

Swann Galleries, New York City

A Focused Photography Market Makes its Choices

by Jeanne Schinto
Photos courtesy Swann Galleries

Swann Galleries' April 18 auction of classic and contemporary photographs in New York City lived up to its name with a wide array of offerings, from Eadweard Muybridge to Edward S. Curtis to Edward Weston to Edward Ruscha. I could go on with other alliterative matchups, but I will restrain myself. Bidders in turn lived up to their current reputation for tending increasingly to be specialized. Commenting on that aspect of her clientele, Daile Kaplan, the longtime director of Swann's photography and photo books department, said, "I think that today what we see in the market is pretty focused buying. When it comes to institutional collections, that's probably always been the case, where curators are looking to expand or fill in certain collecting areas. With private collectors, now I think that there is definitely selective buying based on interests, trends in

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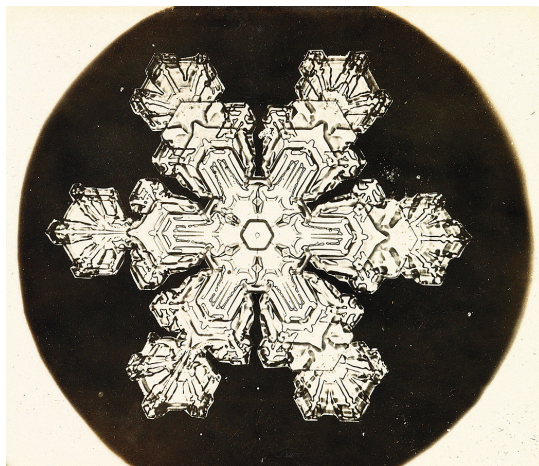
the market, trends in photographer's reputations."

A prime exemplar of the phenomenon was the sale's top lot, whose price was a new record for Peruvian artist Martín Chambi (1891-1973), one of the first major indigenous photographers of Latin America. The record came by way of 16 attributed images contained in an American couple's personal travel album that sold along with a companion album of theirs for \$58,750 (including buyer's premium) to a collector after prolonged bidding by many contenders. Conservatively estimated at \$6000/9000, the albums were compiled by Herbert Heard Evans (1880-1962) and his wife. Evans, a Spanish-American War veteran, worked from 1919 to 1942 as an assistant superintendent of the mechanical division of the Panama Canal. Together the couple traveled extensively in South America, exploring, learning about the continent's history, and collecting books on the subject (now at Smith College) and also textiles (now in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art). The albums were evidence of their passion for the place they called home for so many years.

As for Chambi, beginning around 1920 he established himself as a society photographer and portraitist in Cusco (also spelled Cuzco), a city in the Peruvian Andes that was once the capital of the Inca Empire. His reputation, however, is for the body of work he produced while photographing throughout the southern Andes, recording landscapes, Inca ruins, and the lives of the indigenous peoples of the Andean region. In the main album that sold at Swann are depictions of Incan architectural ruins, sacred lands, and the Incas themselves; five of the images are attributed to Chambi. The other 11 images that bear the marks of Chambi's artistry are architectural studies that were made in and around the locale of Chambi's studio in Cusco, which is known for its Spanish colonial architecture.

Asked if she'd had an inkling the sale would turn out so well—after all, not long ago, on October 25, 2016, Swann got \$50,000 for a suite of 50 photographs of Cusco by Chambi—or if she had been surprised, Kaplan said: "Yes, we were surprised that bidders reacted so competitively, but again I think this speaks to the very specialized interests of collectors today." That the material was fresh to the market and very uncommon material at that, about a culture of great interest to a growing audience, helped garner the attention it received. In addition, the material was well researched by Swann and by the consignor, described by Kaplan only as "a local person." What is more, she pointed out, those who had a chance to examine the albums could see how meticulously the main one had been annotated and captioned by Evans. "That kind of provenance really speaks volumes to clients today," she said.

