" in the Grace and Williamina Parrish Photograph Collection, St. Louis Public Library Digital Collections. Both listed as produced in 1914, were Exhibited as *The Faun* and *Bacio Della Luna*. See collection at "Grace and Williamina Parrish Photograph Collection," The St. Louis Public Library Digital Collections, <https://cdm17210.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p17210coll2>.

¹³⁰ *Camera Craft* "The Wanamaker Exhibition" *Camera Craft*, vol. 22, no. 5 (May 1915), 196-197 <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.fl2h2f&view=1up&seq=231&q1=Parrish> ; *Camera Craft* "Club News and Notes, The Eleventh Annual Wanamaker Exhibition," *Camera Craft* vol. 23 no.4 (April 1916), 164-165, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.fl2h2e&view=1up&seq=181&q1=parrish> ; John Wannamaker to Miss Parrish, 22 March 1916, n.p., in Parrish Sisters' Scrapbook, Missouri Historical Society.

However, Stieglitz interest had shifted away from photography, only hosting three photography shows at his gallery from 1910 onward. Stieglitz dedicated shows in 1910 and during the winter of 1911-1912 to exhibition of early color photography, with the last one-man show being of his own work in 1913. The same year, Stieglitz made his first statement, “condemning painterly photographs,” as his taste had moved away from pictorial images to “pure” or “strait” photography.¹³¹

Stieglitz complemented her work in the 1916 exhibition, noting that he remembered both Williamina and her sister, and observed her progress as a photographer. “Your new work is finer than your old. There is development.” However, Stieglitz concluded, “I feel your work, is good as it is, is primarily picture-making.” Stieglitz concluded that he knew of no place in New York where Williamina could display her work -including at the gallery he operated. To Stieglitz, picture-making, “is not adding to the idea of photography, nor the idea of expression...” Therefore, Williamina’s work was not a good fit for the Little Gallery.¹³²

In the following years, Williamina is mentioned less frequently in photography magazines. Several factors may have contributed to Williamina’s absence from photography magazines during the war years and those that followed. A shortage of supplies led to some photographers suspending their photographic efforts during the war years including F. Holland Day. Williamina and Grace were working with the Red Cross in France and Italy from 1919 to 1920. These locations, ravaged by war would have limited supplies and the concern of the sisters focused on providing humanitarian aid. Finally, the rejection of Williamina’s photographs by Stieglitz may have had a significant impact on her future career. Stieglitz had connections in art

¹³¹ Greenough, Hamilton ed., *Alfred Stieglitz Photographs & Writings*, 226-7, 200; Homer, *Alfred Stieglitz and the Photo-Secession*, 142-148.

¹³² Greenough, Hamilton ed., *Alfred Stieglitz Photographs & Writings*, 200.

circles, having the power to restrict careers of photographic artists as he did with Käsebier and Anne Brigman.¹³³

Williamina continued to exhibit her work in St. Louis through the 1920s including a joint exhibition with her sister in 1923, that was met with praise by local art critics. Mary Powell in the *St. Louis Star and Times*, described the work of the Parrish sisters as “artist-photographers” to “distinguish them from commercial or amateur photographers.” The Parrish sisters’ prints shown as part of a 1928 exhibition at the Artists’ Guild are described as, “photographs only in the sense that they were created with the help of a camera.” The “works of art” are described as “more closely akin to etching or woodblock printing ... because the process is largely mechanical.”¹³⁴

In 1924, Williamina and Grace each exhibited three prints of their solo photographic work at the Eighth International Salon of Photography, hosted by the Camera Pictorialists of Los Angeles. Williamina’s print entitled *Spring Profile* was selected and purchased as part of the permanent photography collection being established by the museum where the Salon was held. *Spring Profile* is part of the permanent photography collection at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Despite continued success in photography, Williamina began experimenting with other mediums of art and began exhibiting paintings during the 1920s. The St. Louis Artist Guild Ninth Annual Open Competitive Exhibition in the winter of 1921-1922 exhibit catalog lists entries for Williamina and Grace under paintings. Williamina continued to paint throughout

¹³³ Fanning, *Through and Uncommon Lens*, 187-188; Bishop, “The Potter’s Wheel” 81-82; Barbra Michaels, *Gertrude Käsebier*, 125; Pyne, *The Photographer of Enchantment*, 152.

¹³⁴ Mary Powell, “Notes about Artists and Art World,” *St. Louis Star and Times*, February 25, 1923, Newspapers.com; Emily Graff Hutchings, “Art and Artists,” *St. Louis Globe -Democrat*, March 18, 1928, Newspapers.com.

her lifetime. At the time of her death in 1941, several of her paintings were on display as part of an Exhibition at the Artist' Guild.¹³⁵

During Williamina's time in Italy leading up to World War I, a friendship blossomed between her and a young painter who became her model and muse. The February 1923 exhibition of photographs of Williamina and Grace Parrish at the Artists' Guild, included a series, described as having the appearance of etchings or lithographs titled "Variations on a Given Theme." The subject of the photograph, Nino, is described by Powell as, "an Italian artist, young and beautiful, though a bit irritating in his self-consciousness and effeminacy." Nino Ronchi, the Italian artist in the portrait series, arrived by ship to Boston in November 1923, with other noted Europeans onboard, on route to New York. Williamina and Grace had stayed in the home of the Ronchi family while studying in Italy, and later Williamina served as a governess to his younger sister, Nina. Both the father and son were painters. In 1924, Williamina "installed her young Italian friend" in the family home in St. Louis, causing tension. Williamina likely viewed the arrangement as reciprocating hospitality that had been shown to her and her sister Grace in Italy. Nino was a close friend visiting from abroad and Williamina sought to aid in cultivating his career as an artist.¹³⁶

The Artists' Guild in St. Louis hosted an exhibition of Ronchi's work in March 1924. *The Art News* describes his work as, "modernistic" and "notable for the clean, clear color employed

¹³⁵ "Camera Pictorialists of Los Angeles, Eighth International Salon of Photography Catalog (1924)," n.p. in, Parrish Sisters' Scrapbook, Missouri State Historical Society; John C. Stick, Camera Pictorialists of Los Angeles to Williamina Parrish 31 December 1924, n.p. in, Parrish Sisters' Scrapbook, Missouri State Historical Society; "Spring Profile," Los Angeles County Museum of Art Website; "Catalogue of the Ninth Annual Open Competitive Exhibition, St. Louis Artists' Guild, November 12th 1921 to January 17th 1922," n.p. in, Parrish Sisters' Scrapbook, Missouri State Historical Society; *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, "Williamina Parrish Dies."

¹³⁶ Powell, "Notes About Artists and Art World," *The St. Louis Star and Times*, February 25, 1923, Newspapers.com; *The Boston Globe*, "Opera Song Bird Arrives," *The Boston Globe*, November 2, 1923, Newspapers.com; *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, "In the Studio Gallery," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, March 9, 1924, Newspapers.com; Bishop, "The Potter's Wheel," 81-82.

and the evident academic knowledge back of the technique.” The exhibition included forty-nine paintings and thirty-nine drawings, including small landscapes, representational paintings and abstract pictures. The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* devoted an article describing eight of the paintings in detail, including *Adolescence*, which was purchased by Ted Shawn, of the Denishawn Dance Company, who visited the exhibit while in St. Louis. The admiration must have been mutual, as the April issue of *Art News* reported Nino Ronchi’s intent to travel to New York to work with Ted Shawn to develop, “some ideas of musical interpretation by means of movement and color.” In June, Ronchi exhibited his work at the Denishawn Studio in New York. During the fall the collection was to travel on to Boston. Williamina likely aided in making the introduction between Ted Shawn and Ronchi hoping that it would give Ronchi the opportunity to establish himself as an artist in the United States. Williamina was acquainted with Ted Shawn’s wife Ruth St. Dennis and photographed her in 1922.¹³⁷

Although New York offered promise, Nino found himself staying in a small room above a practice room, lonely and disillusioned. After traveling to New York to work with Ted Shawn, Ronchi felt overworked and ignored. “Everything here has to be done by me...It’s been three months that I do not see him except five minutes, and this too every week.” Nino also spoke limited English and endured, “snickers because I do not speak correctly.” By this time Nino and Will’s relationship had also become strained. Although the situation was different than he expected, Nino sought to remain in New York. “I will resist making an end of it... I don’t want your sacrifice to go for nothing.” Nino had begun to feel uncomfortable with a, “sense of obligation” toward Will. “You aid me, and so greatly, and I thank you. But I would wish, when I

¹³⁷ *The Art News*, “St. Louis.”; *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, “In the Studio Gallery.” March 9, 1924; Hutchings, “Art and Artists,” May 24, 1924; Image “Ruth St. Dennis -dancer, Williamina Parrish, 1922,” Grace and Williamina Parrish Photograph Collection, St. Louis Public Library Digital Collections, <https://cdm17210.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p17210coll2>.

spend your money to feel you more close.” “Will, I beg you not to be so shut away,” Nino pleaded. Despite the hardships, Nino made connections and had been invited for three days stay at Long Beach at the “gracious villa,” of “Whiteman of the Jazz Orchestra.”¹³⁸

In October of that year Williamina quit funding Ronchi, requiring him to stand “literally and brutally on his own two feet.” During the winter of 1924, decorative panels by Nino Ronchi were used in, *The Vison of the Aissoua-An Algerian Dance Drama* created and produced by Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn. Ronchi went on to create a painting *The Soul of America*, an interpretation of “the peculiar irregularities of syncopation” inspired by the jazz music of Whiteman. Ronchi continued to create and exhibit new works of art in the United States until at least 1933. An exhibition held at the Delphic Studios described Ronchi’s style as, “leaning toward the abstract.” The paintings depicting the city skyline had been, “done abroad from memory.”¹³⁹

Correspondence shed some light on the circumstances surrounding the tensions between Williamina and Nino. Nino served as a muse for Williamina, providing her with inspiration and new perspectives, while Williamina assumed a nurturing role toward Nino, seeking to guide his professional success, aiding him in making connections, and at times offering financial support. The friendship also contained a romantic component- at least at one time. Vine (Colby)

¹³⁸ Nino Ronchi to Williamina Parrish 15 August 1924, Sara Teasdale Collection, University of Virginia, Charlottesville. Copy from University of Virginia, Charlottesville Library Identified as Accession No 8170-d, Box 1, ND “Lamento Doloroso”. Foreword specifies letter was translated from Italian to English. Although no translator is named, the translation was most likely performed by Vine Colby McCasland. Guide to Sara Teasdale Collection lists a different document description for this accession number.

