Photography
A Cultural History

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mounted PLATINUM PRINTS (called platinotypes in the period) with accompanying text by Emerson and his friend and traveling companion, the artist Thomas Frederick Goodall (1857–1944). Emerson's pictures emphasized the unchanged relationship of people to the land (Fig. 4.5).

Emerson was known as an eccentric art celebrity, whose ideas and work were controversial, like those of American painter James McNeill Whistler (1834–1903). When he rejected his own theory in a black-bordered pamphlet titled *The Death of Naturalistic Photography* (1890), the public was skeptical. Yet Emerson maintained that his early theory was based on a belief that tones in a photograph could be manipulated to a greater degree than chemists now proved possible. Having promoted art photography as a cutting-edge application of recent science, he cast it off because he saw it as limiting the individuality of the artist.

PICTORIALISM

Although Emerson wrote that he found much amateur and art photography pretentious, many practitioners ignored his insults, and based their ideas of art photography on his photographs, with their subdued middle-gray tones, soft focus, and peaceful, agrarian subjects. Amateurs of art photography creatively misunderstood Emerson's writings to authorize moving away from faithful depiction toward more evocative and expressive photographs. The resulting international photographic movement known as Pictorialism gathered strength in the mid-1880s, peaked in the 1900s, and persisted into the 1920s.

Pictorialists adopted Emerson's disgust with industrialization and mass-produced goods, as well as his belief in photography as a full-fledged modern art form. They embraced his choice of subjects, but jettisoned allegiance to

4.6 (right)
JANE REECE,
***The Poinsettia Girl (Self- Portrait)*, 1907.**
Sepia-toned gelatin silver print. Dayton Art Institute, Dayton, Ohio.

Reece lived in New York City for a time in 1909, and exhibited her work with the Photo-Secession.[16] Her mingling of contemporary art styles was typical of Pictorialists, who, like earlier nineteenth-century photographers, allied themselves with art in other media.

recent science. In Pictorialist hands, Emerson's selective or differential focus became a dislike of the distracting details associated with vulgar commercial photography. Pictorial photographers often overlaid large parts of a picture with shadow and fog. In contrast to their simple subjects, they strove for tonal complexity choosing techniques such as platinum printing that yielded abundant soft, middle-gray tones. They favored procedures that allowed for handworking of both negatives and prints. Their results were in obvious visual opposition to the sharp black-and-white contrasts of the commercial print. Pictorial photographs were frequently printed on textured paper, unlike the glossy surface of commercial photographs, so that they resembled watercolors, and evoked the earlier Victorian photographs of David Octavius Hill and Julia Margaret Cameron (see pp. 70–72 and p. 158), which they admired and exhibited.

Pictorialists valued the symbolic control over industry, and a sense of superiority over the snapshooters, who did not even develop their own film. One Pictorialist asserted that "the photographer is not helpless before the mechanical means at his disposal. He can master them as he may choose, and he can make the lens see with his eyes, can make the plate receive his impressions."[14] Pictorialist writing encouraged a self-image of cultural heroism, striking back at the worst of the modern world. In his influential 1901 book, *Photography as a Fine Art*, critic Charles H. Caffin (1854–1918) described the "men and women who are seeking to lift photography to the level of one of the Fine Arts" as "'advanced photographers'," and Alfred Stieglitz (1864–1946), who would emerge as the foremost art photographer, as an "artist, prophet, pathfinder."[15]

As Emerson's justification of selective focus—that is, to match the way the eyes see—faded from currency, the writings of Henry Peach Robinson, which Emerson strongly disliked, were devoured by a new generation. Robinson, best known for his combination prints (see p. 155), was probably even more responsible for popularizing the word "pictorial" than Emerson. His book *Pictorial Effect in Photography*, first published in 1869, was still read at the turn of the century. A few photographers made elaborate *tableaux vivants* of Old Master paintings, extending Robinson's own practice. Serious amateurs, as they were called, sometimes blended contemporary styles and themes in their work. Jane Reece (c. 1869–1961), a