One of the sale's most significant underperforming offerings was 28 issues of *Camera Work*, a magazine that Kaplan has called (while on *Antiques Roadshow*)

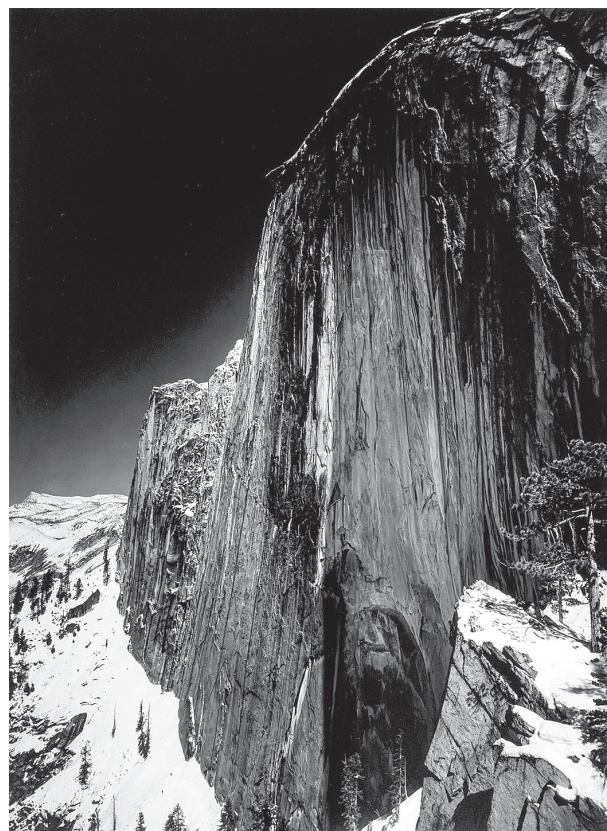


An album of 55 photographs by Wilson A. "Snowflake" Bentley (1865-1931), including 51 snow crystals, two landscapes, a frost study, and a spider web, sold for \$22,500 (est. \$25,000/35,000). These images, dating from 1888 to 1927, are silver prints, most measuring approximately 3" in diameter. The album, its derivation unknown, although it may have been at least partially compiled by Bentley, was sold together with three mounted snow-themed poems introducing the photographs and additional period ephemera relating to Bentley and the study of snow.



"the preeminent art journal of the twentieth century." It was cataloged as a series of 16 lots; ten sold for a total of \$77,000, which did not add up to its aggregate low estimate. The publication was, of course, the brainchild of Alfred Stieglitz (1864-1946), who produced it in New York from 1903 to 1917, when the idea of photography as a fine art form was not widely accepted. Yet Stieglitz, the impresario and larger-than-life figure, championed it as well as Modernism in general through his magazine's pages.

The complete run of *Camera Work*, one of which sold at Sotheby's in New York on October 7, 2016, for \$187,500, consists of 52 issues, including three special unnumbered ones. Each featured photogravures of now-famous photographic masterworks by the likes of Edward Steichen (who designed the magazine's cover), Paul Strand, and Stieglitz himself, as well as artworks by the then new European Modernists, such as Auguste Rodin and Pablo Picasso. Stieglitz personally tipped every reproduction into every issue, which is one reason why *Camera Work* is so prized. Beyond those attractions, the issues that sold at Swann had a special provenance. Acquired by the consignor from Chicago's Hanzel Gallery in the late 1960s or early 1970s, they had originally belonged to Stieglitz's brother Julius Stieglitz (1867-1937), a chemist who taught at the University of Chicago for many years.