¹³⁹ Williamina Parrish to Ruth St. Denis 11 July, 1925, Ruth St. Denis Papers, New York Public Library; *The San Bernardino County Sun*, “Spinnet Program Will Feature Ted Shawn and Ruth St. Denis,” *The San Bernardino County Sun (San Bernardino, CA)*, December 8, 1924, Newspapers.com; *Image*, “Help Singers Sing; Optic-Wonder Again; Princess for Movies?” *Star-Phoenix (Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada)* February 6, 1925, Newspapers.com; Thomas S. Linn, “Visiting the New Exhibitions about Town,” *New York Times*, January 8, 1933, ProQuest historical newspapers.

McCasland, a member of the Potters and a lifelong friend of Williamina said of Williamina and Nino's friendship, "From Nino she learned a great deal about the relations of men and women, and the nature of love, which had previously been terra incognita to her." Vine concluded that Williamina's love for Nino was, "in essence maternal" and Nino sought unsuccessfully to teach Will to conform to, "his ideal of womanness and femininity." Williamina described her upbringing and way of life prior to meeting Nino as, "the life of a Puritan." Williamina did not blame Nino, "for what I am ...except the blame of giving me an invaluable gift of knowledge and life." For this, Williamina felt, "a debt toward him," that she repaid through "devotion to his interest." In the years leading up to World War I while Williamina was in Italy, her photography style evolved, leading to the production of a series of prize-winning photographs of nude male figures in nature including *The Faun*, for which Ronchi served as the model.¹⁴⁰

Nino was thirteen years her junior. By 1925, Williamina became frustrated with Nino for his lack of focus and motivation. Williamina met Nino when he was twenty and, "full of infinite possibilities of beauty." Ronchi was "nearly 33" but acted, "like a kid of 18." Williamina feared it was too late for Nino and said of him, "The war, and his sister's influence, and his tendencies to laziness and self-indulgence sensuality have all taken a toll...scarcely a vestige of that young Nino remain." After Williamina cut him off financially in October 1924, Nino became involved with a woman- with at least some financial motivation. The two were cohabitating and married under pressure from the woman's employer, Ted Shawn. Nino sought to keep the marriage secret

¹⁴⁰ Vine Colby McCasland to Margaret Carpenter, 15 October 1956, Accession 10656, b.14, f. 1956, Margaret Haley Carpenter Papers, University of Virginia, Charlottesville; Williamina Parrish to Ruth St. Denis 11 July, 1925, Ruth St. Denis Papers, New York Public Library; John Wannamaker to Williamina Parrish 15 March 15, 1915, n.p., in. Parish Sisters' Scrapbook, Missouri Historical Society; McCasland, "The Art of Misses Parrish and Risqué."

and was “very angry that news of this marriage had reached St. Louis” as he did not want Williamina to know he had married.¹⁴¹

To Ronchi the marriage was only for appearances, “When one goes into Society, one must wear evening clothes,” Ronchi wrote. “When one lives with a woman, she must be one’s wife.” Nino clearly disagreed with American views on marriage but was doing what he felt was necessary in his circumstances. “Perhaps you are not aware that in America the most subtle art one can learn is hypocrisy.” Nino continued, “With this art I also have been forced to play, and I have made quite a little progress in it.” He sought to reassure Will that he could, “get a divorce[sic]. This is the way this society conducts itself!”¹⁴²

Williamina chastised St. Denis and her husband for pressuring Nino into a marriage. Williamina was unaware of the stipulations surrounding Nino’s lodging. Williamina wrote that if she had a more open discussion with Ted and Ruth beforehand, she would not have, “placed him in YOUR house, KNOWING HIM. I would have sent him home at once.” Williamina’s frustration was centered around his apparent lack of motivation, “I could have, because it was MY money which was doing all of it. He had no freedom in the matter... because he did not choose to free himself with honest LABOR that would bring him money, which IS freedom.”¹⁴³

In 1934 Williamina described her feelings toward Nino as “not a positive cold...just vacancy...he exists no longer for me... not even in memory.” Williamina had concluded that some of the tensions between her and Nino may have been linked to his private use of drugs.

¹⁴¹ Williamina Parrish to Ruth St. Denis 11 July, 1925, Ruth St. Denis Papers, New York Public Library; “From Letters of a Friend of Mine in New York,” 18 May 1925, Ruth St. Denis Letters Personal Correspondence, IV. Correspondence to Ruth St. Denis, 1925, f.333 Archives & Manuscripts, New York Public Library.

¹⁴² Nino Ronchi to Williamina Parrish, 8 May 1925 Ruth St. Denis Letters Personal Correspondence, IV. Correspondence to Ruth St. Denis, 1925, f.333, Archives & Manuscripts, New York Public Library.

¹⁴³ Williamina Parrish to Ruth St. Denis 11 July, 1925, Ruth St. Denis Papers, New York Public Library.

Nino had created a picture titled *Oppimane* based on “oppio” for opium combined with mane for “fiend” or addict and another titled *Cocainomane* or cocaine addict. “I am convinced they were taking drugs in the Portofino days...and these were done just after I left.” Upon reflection, Williamina was convinced that some of his other works including “*Incubo Rapace* and some others of its ilk were done under the influence of some drug.”¹⁴⁴

Although Williamina’s friendship with Ronchi faded, Italy became her second home. Williamina frequently traveled to Europe throughout her lifetime, often spending time in Italy. Williamina is known to have returned to Italy sometime in 1929 and remained there until 1933. Sara mentioned in a letter to Vine (Colby) McCasland that she had hoped to see Will while traveling abroad during the summer of 1930 with her friend Margaret Conklin, “but I gathered that she was romantically occupied.” At the time Will was living, “in a small place near Genoa.” Sara Teasdale continued to correspond with Will and commented to Grace Parrish in a 1932 letter that “Will wrote me a long frank letter. Her life seems happy.”¹⁴⁵

Williamina was freed from social constructs and expectations of unmarried upper-middle-class American women by living on her own in Italy. The distance also granted her privacy to live as she chose without oversight of the community where she had been born and raised and extended family networks. Beverly Bishop noted in an interview with descendants of the Parrish sisters that Will had quarreled with her father over issues of dress and that Williamina smoked. In a letter to Margaret Carpenter, Vine described the challenges of being a young

¹⁴⁴ Williamina Parrish to Vine Colby (McCasland), 8 January 1934, Accession No 8170-d, b.9, Sara Teasdale Collection, University of Virginia, Charlottesville.

¹⁴⁵ *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, “Social Activities,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, June 2, 1932, Newspapers.com; Vine Colby McCasland to Margaret Carpenter, 21 July 1954, Accession 10656, b.14, f. 1954-55, Margaret Carpenter Papers, University of Virginia, Charlottesville; Sara Teasdale to Grace Parrish, 12 February 1932, Missouri Historical Society; Sara Teasdale to Vine Colby McCasland, August 10, 1930, Sara Teasdale Collection, University of Virginia Charlottesville; Bishop, “The Potter’s Wheel”82.

woman in the early twentieth century. In the time, “before the development of psychology... natural instincts or emotional development of the body were looked upon as evil, dangerous and to be suppressed.” Vine concluded that none of them had been prepared to meet the challenges of adulthood. In a response to her upbringing, Williamina’s sister Grace remained celibate and, “afraid of, and averse to any emotional entanglement,” with men. Williamina had begun the same way but in Italy, “found a release from Puritanism.” This carried Will into, “strange experiences, and made her a far greater human being, more complete,” than she would have been had she, “remained in the strait-jacket of the ideas imposed on her by her mother and the two old aunts who lived in the Parrish house for many years.”¹⁴⁶

Upon her return to the United States, Williamina resumed her close friendship and correspondence with Vine (Colby) McCasland and began writing her autobiography. Will began sending chapters to Vine as they were completed, with another Potter and close friend, Petronelle reviewing original drafts. During earlier travels to Italy, Petronelle was closely involved with Will and had “more factual knowledge,” although it was doubtful that she “would make any of the knowledge public.” Petronelle had “crossed the ocean at least five or six times up to 1929” placing “The Italian years” referred to vaguely by Vine in letters as during Will’s earlier travels to Italy. Vine was “fascinated by the strangeness of her experiences,” during her years living abroad, and astonished by Will’s, “memory of past scenes and dialogs,” along with her objectivity of characters in the “story” including herself. Before the drafts were complete Will tired of the project and requested Vine to destroy the manuscripts and her letters. Will visited Europe in 1934 for a five-month vacation with her sister Grace and a niece but returned to St.

¹⁴⁶ Bishop, “The Potter’s Wheel,”82; Vine Colby to Margaret Carpenter, August 5,1954, b.14, f. 1954-1955, Margaret Carpenter Papers, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Va.

Louis in October of that year. Over the following years until her death in 1941, Williamina focused on painting and exhibiting her work in St. Louis.¹⁴⁷

Although Williamina explored painting as a creative medium, she did not attain the same level of success with painting that she did with photography. Williamina exhibited her paintings locally, whereas she was known nationally and internationally for her photography. Williamina defended her use of photography as an artistic medium in a 1912 article in *Photo Era*. “Art is the expression of the dream of the soul in terms of the senses.” She concluded, “Then why should an artist not express his soul-thought in monochrome, through a lens, just as a painter does through bits of hair tied to a stick?” In 1945, four years after her death, Williamina’s sister Grace and fellow Potter Edna (Wahlert) McCourt, requested Vine write a memoir of Will and Sara, but Vine was hesitant. The challenge was to create a work that would be “good enough for Will,” while satisfying to those close to her. One of the barriers to an honest story about Will’s life is that “Nine-tenths of her would have to be left out, because it is too intimate and involves too many persons now living.” Vine concluded, “Sara belonged to the world, but Will belonged to us, and certain others.”¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁷ Vine McCasland to Margaret Carpenter, 21 July 1954, Margaret Haley Carpenter Papers, University of Virginia, Charlottesville; Vine Colby to Edna Wahlert 27 October 1945 Sara Teasdale Papers Missouri Historical Society Library and Archives, St. Louis; Robert G. Majer to Margaret Carpenter, 3 August 1954, Accession no. 10565, b.15, f.1954,1960, Margaret Haley Carpenter Papers, University of Virginia, Charlottesville; *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, “Social Activities,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, September 21, 1934, Newspapers.com; *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, “Williamina Parrish Dies.”