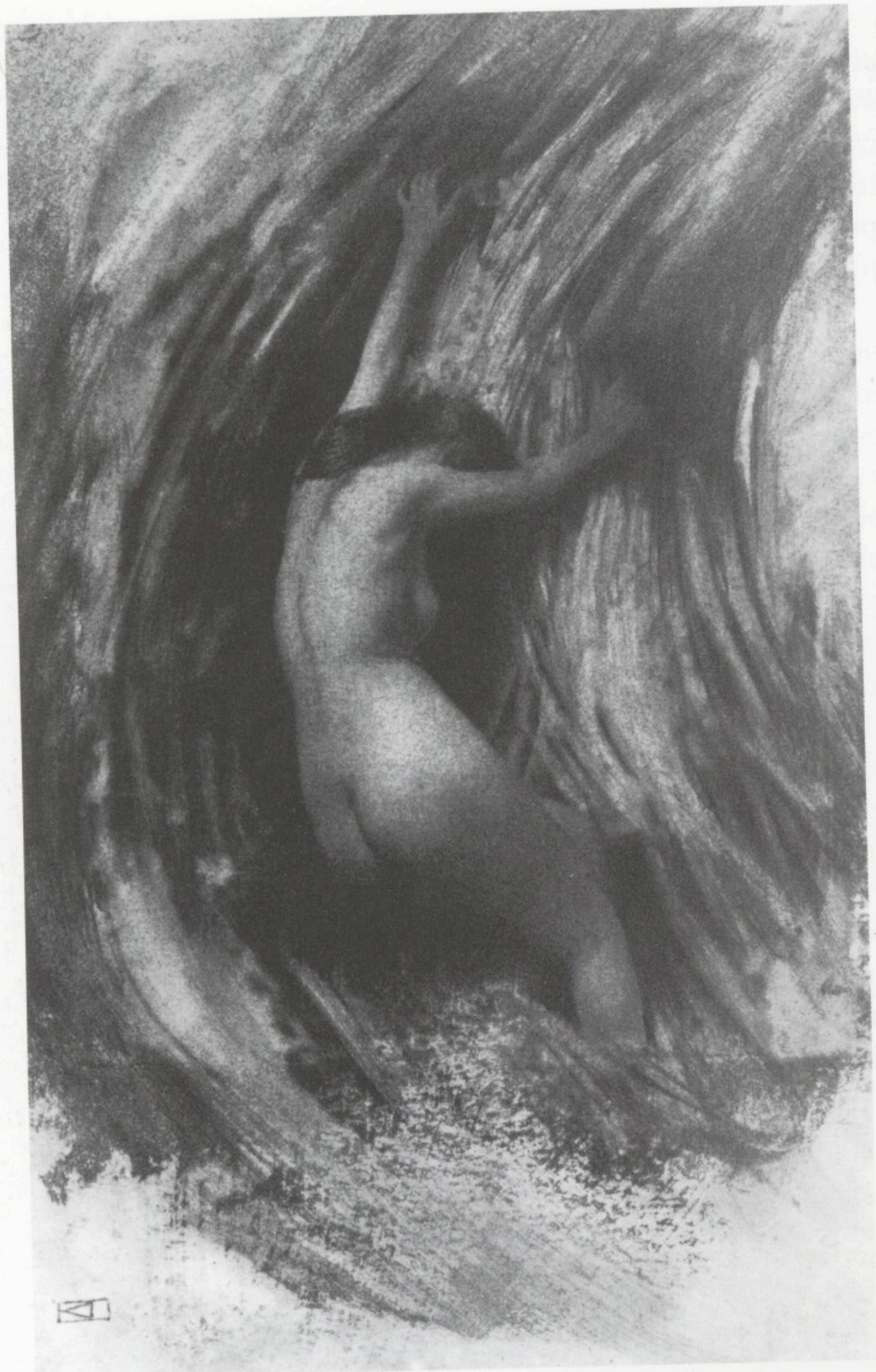
commercial portraitist in Dayton, Ohio, combined turn-of-the-century interest in Japanese prints, with their flattened space, and the principle that one should beautify the experience of everyday life, an idea promoted by the Arts and Crafts movement and the followers of Art Nouveau (Fig. 4.6).