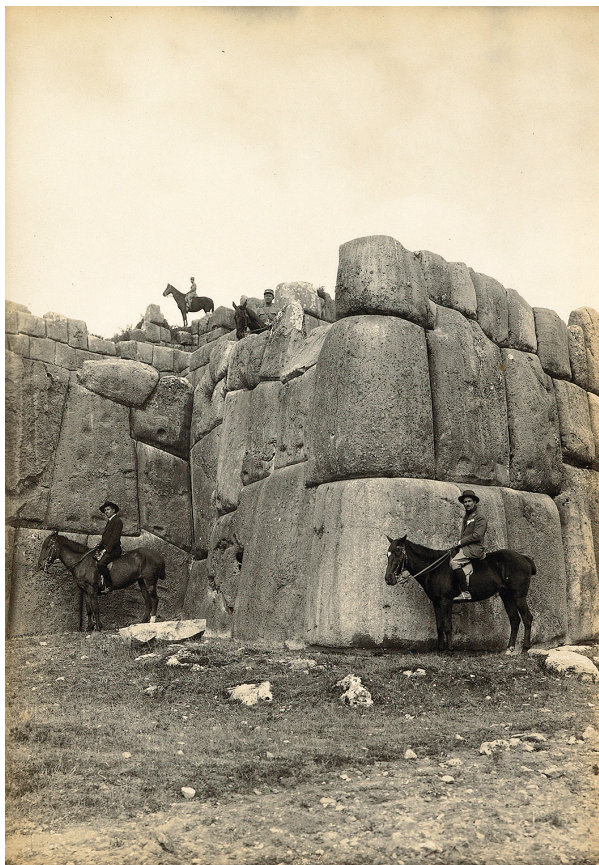


Portfolio Three: Yosemite Valley by Ansel Adams (1902-1984) sold to a collector for \$57,500 (est. \$40,000/60,000). It is number 69 from an edition of 200 printed in 1960 and issued by the Sierra Club. The set is complete with 16 photographs (one shown), a letterpress colophon, and title sheet with Adams's introduction in which he states, "Each [image] represents, for me, a moment of wonder." The silver prints measure 6 7/8" x 5 1/4" to 11" x 8 5/8". Each has the portfolio hand stamp with the print number and set number.

Daile Kaplan, with *Lisa Lyon* by Robert Mapplethorpe (1946-1989). The 1980-82 oversize silver print, the image measuring 39 3/4" x 29 3/4", with Mapplethorpe's signature in pencil on the mount's back, sold for \$50,000 (est. \$50,000/70,000), a new auction record for any photographic image of Lyon. And while Mapplethorpe is best known for his depictions of masculinity, as Kaplan noted, "He clearly loved strong women." Photo credit Bob Frishman.

"*Camera Work* as a publication is so important to the history of photography and Modernism in the United States," Kaplan said after the sale. "And yet, today I think what we're seeing is more of a focus on single images rather than magazines or books. Having said that, the [Edward S.] Curtis books [two volumes of which sold for \$4000 and \$10,625, respectively] did nicely. But we certainly recognize that *Camera Work* is more of a connoisseur's type purchase today."

Another album lot, this one consisting of 51 images of snowflakes (or, more properly, snow *crystals*), two landscapes, a frost study, and a spider web by Wilson A. "Snowflake" Bentley (1865-1931), sold to a dealer for \$22,500. For decades, Bentley obsessively made photographs of individual crystals, 500 of which now reside in the Smithsonian Institution archives. Bentley used a combination of microscope and camera to make his images, which he produced from age 20 until his death. Ignored by most scientists in his lifetime, he made the discovery of the fact that no two crystals are alike. One scientist who did pay attention to him was a U.S. Weather Bureau chief meteorologist, Dr. William J. Humphreys (1862-1949), who helped Bentley publish a collection of his photos in 1931. The book, *Snow Crystals*, with a text by Humphreys and 2500 Bentley images of crystals, plus 100 of frost and dew formations, was reissued by Dover Books in 1962. First introduced



Sixteen photos (one shown) of Cusco, Peru, attributed to Martín Chambi (1891-1973), were part of an extensive album of 118 photographs compiled by Herbert Heard Evans (1880-1962) and his wife, and captioned by Evans. The album sold, along with a companion album of 87 snapshots and real photo postcards, for \$58,750 (est. \$6000/9000).

into the photography market as a folk artist, Bentley is “due for some scholarly import,” said Kaplan, who noted that, ironically, the eccentric, obsessed, lifelong Vermonter died of pneumonia contracted after walking through a blizzard.