¹⁴⁸ Parrish, “Arms and the Man,” 251-252; Vine Colby to Edna Wahlert 27 October 1945 Sara Teasdale Papers, Missouri Historical Society.

CHAPTER 4: WILLIAMINA PARRISH & TURN-OF-THE-CENTURY PHOTOGRAPHIC ART

At the turn of the twentieth-century, many voices sought to promote photography as art in the United States. However, personality conflicts limited the formation of one cohesive movement. Individuals and organizations often undermined each other with the goal of advancing themselves- hindering the advancement of art. Issues of debate ranged from administrative matters to the continuation of nineteenth-century debates involving monetization of photography and technique. Despite tensions and conflicts within photography at the beginning of the twentieth century, Williamina Parrish was able to navigate the photographic art world, remaining visible nationally as an artist for a decade and a half. Williamina was a founding member of the Salon Club of America—a group formed in opposition to the Photo-Secession—yet studied with one of the Photo-Secession’s founding members, Gertrude Käsebier.¹⁴⁹

Williamina and Grace were from another time—lady amateurs, known for soft focus images, inspired by themes from literature and mythology. Through analysis of photographs of Williamina Parrish and those she created in partnership with her sister Grace, three main periods can be defined: Finding Their Voice (1898-1908) Growth in Skill (1909-1913) and Finding Separate Paths (1914- Onward). The Parrish sisters found their voice through experimentation with photographic techniques and artistic mediums to find a defining style of their own. As they grew in skill they began to experiment with shadow and light in their photographs and explore

¹⁴⁹ Gillian Barrie Greenhill’s thesis, “The Outsiders: The Salon Club of America and the Popularization of Pictorial Photography” focuses on conflicts that led to the formation of the Salon Club of America, along with conflicts between Day and Stieglitz, Curtis Bell and Stieglitz. Barbra Michaels, *Gertrude Käsebier the Photographer and her Photographs*, describes conflicts with Stieglitz and Käsebier over style and monetization in *Ch VI Emotional Art and Artists*, 111-138. Greenhill includes a biography of “Williamina Parrish and Grace Parrish.”

new themes such as the nude form. In 1914 when the Parrish sisters began working separately, the sisters had a similar education and background. The themes of surviving work of the sisters differ, with Williamina further exploring the nude male form in nature before returning to more traditional landscapes and portraiture. From surviving work, Grace appears to have returned directly to more traditional themes.

Williamina and Grace Parrish were amateur photographers as defined by terminology of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. In the 1897 book *Occupations for Women*, Frances Willard defines the division between amateur and professional photographers based on three factors, the most prominent being monetization. By this definition, to be a professional photographer one had to be engaged in the occupation of commercial photography. Author Phyllis Rose in her book about the career of Alfred Stieglitz clarifies the definition. “The word amateur signified “artistic” as opposed to “commercial” in the nineteenth century and did not carry the connotation of dilettante it does today.” Societies for amateur photographers welcomed all levels of skill but not, “people who tried to make a living from photography.”¹⁵⁰

The Parrish sisters were a continuation of the nineteenth-century tradition of lady and gentleman amateurs that used photographic technology to create art but did not monetize their work. Many of their contemporaries including Gertrude Käsebier, Zaida Ben-Yusf, and later Imogen Cunningham created art using photography as a medium but worked as commercial photographers. Although Williamina and Grace did not have the means of two leading gentlemen amateur photographers of the early twentieth century, F. Holland Day and Alfred Stieglitz, the

¹⁵⁰ Phyllis Rose, “City of Ambition,” in *Alfred Stieglitz: Taking Pictures Making Pictures*, Yale University Press, 42, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvfc52zc.5>

sisters were of independent means due to income left by their father from his business.¹⁵¹ This allowed Williamina and Grace to create photographic art according to their own tastes, instead of having to tailor their photography to the consumer market.

The Parrish sisters began experimenting with photography in the last years of the nineteenth century when many creating artistic photographs implemented soft-focus techniques. The earliest surviving sample of Williamina Parrish's work and first prize-winning photograph from 1898, *Testing the Vintage*, depicts two young women in German inspired costumes sampling beer. The photograph relies heavily on costumes and props to convey a sense of location in a carefully staged controlled environment. In this image Williamina used sharp focus, unlike later images that are recognizable for their misty, soft-focus style, such as *Sleeping Girl* from 1903. This demonstrates that the Parrish sisters knew how to use sharp focus and choose to use soft-focus as a tool to express photographic art.¹⁵²

During the years Williamina and Grace worked together, including the years the sisters studied in New York, they often continued to employ the soft-focus technique in surviving samples of their work, including *The Closed Door* exhibited at the London Photographic Salon in 1910. However, they also began to experiment with sharper focus, and shadows to create dramatic effects as they did in a portrait of Käsebier they created while they were studying with

¹⁵¹ For background information on women artist in commercial photography see Barbra Michaels *Gertrude Käsebier The Photographer and her Photographs*, Gillian Barrie Greenhill's thesis, "The Outsiders: The Salon Club of America and the Popularization of Pictorial Photography, 133-135 for the biography of "Zaida Ben-Yusuf," Paul Martineau, *Imogen Cunningham A Retrospective*. For men of independent means see Patricia J. Fanning Through an *Uncommon Lens: The Life and Photography of F. Holland Day*, William Innes Homer, *Alfred Stieglitz and the Photo-Secession* and Barbra Michaels, *Gertrude Käsebier The Photographer and her Photographs*, Chapter V "The Photo-Secession Years." Williamina Parrish mentions not having to work in a letter to Ruth St. Dennis 11 July, 1925, Ruth St. Denis Papers, New York Public Library.

¹⁵² *Testing the Vintage*, n.p. in Parrish Sisters' Scrapbook, Missouri Historical Society; Hartman, "The Salon Club," 296- 302.

her. By the outbreak of World War I, Williamina and Grace embraced separate paths creating work independently of each other and employing a variety of photographic techniques they had learned. In some photographs such as the landscape photograph *Pare al Lago, Lago di Lecco, Italy*, Williamina employed a softer focus, relying on contrast between darkness and light to create an artistic effect. The same year Williamina created a series of studies of the nude male figure at Lake Como, Italy, using sharp focus and experimenting with use of shadow. During the 1920s Williamina shifted towards experimentation with painting. Williamina returned to the soft-focus style of photography later in her career, as in the 1924 photograph *Spring Profile* in the collection of the Los Angeles County Museum.¹⁵³

The return to the soft-focus style could be motivated by her work with watercolors and painting that Williamina began to explore and exhibit during the 1920s. However, no known paintings of Williamina Parrish are held in collections for comparison. Another possible motivation is that she may have moved towards sharp focus photography in an attempt to please tastemakers, seeking success in the art world. When she was unable to move forward in her career as a photographic artist she returned to her earlier style. Another explanation is that she continued to use both “sharp” and “soft” focus throughout her career, with only a limited body of her overall work surviving. The final explanation is most likely as she did not rely on income from photography to support herself and Williamina’s later works represent a compilation of her acquired techniques. In a 1946 letter from Grace Parrish to Sara Teasdale’s Biographer Margaret

¹⁵³ Image, “*The Closed Door*, From the London Salon of Photography,” *The Amateur Photographer* v52 1910, 388, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nyp.33433060408618&view=1up&seq=408&skin=>; *Bulletin of Photography* n.p., in Parrish Sisters’ Scrapbook, Missouri Historical Society; “*Pare al Lago, Lago di Lecco, Italy*, 1914 by Williamina Parrish,” Grace and Williamina Parrish Photography Collection, St. Louis Public Library Digital Collection; “*Spring Profile*,” Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

Carpenter, Grace wrote that they had thousands of negatives on glass, “and we destroyed almost all of them.”¹⁵⁴

During the early years of Williamina’s photographic career with her sister Grace (1898 - 1908) they found their creative voice, experimented with techniques, and began to gain notoriety for their work. In 1901 the Parrish sisters were praised by the local press as “two of the cleverest young amateurs.” Samples featured by the *St. Louis Dispatch* were typical for women practicing commercial photography. The Parrish sisters are described as, “equally happy” photographing “children, animals and interiors, and continuously experimenting for novel effects and ideas.” Photographs of babies and small children such as the portrait of Eloie Meyers and “Little Elizabeth Stockton” fell within the accepted and even expected role of women who practiced photography. Surviving examples of the Parrish sisters’ work particularly in the first decade, show they drew inspiration from Gertrude Käsebier in theme and topic, portraying women and children as their frequent subjects, at times with Biblically themed titles. An example is a photograph credited to Grace from 1903 titled, *A little child shall lead them: Donald Anderson*.¹⁵⁵ In the photograph, a young child is leading and being guided by a figure in a dressing gown behind him presumably a mother or nanny, taken with a soft focus. The details of the figure’s face less defined. The lines on the child’s garment are misty, whereas the figure in back appears crisper- implying movement—the camera capturing the child’s first few steps.

Although the sisters were always interested in photography as a creative medium, they may have considered possible commercial aspects early on. The article in the *St. Louis Dispatch*

¹⁵⁴ Grace Parrish to Margaret Carpenter 13 August 1946, Margaret Haley Carpenter Papers, University of Virginia, Charlottesville.

¹⁵⁵ Manthorne, *Women in the Dark*, 55-58; Grace and Williamina Parrish Photograph Collection, St. Louis Public Library Digital Collections.

praising their work announced, “Work done by the Misses Parrish, at Their Home Studio, that Equals Work Done by Professional Photographers of Many Years’ Experience.” This announced that although the sisters were “clever amateurs” they were willing to monetize their work. By 1903 Williamina clearly defined in an interview that their focus was to use photography as a medium to create art.¹⁵⁶

In the area of artistic photography, Williamina began to explore portraying themes in classical art and mythology and would continue to throughout her career. Williamina depicted her sister Grace in a series of photographs in white flowing robes with a variety of accessories as the Nine Muses. Greek Mythology was a common inspiration for photographic art of the period including in the work of photographer Anne Brigman. In the early years, Williamina also experimented with manipulating images to create artistic effects. For one early image Will drew lines to simulate a leaded glass window on a photograph taken of her sister and cut pieces of red paper to fit the lines, pasting them to the back of the negative. She then covered the centerpiece and made another exposure to create the plate for the finished image. Many of the images created prior to their education in New York were manipulated through use of brush strokes including *Babbie*, exhibited in 1903 portraying a character from the 1891 novel *The Little Minister* by J.M. Barrie.¹⁵⁷ In 1903 Williamina and Grace became founding members of the Salon Club of America, aiding them in exhibiting their work outside the St. Louis area and placing them on the national stage. The sisters came to be known for their soft- focused, romantic images, that were often creatively manipulated. They also used their photographs to illustrate the *Potter’s Wheel*, a series of handmade magazines crafted with several of their St. Louis based friends who were also

¹⁵⁶ *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, “Amateur Photography.”; *Western Camera Notes*, “Editorial,” 155-156.

¹⁵⁷ Carpenter, *Sara Teasdale*, 30; “The Little Minister novel by Barrie,” Britannica Online, accessed January 14, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Little-Minister>.

involved in the arts, and *In Love's Domain* and *Call of the Woods* by H.E. Harman published in 1909.¹⁵⁸ Using photography to create illustrations was a natural progression for the Parrish sisters as artists using photography as a medium, following photographic art predecessors such as Julia Margaret Cameron.

The illustrations created for H.E. Harman's book represent the Parrish sisters realizing the potential use of their photographs. But the Parrish sisters would need to gain skill and expand their network of contacts, requiring them to study outside St. Louis. The next stage of the Parrish sister's development (1909 - 1913) would be defined by a growth in skill gained through their studies in New York with Gertrude Käsebier. A review of the 1910 London Salon of Photography described the Parrish Sister's style as, "much more Käsebierian than their mistress." The two studies exhibited by the Misses Parrish are described as "pre-Raphaelite studies of curving soft-toned, softly outlined draperies." One of these "pre-Raphaelite" photographs exhibited at the London Salon of Photography titled *The Closed Door* was reprinted in *The Amateur Photographer*. The image depicts a young woman with dark pinned up hair in a light colored large plaid dress with a box neckline and full flowing sleeves. In the hand closest to the camera, she holds a shawl, in the one closest to the door, she holds a fan. A Japanese-style print featuring two ravens on a tree branch under a full moon hangs behind her on the door. The woman is slightly out of focus, with the sharpest area of focus being the panels of the door in front of the hand next to the door. Another print exhibited under the title *The Closed Door*, was exhibited at the Sixth American Salon and reprinted in the February 1910 issue of *American Photography*. The image depicts a woman with pinned up tresses, arm outstretched, and hand

¹⁵⁸ Pyne, *Photographer of Enchantment*, 61-66; *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, "Amateur Photography."; Hartman, "The Salon Club," 296; Bishop, "The Potter's Wheel," 16-17; Images from *In Love's Domain* and *Call of the Woods*, n.p. in Parrish Sisters' Scrapbook, Missouri Historical Society.

rested on a doorknob, draped in flowing fabric reminiscent of Williamina's early series of photographs of Grace as the Nine Muses. The face of the figure once again appears slightly out of focus, with clearer focus on the folds of fabric nearing the floor, the pattern on the carpet and the panels of the door. The two photographs appear to have been taken at the same location, with different costumes and with a different camera angle. Although this may not have been the second print exhibited at the 1910 London Salon of Photography, the photograph could be described as "pre-Raphaelite" inspired. The Parrish sisters were among eight Americans exhibiting that year including their mentor Käsebier who had been part of organizing the Salon and the celebrated return of F. Holland Day after a ten-year absence.¹⁵⁹

In 1909 Williamina and Grace relocated to New York to study with Gertrude Käsebier returning to St. Louis in the Spring of 1911. Williamina and Grace continued to work together creating prints drawing inspiration from mythology and perhaps the pre-Raphaelites while gaining greater technical skill. A portrait of Käsebier with one of her cameras by the Parrish sisters was featured in an article in the *Bulletin of Photography* accompanying an article about their mentor. The portrait is a departure from the signature soft-focused photographs with romantic themes. Käsebier is posed leaning on one of her cameras - with the camera as a main area of focus. The Parrish sisters experimented with shadow and light in the image capturing the reflection of windowpane silhouetted on the wall behind Käsebier's shoulder.¹⁶⁰

Studying photography in New York expanded the sister's technical knowledge and exposed them to new ideas that challenged them to attempt different themes and settings than in

¹⁵⁹ H. Snowden Ward F.P.P.S., "London Salon of Photography," *American Photography Vol. 4 1910*, 695,675, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=pst.000007691973&view=1up&seq=7&skin=2021>; "The Closed Door," *The Amateur Photographer (vol. 52 1910)*, 388.

¹⁶⁰ *Bulletin of Photography*, n.p. in Parrish Sisters' Scrapbook, Missouri Historical Society.

the past, including nude studies. These studies make up a small percentage of the surviving work of the Parrish sisters housed at the St. Louis Public Library, with the earliest dated images being from 1910. All five of these studies of young women from 1910 are signed by Grace Parrish. Williamina is thought to be the first of the sisters to experiment with figure studies. Seven images from a 1909 “mermaid” photoshoot of Vine Colby taken by Williamina Parrish are housed in a collection at the University of Virginia, Charlottesville. The Misses Parrish nude study *Pipes o Pan* was praised at the London Salon of Photography when it was exhibited in 1912. The work is described as having an excellent range of low tones and “the best picture of this type in an exhibition containing a large number of studies of the nude.” Imogen Cunningham exhibited at the salon for the first time in 1912, but the article does not specify which prints she exhibited or if her early nude studies were among those she exhibited.¹⁶¹ Due to stylistic difference it is unlikely they drew inspiration from each other. However, it is noteworthy that the Parrish sisters and Imogen Cunningham would have been aware of each other professionally, with the Parrish sisters as established artists and Cunningham as a newcomer.

By the outbreak of World War I two years later, the Parrish sisters were living in Europe separately from each other with Grace in Britain and Williamina in Italy. In the final stage of artistic development (1914 - Onward) Williamina and Grace parted ways—traveling, documenting, and creating art independently. Based on the digital photograph collection of the St. Louis Public Library and associated metadata, Grace explored the nude female form in

¹⁶¹ Grace and Williamina Parrish Photograph Collection, St. Louis Public Library Digital Collections; Photographs of Vine Colby, Accession 8170-d, b.9, f. ca.1905, Sara Teasdale Collection, Accession 8170-d, Special Collections Department University of Virginia, Charlottesville; E. O. Hoppé, “London Autumn Expositions” *American Amateur Photographer*, vol. VI no. 11 November 1912, 620, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=pst.000065805428&view=1up&seq=634&skin=2021&q1=parrish>.

photographic art during her years studying in New York, particularly in 1910. She then returned to previous themes she had explored and those more common among female photographers of her time—photographing women, children, and landscapes. The extraordinary *Last Call for Volunteers*, documented the pivotal historical event that she witnessed as men were called to arms in Trafalgar Square-London at the beginning of World War I.¹⁶²

While Grace was in London, Will had chosen the Italian countryside near Lake Como, in the north of the country near Milan, experimenting further with the nude figure, transgressing a boundary permitted only in artistic circles—exploration of the male nude form. The photographs taken in 1914 at Lake Como made Williamina visible to many prominent leaders in photography—representing a new direction and a peak in her career. The series are described as “strait photography” a break from earlier work, created in context of Newton’s soft-focus school. Will continued to follow themes of neo-classical art and drawing inspiration from popular culture of the time, citing a production of Debussy’s *Afternoon of a Faun*. After rejection of her work by East Coast taste makers, and the years of World War I, Williamina reached westward exhibiting her work in California. The print in the collection of the Los Angeles County Art Museum, purchased in 1924 showcases her earlier style of soft-focus romantic portraits.¹⁶³ This stage represents Williamina’s mature period as a photographic artist when she implemented her

¹⁶² *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, “Many St. Louisans Now Abroad Send Word of Safety,” August 6, 1914, Newspapers.com; *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, “Woman Writes of Refugees’ Distress,” August 21, 1914, Newspapers.com; Grace and Williamina Parrish Photograph Collection, St. Louis Public Library Digital Collections; L.A.L., “Miss Parrish’s Moods,” 280-281; McCasland, “The Art of Misses Parrish and Risqué,” 295; “*Spring Profile*.” Los Angeles County Museum of Art Website.

¹⁶³ L.A.L. “Miss Parrish’s Moods,” 280-281; McCasland, “The Art of Misses Parrish and Risqué,” 295; Greenough, Hamilton ed., *Alfred Stieglitz Photographs & Writings*, 227; *Spring Profile* n.p. in Parrish Sisters’ Scrapbook, Missouri Historical Society.

education and experience, while remaining constant to mythological and romantic themes appearing in her earlier work.

Women Photographers Exploring the Nude Figure

In her paper “Why are Female Artists Representing the Male Nude Figure Very Rare,” art scholar Alla Parsons, notes that women were long excluded from professional art training. Even by the late nineteenth- century women viewing the nude male figure for artistic purposes was taboo. Thomas Eakins, while a professor at the Philadelphia Academy of the Fine Arts, was reprimanded for including a nude male model in a co-educational painting class. Eakins resigned other than change his curriculum. Due to this decision, Eakins was fired from a position at the Drexel Institute and banned from the Philadelphia Sketch Club.¹⁶⁴

By the twentieth century new emerging styles placed less importance on the human form and anatomy making figure drawing, “old fashioned” with few female artists, “concentrating on the nude figure, especially the nude male figure.” Parsons speculates that even up to the late 2000s the nude male form remained particularly offensive to some as, “nude models are associated with prostitution and male nude models threaten the ideal of masculinity.” “Although there have been cases of protest against female nude figures and even against textbooks with art by Old Masters that included nudity,” Parsons notes that “most protests were against images that included male nudity.” Women continue to rarely portray male nudity in art; however, it was

¹⁶⁴ Parsons, “female artists representing the male nude figure.”

more common for female artist using photography as a medium to explore “the erotic male nude.”¹⁶⁵

Parsons cites art critic, Bram Dijkstra, concluding that female photographers had more freedom at the turn-of-the-twentieth century than women in the world of drawing and painting as photography was not fully established as an art form. When discussing the work of Anne Brigman, Dijkstra notes that “since photography was yet hardly recognized as a medium for significant artistic expression, she was less constrained than women painters of her time.” Anne Brigman began experimenting with art featuring the female nude form including self-portraits beginning in 1905. Kathleen Pyne notes that controversy still surrounded modernist art exhibitions portraying the female nude figure in the early twentieth century. Photography however was designed to capture nature, making the portrayal of a nude figure more acceptable in the medium of photography. Pictorialists such as Brigman and Steichen portrayed their nudes, “as allegories of the psyche.” In addition to the symbolism, the nude figures were portrayed as silhouettes—light figures against darkness, or dark figures against light—to “defer any erotic suggestiveness.”¹⁶⁶

Anne Brigman became famous for her silhouetted female figures against the backdrop of twisting trees in the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Born Anne Wardrope Nott into a missionary family on O’ahu, Hawai’i, she immigrated with her parents and seven siblings to California in 1885. The following year she married a sea captain and Danish immigrant, twenty-four years her senior, Martin Brigman. For the first three years she regularly traveled with her husband to China

¹⁶⁵ Parsons, “female artists representing the male nude figure.”