O. Winston Link (1914-2001) was a photographer known for an obsessive subject of his own, steam locomotives, preferring to shoot them at night. He used arrangements of scores of flashbulbs to create dramatic lighting effects, and he shot not only the trains but people in the foreground landscapes (a drive-in, a backyard pool) presumably just living their lives. The finished products all seem so serendipitous, including the one sold at this sale, an oversize (20" x 24") silver print of *Hotshot, Eastbound, Jaeger, West Virginia* that went to a collector for \$11,700. In truth, he produced these surreal cinematic photographs with the help of local residents who posed as models and engineers with whom he developed friendships, whose locomotives “rolled by on cue,” in the words of a *New York Times* reporter. (See Barry Meier, “A Fairy Tale Ending Derailed,” *New York Times*, April 3, 1994.)

“There is a film-set quality to these images,” observed Kaplan, who praised Link’s virtuosity. “They are lit in a way that required so much technical expertise.” And while what he produced is unique, and decidedly quirky, he nonetheless is someone who has influenced others, if not consciously then certainly unconsciously, she said, naming, for one, Gregory Crewdson (b. 1962), whose photographs of American homes and neighborhoods achieve similarly surreal effects with lighting and other techniques.

Unfortunately, like Bentley, Link has his own sad end-of-life story, involving his second and much younger wife, Conchita Mendoza, and her lover, Edward Hayes, a Link employee, who were convicted of grand theft in the first degree for stealing his cameras, equipment, and thousands of his prints, including the very one sold at this sale. The sorry details can be read on many Internet sites. There is happier news, however, in that the O. Winston Link Museum, located in downtown Roanoke, Virginia, in a restored Norfolk & Western Railway passenger train station, opened in 2004. For more information, see the website (www.roanokehistory.org).

Even more dramatic electric lighting and even greater elements of the surreal played roles in the production of *Electricité* by Man Ray (1890-1976) and Pierre Bost (1901-1975), a copy of which sold to a dealer for \$37,500. The portfolio consists of ten photogravures



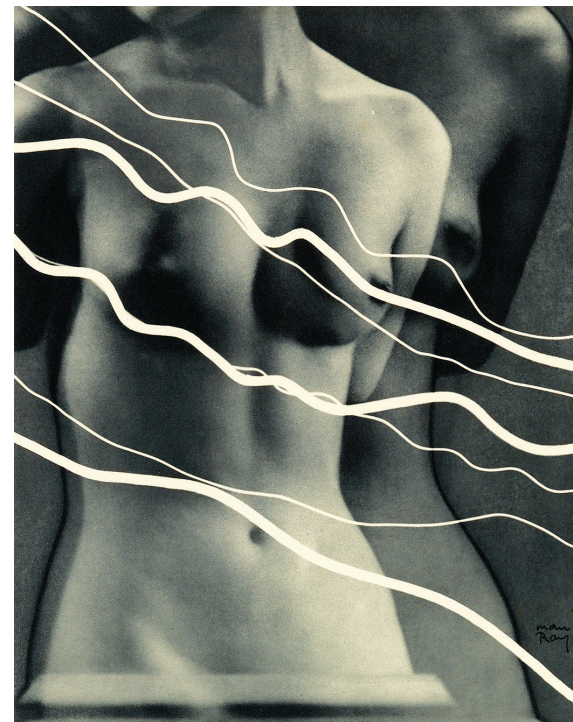
A ready-made collection of 30 real photo postcards (each approximately 5½" x 3½"), each featuring that traditional, whimsical studio prop of the early 20th century, the paper moon, sold for \$2000 (est. \$1200/1800).

after Man Ray’s rayographs (camera-less photographs) and a text by Bost, a French novelist, screenwriter, and journalist. Commissioned by La Compagnie Parisienne de Distribution d’Electricité, a private French power company, it was published in Paris in 1931 in an edition of 500 numbered copies. Its purpose was to promote the domestic consumption of electricity in France at a time when most French homes were relying on natural gas, wood, or coal for lighting, cooking, and heating. One can imagine that the company’s principals could not have anticipated Man Ray’s conflation of images of nudes, a light bulb, a toaster, a fan, an iron, and a roasted fowl on a platter with waves of light (representing the electrical force) to make their point. “It is very curious that they hired Man Ray, but the French have always been very avant-garde, and he certainly delivered a very vivid picture of electricity,” said Kaplan with a laugh.

Sobering classics by Dorothea Lange (1895-1965) attracted strong interest among certain other bidders. One was her *Korean Child*, which sold to a dealer for \$20,000, a record for the image. Made in 1958 in Korea, where Lange was sent by the U.S. State Department after the Korean War, the 1960s silver print of a child with eyes closed, as if in prayer or else against horror, was cropped from a classroom scene of ten children. It was recognized as a masterwork by John Szarkowski, the curator of the Museum of Modern Art who was responsible for MoMA’s Lange retrospective in 1966; indeed, he used it for the cover of the catalog.

The sale’s cover lot was Andreas Feininger’s *The Photojournalist (Dennis Stock)*, *New York*. The choice of the 1951 closeup of Stock’s face obscured by his camera, an alluring sheen on his lower lip, could be considered a paean to photographers, journalists, and photojournalists everywhere in these troubled times of threats to the free press. The image was originally made for *Life* magazine after Stock (1928-2010) won first prize in a competition for young photographers at age 23. Signed by Feininger (1906-1999), the 1992 silver print sold for \$10,625.

Other notable lots first published in magazines included Alfred Eisenstadt’s 1932 photo of waiters in the Grand Hotel dining room, St. Moritz, Switzerland, watching Sonja Henie skate (\$5500), and Art Kane’s *A Great Day in Harlem* (\$9375). The latter image shows 57 jazz greats, Thelonious Monk, Charles Mingus, Gene Krupka, Mary Lou Williams, and Lester Young among them, along with kids from the neighborhood lined up on the curb outside a row of Harlem brownstones. Kane (1925-1995), who had the idea for the tableau and the wherewithal to gather the greats, made the image in



Electricité, a portfolio composed of ten photogravures after Man Ray’s rayographs and text by Pierre Bost, sold for \$37,500 (est. \$20,000/30,000). Each image is approximately 10¼" x 8⅝" and has Man Ray’s signature in the negative.

1958 when he was a young art director for *Esquire*.

It’s a rare Swann photo sale that doesn’t offer works by Ansel Adams. This time he was represented by eight, including *Portfolio Three: Yosemite Valley*, which sold to a collector for \$57,500, and *Moon and Half Dome, Yosemite National Park*, acquired by another collector for \$22,500. “I would consider him a true classic,” said Kaplan. “Ansel Adams’ is a name people recognize to this day. And while he is a historical figure, he is like a fine wine. He ages very well. Collectors across the country recognize the power of his images.”

Another name well known to the general public is Robert Mapplethorpe (1946-1989), whose pronunciation, incidentally, rhymes with “maple,” not “apple,” as it would seem. Among the five examples of his work at this sale was an oversize (39¾" x 29¾") silver print of *Lisa Lyon*, for which a collector paid \$50,000. Swann said it is a new record for any photographic image of Lyon by Mapplethorpe or anyone else.

Mapplethorpe met the subject of the photo in 1980, after Lyon (b. 1953) became the first World Women’s Bodybuilding champion. Over the next few years, the two of them collaborated on numerous portraits and body studies that resulted in a book, *Lady: Lisa Lyon*, published in 1983. The image of Lyon’s head and torso in profile, her head covered by a black net veil, her bicep bulging, her fist clenched, was on that book’s cover. “During the heyday of her career she was a very colorful, pioneering figure,” Kaplan said of Lyon, whom some consider to have been the first female bodybuilder. “One has to remember how long ago that book came out.”

At Swann’s previews, *Lisa Lyon* was front and center in the gallery. The other four Mapplethorpe photos—which sold collectively for a total of \$31,575—one had to go looking for, in the darker reaches of the partitions, even though, considering the entire Mapplethorpe oeuvre, they were tame examples, two of men’s genitals, two of men and boots. I came to a better understanding of Mapplethorpe’s own darker reaches by reading Patti Smith’s 2010 memoir of her friendship and eventual romantic relationship with the artist, *Just Kids*. “Robert took areas of dark human consent and made them into art....” she writes. “He was not looking to make a political statement.... He was presenting something new, something not seen or explored as he saw and explored it....” What is more, she says, “He didn’t think the work was for everybody.” In a nutshell, an accurate reading of the marketplace 30 years after his death.