¹⁶⁶ Parsons “female artists representing the male nude figure.”; Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity, Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siecle Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 96-97; Pyne, *The Photographer of Enchantment*, 58-63, 129.

and through the Pacific, until Anne was injured in a fall aboard the ship requiring her left breast to be removed. By 1900, Anne settled in a middle-class neighborhood in Oakland and began experimenting with photography. Brigman was inspired by the work of Photo-secessionist Frank Eugene and local Pictorialist Adelaide Hanscom. Hanscom had gained notoriety, as an illustrator for an “orientalist project” for Edward Fitzgerald’s *Rubaiyat Omar Khayyam*, afterwards opening a photographic studio. Like many photographers of the time, Hanscom’s primary source of revenue that supported her studio was portraits of San Francisco’s city elite. Many of the local elite sought out Hanscom’s studio to be posed in exotic costumes. Instead of seeking her inspiration in the popular trend of Orientalism, Brigman sought the exotic in wild broken landscapes of the nearby mountain ranges. The Camera Club of California hosted its first group of men and women to hike and photograph Yosemite in 1902, with the Sierra Club beginning an annual outing the following year.¹⁶⁷

The women on these hikes were daughters of the middle-class elite associated with Berkley that often-fashioned shorter skirts, paired with denim and corduroy bloomers and wide brimmed hats for these photographic nature hikes. Brigman wore long tunics paired with knickerbockers and by the 1920s on her hikes adopted a unisex style of knee breeches that resembled riding pants, paired with knee high boots for her adventures. The trips would last days with opportunities for hiking out further from the base camp by day into the wilds for fishing and swimming. Brigman was less interested in mountain climbing as other women on the outings, and instead sought to find striking settings for her photographic vision. Brigman’s photographic

¹⁶⁷ Pyne, *Photographer of Enchantment*, 9,24, 59-61.

expeditions were solitary, or with one or two female friends to grant them privacy and freedom in nature.¹⁶⁸

Brigman created her first series of nymph portraits on her first hike in the Sierra Nevada in 1905. These Earth spirits from Greek mythology were lesser deities attached to natural settings, including groves, caves, and particularly bodies of water. Kathleen Pyne notes that Brigman's nymphs, "were as 'chaste' as possible," with their bodies, "often rendered as darkened silhouettes as if to shield their figures from an eroticized gaze." Brigman sought to conceal the identity of her models through photographic techniques, never admitting publicly that she had posed nude in some portraits and referred to her models only as friends. In the years preceding her death she did disclose that her sister Elizabeth had frequently posed as a model prior to 1908.¹⁶⁹

Brigman cites the destruction of the San Francisco earthquake for inspiring her twisted nude figures paired with gnarled dying trees for which she became renowned. The San Francisco earthquake of 1906 ruptured gas mains, setting off three days of explosions and fire destroying the city's residential sections of Nob Telegraph and Russian Hill, with the most substantial damage sustained by the low-income neighborhoods south of Market Street. Firestorms raged incinerating people and homes as temperatures in some areas reached two thousand degrees. Fatalities from the fires, explosions and building collapses are now estimated at three thousand. Brigman was living in Oakland where there was minor damage. However, the city's greatest challenge was the 150,000 displaced persons that arrived in Oakland—a town of only 100,000 over three days. Artists, painters, and photographers lost their galleries, equipment, and entire

¹⁶⁸ Pyne, *Photographer of Enchantment*, 59-61, 67.

¹⁶⁹ Pyne, *Photographer of Enchantment*, 65-67.

catalogs of work. The Camera Club headquarters was destroyed along with art galleries, and studios of photographers and painters who lost most of their paintings, negatives, and prints. Some left the Bay area after the earthquake including Adelaide Hanscom, who relocated to Seattle.¹⁷⁰

“By summer many of us felt we needed a change of scene after the long strain,” Brigman said of the first trek after the earthquake. Anne and a small group of friends traveled to the northern Sierra Nevadas, packing supplies with them on a mule. Brigman’s work from the summer of 1906 onward was similar in style to the work exhibited locally and praised the prior year—but distinctively darker. During the summer of 1906, Brigman created several signature images, including *Soul of a Blasted Pine*. Brigman’s nymphs shape-shifted “from a supremely beautiful human body to a decaying and grotesque form of a different species.” Brigman produced other photography, but she would come to be known for her mountain prints, as her mentor Alfred Stieglitz only promoted and exhibited her portraits of nudes in nature. In 1910 Brigman journeyed to study with Alfred Stieglitz who had promised her a solo show at the Little Galleries, but constantly withdrew the offer criticizing the quality of her printmaking. Stieglitz did eventually hang a few of Brigman’s photographs in the gallery in an intermission between exhibits in the spring of 1911.¹⁷¹

Stieglitz brought her into his inner circle, supporting her work at European exhibitions, but controlled “the public presentation of her work” exhibiting only her nudes in landscape. Stieglitz saw her as a replacement for Käsebier, who had devoted her career to soft-focus images featuring motherhood and children. Pyne notes that Stieglitz was attracted to the work of

¹⁷⁰ Pyne, *Photographer of Enchantment*, 47-57,45-48,49-51.

¹⁷¹ Pyne, *Photographer of Enchantment*, 70-72,151,123,138.

Brigman as a vehicle to support a shift in the Photo-Secession movement. A female photographer as Brigman, depicting “female nudes in the wild could speak of a world where humans were restored to an authentic condition of human sexuality.” Stieglitz and others in his circle had immersed themselves in the science of sexology by authors such as Edward Carpenter, Havelock Ellis, Sigmund Freud, and others to support the idea that “science supported a full sexual life as promoting health and happiness,” giving “Stieglitz and other intellectuals permission to act out a number of erotic practices publicly.”¹⁷² This likely would have made respectable women and more traditional men reluctant to pursue professional dealings or close associations with the group centered at Gallery 291. This further protected the homosocial space, and limited ideas outside those that Stieglitz and his followers advocated.

Respectable women of the time were not willing to be objectified, take part in lude discussions, or trade sexual favors for advancement in the arts, as demonstrated by Brigman’s letters to Stieglitz. Less assertive women may have also objected to behavior at 291 Gallery, breaking off contact with the circle without expressing their reasons openly. However, Brigman directly confronted Stieglitz regarding the situations she experienced at the gallery that made her uncomfortable. Respectable men may not have wanted to be associated with men engaged in licentious behavior as it could damage their social reputation. Many men at the time within photographic art had healthy relationships with women, including Clarence White, described as a devoted family man and F. Holland Day who was known for his close relationship with his mother and female friends.¹⁷³

¹⁷² Pyne, *Photographer of Enchantment*, 123-128.

¹⁷³ Pyne, *Photographer of Enchantment*, 146; Michaels, *Gertrude Käsebier*, 142-149; Fanning, *Through an Uncommon Lens*, xviii-xxii.

Pyne argues that Stieglitz understood Brigman's work to be photography related to the modernist school of art including Auguste Rodin, Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, and Paul Cézanne, "whose nudes were understood as picturing woman's sexuality as the site of liberation and paradise." Brigman saw her work in a different light. Prior to the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, it was suggested that her photograph "Dryad" represented, the fairylike figure peering through the boughs of a tree observing the "vanishing of the pines themselves" and commercialism's destruction of, "the great beauty of native forests." After the earthquake, Brigman describes her work as coming to symbolize "nature's hostility to human life," and the "simultaneous beauty and grotesqueness," in nature. Brigman and the local audience also drew connections to discussions surrounding evolution and the struggle among creatures, portraying "nature's upward movement in consciousness and spirit from lower species." The audiences in New York were not familiar with the geographical locations and their significance. The images were captured in remote sites in the Sierra Nevada Mountains that locals held a mystical connection to and had only recently been accessible to women. After Brigman's involvement in the suffragist movement, she came to relate the nudes to the economic and political struggle of women, instead of a portrayal of "the spirit life of the Sierra." However, Brigman always distanced her images from endorsing the "quest for sexual pleasure" or "free love" popular among New York modernists in the 1910s and 1920s.¹⁷⁴

By 1912, Brigman became more vocal and empowered after separating from her husband and involvement with the women's suffrage movement. Brigman wrote letters to Stieglitz explaining the ways that he had made her uncomfortable in their times working together. "You made me ashamed deep down when you talked of those photographs of the Pompeiian freezes

¹⁷⁴ Pyne, *Photographer of Enchantment*, 128, 73-76, 130-131, 62, 152.

Webber had. I'm pretty, clean, and unafraid, but it staggered me." Brigman went on to describe another episode at the 291 Gallery while she as the lone woman artist in the group and watched as the men in the group gathered to gawk at the female nude figures that were ever present on the walls of the gallery. She recommended that Stieglitz read Edward Carpenter's essay "Love as an Art" in *The Drama of Love and Death* to change his perspective about the female form and sexuality. In this tactful way, Brigman censured Stieglitz who had power over her career, by making him aware his behavior was objectionable- while opening a door for him to learn from his error and change his behavior. "When you read ... you will understand why I quivered and fought against those wonderful terrible French chalk things by De Zayas [sic]. They are wonderful conceptions of the hideous misuse of our divine powers and holy temples." Pyne notes that Brigman was the free new woman, hiking in the mountains, with a strong body. Brigman was a feminist politically but rejected the "free love" culture that many in New York including Stieglitz promoted.¹⁷⁵

By the war years, Stieglitz had shifted his attentions elsewhere but respected Brigman. Stieglitz frequently clashed with others in photography, using his connections to undermine the careers of those he conflicts with or who no longer advanced his agendas. Although he had tired of Brigman, he respected her originality, incorporating elements of her style in his later work. In a move uncharacteristic for Stieglitz, he assisted her in finding ways to publish and sell her photography during the war years. Stieglitz harshly criticized Brigman's technique, "The way you did them was rotten.... but they were a new note-they were worth-while." Stieglitz aided Brigman in publishing her photos through other avenues including *Vanity Fair*, but made it clear her time in photography had ended. He remained in contact with Brigman for a few years,

¹⁷⁵ Pyne, *Photographer of Enchantment*, 137-146,152.

continuing to show her work to others including his new muse and protégé, Georgia O’Keefe. Stieglitz admitted using Brigman’s photographs as inspiration for posing O’Keefe for a series of photos in 1919.¹⁷⁶

With her ties severed with New York, and diminishing venues for Pictorialist photography, Brigman shifted towards printmaking. Brigman attended design classes at the California School of Fine arts, now the San Francisco School of Fine Arts, from 1918 to 1920. Brigman served as a mentor and inspiration to West Coast photographers. Pyne suggests that Imogen Cunningham’s early nude portraits of her husband Roi on Mount Rainier were in part inspired by Brigman’s nudes. Brigman earned the nickname “Mother” from photographers of the f/64 group to which she supplied support and provided her studio as a meeting place. A selection of Brigman’s prints were included in a 1948 show featuring images from *Camera Work* by Edward Steichen, who had become the curator of the Photography Department at the Museum of Modern Art.¹⁷⁷

Brigman did explore the nude male form in her signature style of soft silhouetted nude figures in nature later in her career. The Metropolitan Museum of Art houses a print titled *Pan* by Brigman from 1914 the same year Williamina Parrish created several photographic images of nude male figures at Lake Como, Italy, a year prior to Imogen Cunningham’s experimentation with figures of her husband Roi on Mount Rainier. Brigman, Parrish, and Cunningham were from different generations and at different stages of their career when they experimented with the nude male figure in nature. Brigman, was towards the end of her career as photographer and older than Parrish. Williamina was towards the middle of her career and producing some of her

¹⁷⁶ Pyne, *Photographer of Enchantment*, 150-153.

¹⁷⁷ Pyne, *Photographer of Enchantment*, 157-164, 197.

most well-known photographs. Cunningham was younger than Parrish and towards the beginning of her career. Although at different stages in their careers Brigman, Parrish, and Cunningham explored depicting the male nude figure in nature during the same period- in the years leading up to the United States involvement in World War I.¹⁷⁸

Imogen Cunningham was a commercial photographer and an artist with a nearly seventy-year career. Cunningham was a modernist and explored various subjects focuses of her work throughout her career from portraits and nudes to botany. Imogen had begun experimenting with photography while still in high school in 1901. At the time she knew no other photographers near where she lived in Seattle. She sold her camera to aid in funding classes at the University of Washington in shorthand. Cunningham decided her calling was photography leading her to shift her focus to chemistry, physics, mechanical drawing, and learning German and French. Cunningham's first job in photography was creating lantern slides of microscopic details of plants for the university's botany department. Cunningham began to explore depictions of the nude form while still attending university. In 1906, she created a nude self-portrait lying on her stomach in a field. Associate Curator of the J. Paul Getty Museum, Paul Martineau notes that during this time depiction of the nude female form were "the domain of male artists, and with rare exceptions were made in the controlled environment of an indoor studio."¹⁷⁹

In a 1959 interview, Cunningham credits Käsebier with inspiring her to pursue photography as a career. The photograph that touched Cunningham most deeply was *Blessed Art Thou Among Women* featured in *The Craftsman's* April 1907 issue as part of a series of her

¹⁷⁸ "Pan-1914 Anne Brigman," Metropolitan Museum of Art.org, accessed February 12,2022, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/267515?who=Brigman%2c+Anne+W.%24Anne+W.+Brigman&ft=*&offset=0&rpp=40&pos=22.

¹⁷⁹ Martineau, *Imogen Cunningham*, 15-20, 6.

Photographs on motherhood titled, “Photography as an Emotional Art: A Study of the Work of Gertrude Käsebier.” Cunningham applied for an unpaid position in the studio of Edward C. Curtis during her final year of college to learn the platinum printing process. Curtis was currently involved in a project photographing Native American tribes west of the Mississippi titled “The Vanishing Race.” After graduation in 1907, Cunningham went on to a paid position in the studio of Adolph Muhr where she learned retouching processes. In 1908 she became youngest charter member of the Seattle Fine Arts Society and the only photographer. A year later she left her job at Muhr’s studio to study in Dresden, Germany, where she was the only woman in many of her classes. In 1910, she returned to Seattle and establish a studio for “artistic” photography.¹⁸⁰

In 1910, Cunningham created the photograph titled, *Reflections* depicting the nude figures of a husband, wife, and their daughter standing beside a pond. The father leads the daughter as the wife stands in the background with the figures reflected in the water. Martineau notes that this was the only time Cunningham paid models to pose for her and used different themes and techniques than were typical of the time. It is the father leading the child out into the world instead of the mother, reversing the established roles depicted in family portraits of Käsebier. Pictorialists, such as Brigman employed soft focus to create silhouetted figures obscuring the nudity of figures, whereas in Cunningham’s picture the figures are clearly nude in an outdoors setting. When a Seattle based weekly arts and culture magazine, the *Town Crier*, reprinted another image from the series titled *Eve Repentant* in 1915, it was criticized by Henry Chadwick, owner and editor of the more conservative leaning weekly paper *The Argus*. However, *Reflections* and *Eve Repentant* were exhibited without controversy in art galleries. *Reflections* and *Eve Repentant* were selected along with six others of Cunningham’s photographs

¹⁸⁰ Martineau, *Imogen Cunningham*, 21-25.

for the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition in the fine art photography section. The exhibition commemorated the completion of the Panama Canal and was held in San Francisco to celebrate the rebirth of the city after the devastation of the 1906 earthquake. Cunningham was one of forty-seven photographers exhibiting one hundred forty-eight prints.¹⁸¹

In 1915, Cunningham produced a series of photographs of her husband Roi Partridge, a fellow artist and printmaker as Narcissus while on a sketching trip to Mount Rainier. Martineau draws a connection between these images and Anne Brigman's nudes in nature taken in the Sierra Nevada mountains. *On Mount Rainier I* depicts the nude male figure of Roi crouching with an arm outstretched on a nearly frozen lake. Like *Reflections*, the figure's reflection is captured in the image along with the nearby landscape.¹⁸²

By the 1920s, Cunningham had moved away from depicting nude figures in nature instead depicting the nude figure closely cropped and in sharp focus. In 1929 Cunningham created a series of images of exotic dancer John Bovingdon nude in gymnastic poses. An untitled image focuses on his head and torso as he balances himself with his hands. Bovingdon was also the model for closely cropped images titled *Back* and *Legs*. Cunningham likely took these images while attending Sunday afternoon parties in West Hollywood hosted by Austrian-born architect Rudolph Schindler and his wife Pauline. *Torso* from 1923, depicts a nude female torso in the embrace of a man's arm. *Triangles* from 1928 is a closeup of the female torso inspired by cubism.¹⁸³ By the late 1920s, photography had become the domain of modernists such as

¹⁸¹ Martineau, *Imogen Cunningham*, 28-29.

¹⁸² Martineau, *Imogen Cunningham*, 30-31.

¹⁸³ Martineau, *Imogen Cunningham*, 38-40, 97,15,115

Cunningham. Artists of other styles, such as Anne Brigman and Williamina Parrish, had moved away from photography seeking other creative mediums.

Williamina Parrish was one of the last of her kind, a “lady amateur” who selected her own clients and photographed according to her own style and taste—separate from the growing trend of modernism. Williamina Parrish began to experiment photographing the nude form prior to studying in New York. A member of the Potters and lifelong friend of Williamina Parrish, Vine Colby McCasland recounted events surrounding what she believed to be the first time either Williamina or Grace experimented with photographing the nude form to Margaret Carpenter, the biographer of Sara Teasdale. During the summer of 1909, Sara, Vine and Williamina were staying at the Teasdale summer cottage in Charlevoix, Michigan. While they took a stroll along the shore of the nearby lake, they encountered a small wreck of a boat. Will exclaimed “There ought to be a mermaid playing around that wreck.” Vine recalls that Will’s eyes fell upon her—and she “was cast in the role of a mermaid.” The beach was desolate in that location and Vine recalls, “We felt frightfully daring.” Although there was a risk of intruders on the impromptu photoshoot, they were undisturbed. Williamina made enlargements of two of the prints, carefully retouching the photographs to conceal the identity of the model and exhibited the photographs in St. Louis and to “the salon in New York.” Williamina and Grace later experimented with nude photographs at locations in New York and Connecticut.¹⁸⁴

These mythically inspired images draw from romantic themes of a playful “mermaid” in her native environment of the coastline. The curvaceous figure with long flowing hair frolics on

¹⁸⁴ Vine Colby to Margaret Carpenter “Information for Margaret Carpenter from Vine McCasland,” Margaret Carpenter Papers, Accession No. 10656, b.14, f.1945-1947. University of Virginia, Charlottesville. Vine gave seven prints of the images to Carpenter as she could not show them to her family and wanted the photographs to go to someone who would be interested in them “for the sake of their association.” “Photographs of Vine Colby” Accession Number 8170-d, b. 9, f. ca.1905, Sara Teasdale Collection, University of Virginia, Charlottesville.

the beach uninterrupted, gazing occasionally at her lone companion the camera. This contrasts with the contorted figure emerging from a broken hollowed out tree as in one of Anne Brigman's most well-known work *Soul of a Blasted Pine*. Further examples such as *The Lone Pine*, from 1908 show a female nude figure crouched leaning forward grasping on to a lone twisted pine growing from a rocky embankment.¹⁸⁵

Even Brigman's more lighthearted works of the nude female figure in nature seem to represent isolation- although more positive aspects of being alone such as freedom and harmony with nature. The subjects in Brigman's images look away or downward, unaware of the presence of an onlooker. In *Dawn*, Brigman depicts a slightly silhouetted figure of a nude woman with short or pinned up hair laying by a small pool of water on a mountaintop. The figure leans forward on one arm with the other arm outstretched contrasting against the mountain ranges and sky in the background. Pyne notes that the gesture of the raised arm creates an effect of a wavelike outline compared to her torso, the contour of the ground and skyline. The figure is alone in the mountains, the camera as the sole witness capturing the moment of oneness and harmony with nature. In *Ballet de Mer*, Brigman depicts a nude female figure dancing along a beach near a rocky outcropping. Pyne notes that the dancer is free "as part of nature's order." The dancer is fragile, and light compared to the dark rocky outcroppings along the shoreline, and the waves rushing to the beach. On some of the prints Brigman drew lines out from the dancer's body to depict her whirling in the air.¹⁸⁶

One of Williamina's later prints in the collection of the St. Louis Public Library appearing under the listing, "Nude woman standing beside a tree" is divergent from her earlier

¹⁸⁵ "Photographs of Vine Colby," Sara Teasdale Collection, University of Virginia, Charlottesville; *Soul of a Blasted Pine* and *Lone Pine* in Kathleen Pyne, *Anne Brigman Photographer of Enchantment*, 71-76.