For more information, contact Swann by phone at (212) 254-4710 or via the website (www.swannalleries.com).





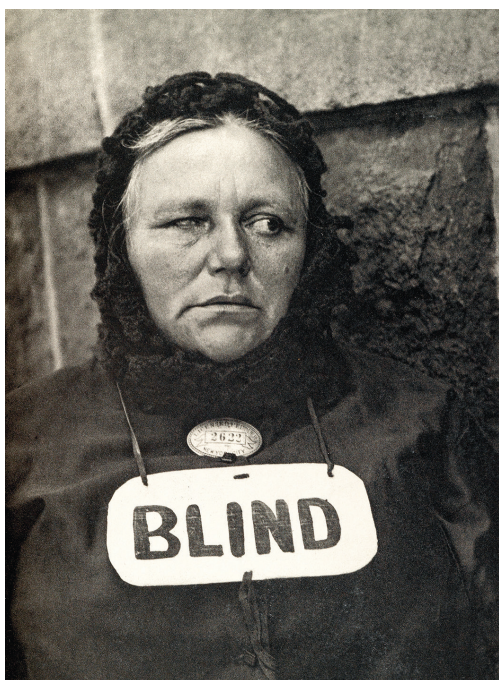
Concurrent with the Swann sale was an exhibit devoted to Robert Mapplethorpe at New York City's Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. On view in the Robert Mapplethorpe Gallery, whose entrance is shown here, the show is *Implicit Tensions*. Part one, on view through July 10, will be followed by part two, which will open on July 24. The lettering on the exhibit wall says: "This exhibition contains mature content and may not be suitable for all," no doubt just as the artist himself would have wanted it. As Patti Smith wrote in *Just Kids*, "...he never felt that his underground world was for everybody." Photo credit Susannah Simone.



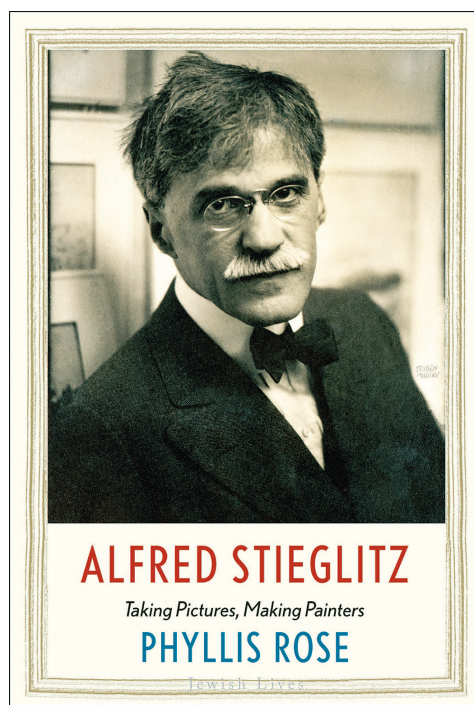
Shown is one image from Edward S. Curtis's *The North American Indian, Being a Series of Volumes Picturing and Describing the Indians of the United States and Alaska, Volume III*, 1908, which sold for \$10,625 (est. \$5000/7000). One of a planned edition of 500 copies, of which fewer than half came to fruition, this unnumbered copy has a provenance that traces it from Curtis to Frank Donohue, who worked as a sales representative engaged by Curtis. It descended from Donohue to the consignor.



Camera Work Number 36, published in 1911 and containing 17 Alfred Stieglitz photogravures, including *The Steerage* (shown), sold to a collector along with another Number 36 that lacked its plates for \$17,500 (est. \$18,000/22,000).



Camera Work Numbers 49 and 50, a double issue published in 1917 and featuring 11 photogravures by Paul Strand, including *Blind Woman, New York* (shown), fetched \$16,250 (est. \$10,000/15,000). The buyer was a collector.

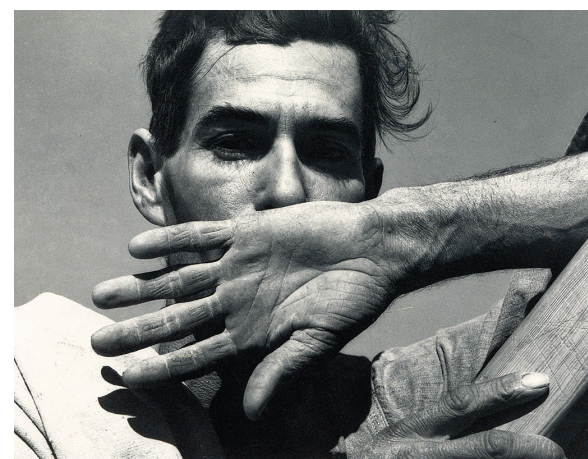


A composite horse-and-rider motion study by Eadweard Muybridge (1830-1904) achieved \$10,625 (est. \$8000/12,000). The 1881 albumen print has Muybridge's copyright and date on the back of the mount. The overall sheet measures 6 1/8" x 8 3/4".

Two new books about Alfred Stieglitz, his life, his art, and his relationships with other artists have recently been issued. One is Carolyn Burke's *Foursome: Alfred Stieglitz, Georgia O'Keeffe, Paul Strand, Rebecca Salsbury*. The other is Phyllis Rose's *Alfred Stieglitz: Taking Pictures, Making Painters*, whose cover art is pictured, featuring a photo by Edward Steichen. Each book is worth a reader's time. Of *Camera Work* and another Stieglitz-produced magazine, *291*, named for his gallery, Rose writes: "When he cleared out 291 [during World War I], there were thousands of magazines left, issues of both *Camera Work* and *291*, which he could find no one to buy at any appropriate price. He finally sold them to a ragpicker for \$5.80 and gave the money to his secretary, Marie Rapp, to buy a new pair of gloves."



This photograph by Alfred Eisenstadt (1898-1995) of waiters in the Grand Hotel dining room, St. Moritz, Switzerland, watching Sonja Henie skate brought \$5500 (est. \$2000/3000). The 12 1/4" x 17" silver print is signed twice by Eisenstadt; it also bears the title, dates, and Time Inc. notations, the copyright in an unknown hand, and a hand stamp denoting the edition 20/50. The 1932 image was printed in 1989.



Migratory Cotton Picker, Eloy, Arizona by Dorothea Lange (1895-1965) sold for \$15,000 (est. \$10,000/15,000). The image is from 1940; the 10 1/4" x 13 1/2" silver print is circa 1966, and the printer was identified in a 2003 appraisal as Edward Dyba.



Texas Springs, Death Valley by Edward Weston (1886-1958) sold for \$10,000 (est. \$9000/12,000). The 7½" x 9½" silver print of the 1938 image bears Weston's signature, title, and date in pencil on its reverse.



Hotshot Eastbound, Jaeger, West Virginia by O. Winston Link (1914-2001) sold for \$11,700 (est. \$6000/9000). Made in 1991 for the Danziger Gallery, the special oversize (20" x 24") silver print of Link's 1957 image bears his signature and printing notations, along with his copyright hand stamp and another hand stamp that reads: "This 20 x 24 print is one of a number that the Link Trust recovered from a successful sting operation that returned Conchita Hayes (Link) to prison and imprisoned her husband Ed Hayes as well." It is signed by Salem Tamer, trustee of the Link Revocable Trust, and editioned #4B of 16.

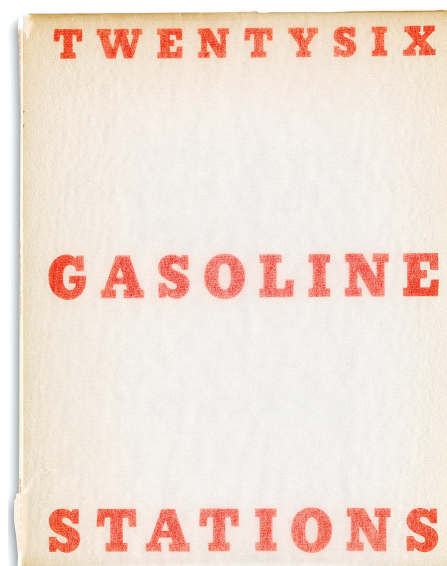


An oversize (15¼" x 19¾") selenium-toned silver print of *Petit's Mobile Station, Cherry Hill, N.J.* by George A. Tice (b. 1938) sold to a collector for \$13,750 (est. \$8000/12,000). It is signed by Tice with its title, dates, and printing notations all in Tice's distinctive block lettering. The 1974 image was printed in 1979.