¹⁸⁶ *Dawn* and *Ballet de Mer* in Pyne, *Anne Brigman Photographer of Enchantment*, 110-111.

portrayals of the female nude- possibly showing she may have taken inspiration from Brigman. The nude figure is light in color, small, and softly out of focus in contrast to the rich detail of the bark of the large dark tree. The tree is not twisted or broken, but very much alive and perhaps not one tree, but four or more that have grown together as one dwarfing the figure. The figure is not playful and carefree, appearing more cautious- looking downward and off into the distance as if she is carefully seeking to place footsteps forward while maintaining balance by leaning against the massive tree.¹⁸⁷

Photographing nude figures in nature posed challenges to photographers as they must, “keep a nude from being naked,” while not losing the landscape, or the artist’s motif. A 1916 exhibition at the Noonan-Kocian Galleries in St. Louis, featured six prints by Williamina Parrish described as “revivals of antique Greek spirit,” of nude male figures in nature. It is likely Williamina created two of her most well-known prints, *The Faun* and *Bacio Della Luna* on the same day during a trip to Lake Como in 1914. While Williamina was living abroad in Italy, she arranged a photoshoot with her models at Lake Como, brought “three dozen films,” and in two hours yielded six exhibition worthy prints. The fourteen by seventeen-inch prints were created from “carefully elaborated negatives on glass.” *Reedy’s Mirror* lists the titles of five of the six prints created at Lake Como in 1914 that were part of the 1916 exhibition: *Forest Bird*, *Morning*, *L’Apres-midi d’ un Faune*, *Bacio di Luna*, and *Summer Night*. Although Williamina, disputed manipulating negatives, arguing the pictures represented “strait photography,” the prints are described as “highly individualized” and “manipulated” to yield special effects,” through use of either specialized paper prepared by Parrish or printed on “platinotype paper.” The review declared Miss Parrish’s photographs a success, however, criticized the dominance of a waterfall

¹⁸⁷ Grace and Williamina Parrish Photograph Collection, St. Louis Public Library Digital Collections.

in several prints as it “detracted from the dominance of the figure” and suggested “judicious “trimming” to eliminating details that diluted the mood of the images. ¹⁸⁸

The identity of at least one of these models can be interpreted from a review of the exhibit by Vine (Colby) McCasland, a writer for *Reedy's Mirror* and a member of the Potters. Nino Ronchi, an artist, painter and muse of Parrish, who she helped promote in the United States in the 1920s was the model for at least one of the series. However, it is uncertain if Ronchi was the model for other images taken in the series at Lake Como. Vine describes, a “superb young man whose many-sided nature lends itself to interpret,” who had posed for several photographs on display at the Noonan-Kocian. This “chameleon” interpreted a young Russian with “dreams of liberty and revolution” titled, *Sasha*.¹⁸⁹ He was the model for *Espangnole, Artist, Poet*, and a portrait titled *Dorian Grey*, inspired by the novel by Oscar Wilde. As *The Faune*, he was “wild and beautiful, not naked, only free and happy.”¹⁹⁰

In March 1915, Williamina Parrish’s photograph *The Faun* was awarded second prize of over twelve hundred prints at one of the most important annual exhibitions, the tenth annual Wannamaker Exhibition in Philadelphia. The photograph was reprinted in the May 1915 issue of *Camera Craft* and is the same image listed under the title “Nude man setting beside stream” in the collection held by the St. Louis Public Library and is dated 1914. A nude figure of a young man sets on the ground his feet resting on a rock by a stream, knees bent, leaning on his arms

¹⁸⁸ McCasland, “The Art of Misses Parrish and Risqué,” 295; L.A.L. “Miss Parrish’s Moods,” 280-281.

¹⁸⁹ An image of Ronchi titled *Sasha* was reprinted in the *Amateur Photographer & Photographic News* in 1918 and appears as “Portrait of a young man 7” in the St. Louis Public Library Digital Collections. *Sasha, Amateur Photographer & Photographic News, Sasha, Amateur Photographer & Photographic News* in 1918 n.p. in Parrish Sister’s Scrapbook, Missouri Historical Society; Grace and Williamina Parrish Photograph Collection, St. Louis Public Library Digital Collections.

¹⁹⁰ McCasland “The Art of Misses Parrish and Risqué,” 295.

behind him. The setting appears to be a canyon with abundant foliage, and a stream fed by a waterfall. The well-lit figure casts a shadow on the ground beside the stream, the movement of the water captured in the foreground. The figure is facing the camera, appearing to look upward and off in the distance. The figure may be aware it is being observed but is more interested in something off in the distance. The Faun appears to be comfortable and natural in a nude state, just as much of a part of the ecosystem as the rocks and stream.¹⁹¹

The following year at the Eleventh Annual Wannamaker exhibition, Williamina was awarded third prize for the photograph titled *Bacio Della Luna*, out of fourteen hundred nationwide entries. The prize-winning image reprinted in the May 1910 issue of *American Photographer* is the same as the image titled “Nude man setting on a rock beside a stream 3” in the St. Louis Public Library collection. A large bolder takes up more than one third of the picture elevating the figure above his surroundings. The man is seated with his legs bent with one foot resting under the other knee and the rest of his weight balanced in his arms. He faces away from the rushing water behind him and toward a tree growing richly from the embankment. The mid-day sun casts a shadow of the tree across the bolder on which he sets. The figure looks downward with his face visible to the camera. The rushing water in the background and rocks in the foreground at the base of the bolder are softly out of focus, with the figure in focus.¹⁹²

Both images are taken outdoors near water but are distinctly different from the nude male figure photographed by Anne Brigman the same year or Imogen Cunningham’s photograph of

¹⁹¹ “Wannamaker Exhibition.” *Camera Craft*, vol.22, no. 5 (May 1915),196-199, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.fl2h2f&view=lup&seq=231&q1=Parrish>; Grace and Williamina Parrish Photograph Collection, St. Louis Public Library Digital Collections.

¹⁹² *American Amateur Photographer*, v 10 1916, 251, in Parrish Sisters’ Scrapbook, Missouri Historical Society. Three variations of the image appear in the collection of the St. Louis Public Library, with the image titled “Nude man setting on a rock beside a stream 3,” being closet to the one exhibited at Wannamaker’s. The same image was also exhibited at the London Salon in 1915 from information in the Parrish Sister’s Scrapbook and was frequently shown as part of exhibits of Williamina’s work.

her husband Roi the following year near a frozen lake near Mount Rainier. Although Brigman's *Pan* uses the same setting as Parrish's *Bacio Della Luna* she uses a different technique to interpret the figure. Brigman's *Pan* depicts a nude male figure sitting on a boulder by rushing water, but the figure's body is facing away from the camera. In classic Brigman style, the figure balances on one arm with the other outstretched. The figure is implied to be nude, but the soft focus creates a silhouette concealing any details.¹⁹³

Imogen Cunningham photographed a series of images of her husband Roi in nature in 1915. *On Mount Rainier I* depicts the nude male figure, crouching with arm outstretched. The figure is an accent to the landscape and in sharp focus, as in Parrish's work. However, like Brigman, Cunningham positions her figure's shadow to be reflected in a pool of water- a technique Brigman implemented with some of her female figures such as in *Dawn* and *The Bubble*. The figure is also posed in a manner like Brigman's figures, looking away and often downward, with limbs outstretched.¹⁹⁴

Another image from the series of photographs was exhibited under the title *The Faun*. Unlike Parrish's *The Faun*, Cunningham's is a landscape photograph accented by a figure in the distance by a pool of water. A mountain range towers in the background above a clearing surrounded by trees and a still pond. The nude figure has knees bent and is resting leaning back on bent arms, resting by the water in the isolated mountain meadow. Reflection of nearby trees and the figure are visible in the still pond. Like Brigman, the figure's shadow is cast across the

¹⁹³ *Pan*, in Anne Brigman, *Songs of a Pagan* (Caldwell, Idaho: The Caxton Printers., 1949), 21; "Pan-1914 Anne Brigman," Metropolitan Museum of Art.org.

¹⁹⁴ Martineau, *Imogen Cunningham*, 31. Kathleen Pyne, *Photographer of Enchantment*, 88-89. "Nude man setting on a rock beside a stream 3" Grace and Williamina Parrish Photograph Collection, St. Louis Public Library Digital Collections.

water. However, in contrast to Cunningham's later work the figure is depicted from a distance unlike her close-range photographs of the 1920s.¹⁹⁵

In conclusion, Parrish's nude studies of the male form were in "sharp focus," contrasting Brigman's soft shadowed silhouetted figures. Parrish incorporated the surrounding scenes in nature where the photographs were taken, but the primary focus was on the subject. By contrast, the early works of Cunningham incorporate the nude male figure into what is primarily a landscape scene. In theme and spirit, Parrish's work is more closely related to Brigman. In the "Italian series", Parrish sought to reinterpret nineteenth-century romantic themes, while employing a sharper focus permitted by advances in photographic technology. As contemporaries, Brigman had access to the same technology as Parrish. However, Brigman created softer focused images as an artistic choice. Cunningham explored the nude in nature, but only in her early career. Cunningham later embraced sharp focused, extreme close-up photographs of the human body—excluding nature surrounding the human form. Therefore, Parrish's work in the "Italian series" can be viewed as a bridge between nineteenth-century photographic styles and modernism. Parrish incorporated the modernist technique of sharp focus, Victorian romantic themes, and pre-Raphaelite imagery of the late nineteenth century, forming a bridge between the past and realism that was ushered in by the devastation of World War I.

Art scholar, Gillian Barrie Greenhill notes that the destruction of World War I, "made the misty idealism of turn-of-the-century pictorialism an anomaly." Even prior to World War I, the Armory Show in 1913 influenced the direction of photography. "Painterly photographs" of the

¹⁹⁵ "The Faun, 1915" imogencunningham.com, accessed February 22,2022, <https://www.imogencunningham.com/artworks/categories/53/1687-imogen-cunningham-the-faun-1915/>; Pyne, *Photographer of Enchantment*, 88-89; Martineau, *Imogen Cunningham*, 38-40, 97,15,115.

turn of the century seemed to be a “restatement of overworked themes and ideas.” Photography in later decades would continue to imitate other mediums of art-particularly painting but would move from neo-classical to modernist inspired themes including cubism. The effect was not immediate, beginning to appear particularly among younger workers like Cunningham beginning in the 1920s.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁶ Greenhill, “The Outsiders.” 95-97; Martineau, *Imogen Cunningham*, 38-40, 97,15,115.