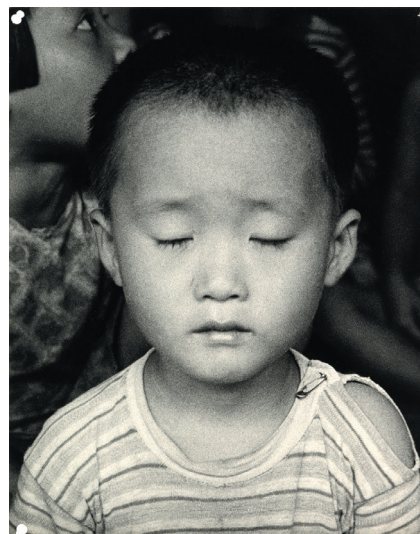
A Great Day in Harlem by Art Kane (1925-1995) sold for \$9375 (est. \$4000/6000). The image was made in 1958. The 16¼" x 23¾" silver print is from the 1980s.



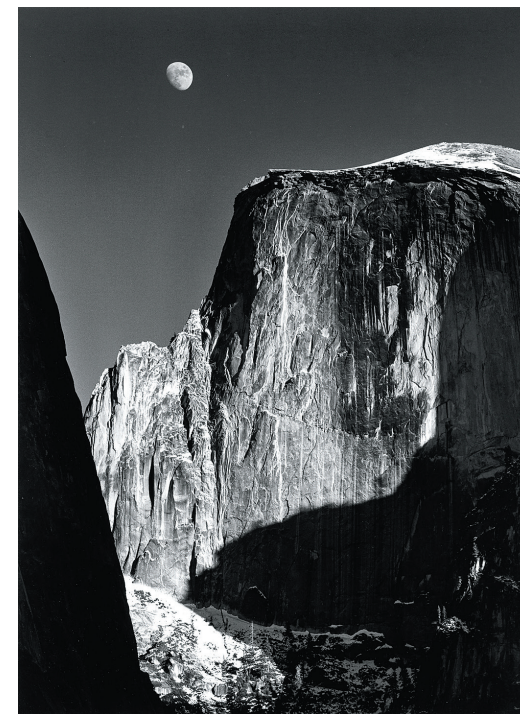
The Photojournalist (Dennis Stock), New York by Andreas Feininger (1906-1999) sold for \$10,625 (est. \$10,000/15,000). The 13½" x 10⅝" silver print bears Feininger's signature in ink. His credit, title, negative date, Time Inc. copyright, and printing notations are in pencil in an unknown hand. There is also the edition hand stamp with the notation "48/50+10." The 1951 image was printed in 1992. Stock, for his part, took the famous photo of James Dean in 1955 a few months before the actor's untimely death. It is the one in which Dean has pulled up his coat collar against the cold, hands in his pockets, a cigarette dangling from his lips, and shows Times Square in the background.



Five artist books by Edward Ruscha (b. 1937), including *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* (cover pictured), sold for \$2500 (est. \$2500/3500). This third, self-published edition was printed by the Cunningham Press of Alhambra, California, in 1969.



Korean Child by Dorothea Lange (1895-1965) sold for \$20,000 (est. \$20,000/30,000). The image is from 1958; the 19¾" x 15¾" silver print dates from the 1960s.



Moon and Half Dome, Yosemite National Park by Ansel Adams (1902-1984) sold to a collector for \$22,500 (est. \$10,000/15,000). The image is from 1960; the 19½" x 14¼" silver print from 1979 has Adams's signature and his Carmel hand stamp, along with title and dates.



An archive of 115 photographs documenting hairdos and doings at a beauty school in Winnipeg, Manitoba, in the 1950s and 1960s sold for \$5125 (est. \$1200/1800). The examples were mostly 8" x 10" silver prints. "That was a terrific price, and those hairdos were pretty terrific, too," said Kaplan.