CONCLUSION

Williamina Parrish represents a transition from older Victorian photographic traditions to those of the modern. Photography in Europe had been strictly divided between the realm of the commercial professional photographer and the amateur artist. But in the United States commercial photography flourished early on with amateur artists emerging in the late nineteenth century. At the turn of the century, particularly in the United States, the lines between commercial professional photography and amateur artist photographers became blurred. A new genre—the commercial photographic artist—emerged. Williamina Parrish, Gertrude Käsebier, and Julia Margaret Cameron, all considered themselves artists, but differed on the issue of monetization. Parrish did market her work as apparent from her business cards. By accepting paying clients, she parallels with changes in the early twentieth century that gave rise to commercial photographic artists like Käsebier. Like Victorian artist photographers such as Cameron, Parrish had the ability to choose her clients as she was of independent means and not dependent on income from photography to support herself.

Parrish expressed Victorian sentimentality often depicting lone figures in the home or nature. Advocates of modernism, such as Stieglitz, expressed their art through depicting urban street scenes representing the crowded external world of the city dweller.¹⁹⁷ By contrast, Parrish depicts the private internal world of the home and individuals in the sanctuary of nature. Parrish was from St. Louis - one of the five largest cities in the United States at the time and had lived in New York while studying with Käsebier. Unlike urban artist of the Ashcan school, Parrish made the choice to not depict the urban environments she would have been familiar with. Parrish also

¹⁹⁷ Kelsey, *Art of Chance*, 156-159.

drew inspiration in her early career from the Arts and Crafts movement which relied heavily on elements of the natural world.

Although Parrish did not embrace modernist themes, she did explore sharp focus techniques advocated by modernists and popular with commercial photographers and scientists of the nineteenth century. Parrish's "Italian series" of nude male figures in nature from 1914 depict the incorporation of modern sharp focus and unaltered "straight" photographic images advocated by modernists and mythological themes in nature popular in the Victorian period. Parrish's work represents art of a transitional period—being both post-Victorian and pre-modern in style.

Virginia Woolf, the great-niece of prominent nineteenth-century photographer Julia Margaret Cameron wrote in her 1924 essay *Mr. Bennet and Mrs. Brown*, "On or about December 1910 human nature changed." Although the change was not as distinct as provocatively stated by Woolf, culture and society began to change significantly in the years leading up to World War I. Writers such as Freud, Marx, and Darwin, undermined belief structures that governed Victorian society. Society was further changed by advances in technology and was altered permanently due to the destruction and trauma experienced by those who lived during the time of the world's first "Great War." In the years leading up to World War I, Williamina and her sister left to stay in Europe. Her sister traveled on to London, leaving Williamina completely on her own, living in a foreign country without her parents or sister for the first time. This allowed Williamina to come into her own as a person and to create art freely.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁸ Nasrullah Mambrol, "Modernism: On or about December 1910 Human Nature Changed," *Literary Theory and Criticism*, March 26, 2016, <https://literariness.org/2016/03/25/on-or-about-december-1910-human-nature-changed/>.

Williamina Parrish was an artist using photography to depict themes of a romantic past that faded to obscurity in the years following the First World War. Williamina Parrish aligned with principles of the nineteenth-century “amateur” artist tradition, by theme, technique, lack of monetization of her photography, while advocating for photography as an art form. Williamina Parrish came into adulthood at the turn of the twentieth century, drawing inspiration from styles popular in the late Victorian era including the Arts and Crafts movement, Pre-Raphaelites, and Greek art. Williamina utilized soft-focus techniques in her early career working with her sister Grace—a style also popular in the late nineteenth century. Williamina explored sharp focus techniques, a style that gained prominence in the years leading up to World War I. Other later examples of her work show that she continued to use soft-focus techniques in some applications throughout her career. The coming generations of photographers would incorporate creative elements into commercial photography, merging art and commerce. The Parrish sisters were among the last of the tradition of the nineteenth-century lady and gentleman amateur artists that did not practice photography as an occupation.

Williamina Parrish was nearly thirty-five and living in Italy at the outbreak of World War I in 1914. The year prior had been pivotal for changes in art. Art Scholar Gillian Barrie Greenhill notes that the 1913 Armory Show was an end of an era with artists in all mediums being forced to come to terms with modernism. Williamina did not experience the Armory Show. She left for Europe in the fall of 1912 and lived abroad until she was forced to return to the United States due to rising tensions in Europe at the start of the war. Williamina would have already encountered modern art as she frequently traveled in Europe, visiting museums in major capitols including Paris, London, and Milan. Despite her exposure to modern art its influences are not evident in her photography. The Armory Show had an impact on popular culture and

those who created art for the commercial or consumer market. Williamina was an artist of independent means and did not create art for the masses or consumer market, so for her the show had little impact. The only impact of the Armory Show on Williamina was perhaps the diminishing popularity of Pictorialism by the end of the 1920s.¹⁹⁹

Sometime near 1914 a pivotal change took place in photographic art although it went by relatively unnoticed. In 1914, both Anne Brigman and Williamina Parrish explored depicting the nude male figure in nature using photography as a medium. The following year Imogen Cunningham created a series of now famous images of her husband Roi depicted as a faun on Mount Rainier. Art scholars have pointed to the series by Cunningham as marking a change in art and foreshadowing future acceptance to women in later decades portraying the male nude figure.²⁰⁰

Author and art historian Paul Martineau concluded that in the past women could depict the female form in indoor settings, however depiction of the nude male figure by female artist was taboo. Williamina's photograph of the "Italian series" titled *The Faun* was awarded second prize in 1915 at an annual exhibition at John Wannamaker's gallery in Philadelphia. The photograph of the nude male figure was praised for its artistry, without any criticism that the work had been created by a woman. The following year another photograph from the series, *Bacio Della Luna* was awarded third place at the same exhibition. Again, the photograph was discussed strictly upon its merit as art.²⁰¹ *Bacio Della Luna* was noteworthy at the time but has

¹⁹⁹ Greenhill, "The Outsiders," 96; *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, "Society" *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, October 7, 1912, Newspapers.com.

²⁰⁰ "Pan-1914 Anne Brigman," Metropolitan Museum of Art.org; Grace and Williamina Parrish Photograph Collection, St. Louis Public Library Digital Collections; Martineau, *Imogen Cunningham*, 30.

²⁰¹ Martineau, *Imogen Cunningham*, 6, 19-20; "Wannamaker Exhibition." *Camera Craft*, vol. 22, no. 5 (May 1915), 196-199; "Club News and Notes, The Eleventh Annual Wannamaker Exhibition," *Camera Craft* vol. 23 no. 4 (April 1916), 164-165.

been overlooked by those who have examined Parrish's work. The exhibit was in Philadelphia during Parrish's later mature period, whereas researchers typically examine her early career as a local St. Louis area artist, with a focus on her work within a local all-female art collective, the Potters. Williamina is remembered by her local community for pictures of children, pets and women in flowing dresses created in partnership with her sister before going on to receive formal training as an artist in New York. The images created during her early career with the Potters represented scenes from upper middle-class life and reflected socially appropriate themes for women working in photography at the time. With formal training, Williamina gained skill as a photographer, but also explored themes that fit outside the traditional space occupied by women photographers. Parrish's mature artistic period may have received less attention as the photographs portray the erotic female gaze representing mature female sexuality— an uncomfortable contrast to those familiar with her prior work depicting romantic themes of upper-middle class domestic life.

Artistic circles were historically more accepting than the public of nudity. Martineau gives as an example of response to Imogen Cunningham's 1910 series of photographs a family nude in nature. *Reflections* and *Eve Repentant* from the series were accepted into the 1915 Panama-Pacific Exhibition. The same year, an image from the series faced criticism when it was republished in a local arts and culture magazine. However, the criticism the series faced was based on the content, not that a woman had taken the photograph.²⁰²

In the past as in the present, there were conflicting views and levels of acceptance of nudity in art. Cunningham's *Eve Repentant*, a photograph from a series depicting a nude family

²⁰² Martineau, *Imogen Cunningham*, 28-29.

in nature was deemed acceptable to be reprinted by a weekly arts and culture magazine in 1915.

However, what is discussed is the controversy that followed. Kathleen Pyne notes that modernist art portraying the female nude figure in the early twentieth century stirred controversy.

Photography was a more acceptable vehicle to portray nudity as photography was to capture nature. Art scholar Alla Parsons speculates that the nude male figure remained offensive to some into the late 2000s due to the association between nude models and prostitution. In this context, nude “male models threaten the ideal of masculinity.” Some male artists did depict the nude male figure, notably F. Holland Day. Day’s work was praised at the time, although some later twentieth-century art critics and scholars have dismissed the complexities of his work, labeling it as homoerotic. Day frequently drew inspiration from paintings, such as his 1895 photograph *Evening* that was modeled after *Young Man Seated by the Sea*, a painting by Jean Hippolyte Flandrin. However, as author Patricia Fanning notes, Day did not advocate “gratuitous nudity.” Only, “a well planned, well thought out, well executed motif . . . with the proper figures, can be considered worthy to be called Art.”²⁰³

Advances in computer technology, scanning capabilities, and expanded access to the internet aid libraries, museums, and archives in sharing their collections with a worldwide audience. With greater accessibility to documents, literature, ephemera, and photographic art, researchers and historians may uncover unnoticed patterns in art history. Perhaps 1914 was the turning point when women artists became comfortable photographing and exhibiting studies of the nude male figure frequently. Or perhaps this happened at an earlier date. Women artists may have taken these photographs at a much earlier time but only felt it was socially acceptable to

²⁰³ Martineau, *Imogen Cunningham*, 28-29; Parsons “female artists representing the male nude figure”; Fanning, *Through an Uncommon Lens*, 89-96.

begin publicly exhibiting their work due to social changes brought about by World War I. Of particular interest are repositories holding collections of catalogs from photographic art exhibitions or materials that may depict or describe now lost work. This may allow experts to evaluate art of the past, including pieces that may have been viewed as offensive, and therefore, been destroyed. Some have always found nudity offensive, and perhaps these are the voices that have echoed in time the loudest.

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