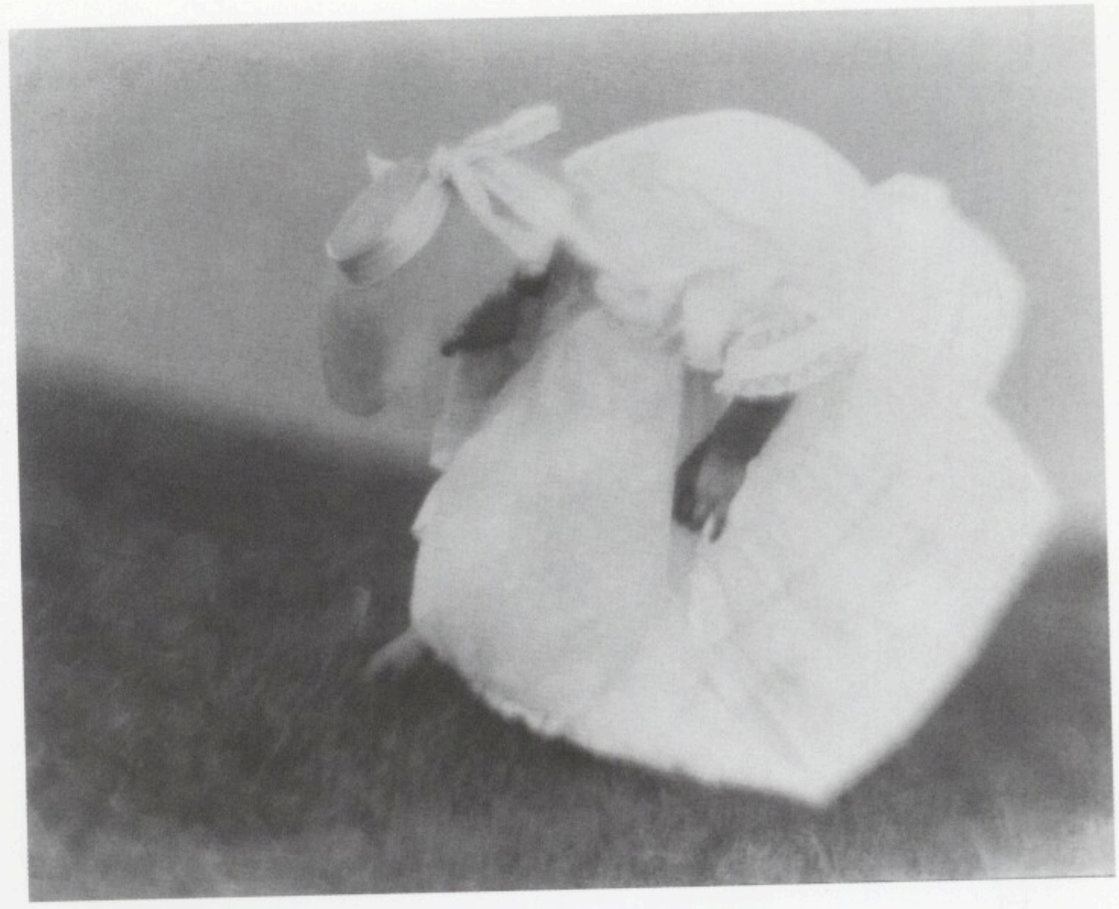
To Emerson's annoyance, another British photographer, George Davison (1854–1930), expanded upon Emerson's theories and promoted an imprecise notion of impressionistic photography. Whereas Impressionism, the French art movement of the 1870s–80s, aimed at capturing a momentary visual imprint of a scene, impressionistic photography attempted to render a personal response to a subject. Soon the words, "poetic," "art," "naturalistic," and "impressionistic" all came to signal Pictorial photography, exemplified by Davison's *The Onion Field* (Fig. 4.7). Unlike Emerson's work, where the main subject was in focus, the entire surface of *The Onion Field* is indistinct. Davison thus shifted the foundations of art photography from science to art. Yet the "fuzzygraph," as Pictorial photographs were mockingly called, helped foster the photographic industry, as commercial manufacturers produced soft-focus lenses and textured photographic papers for amateur use.

Emerson's renunciation of naturalistic photography did not stop him making pictures or criticizing the growing popularity of the GUM-BICHROMATE PROCESS that made it possible to add pigment and texture to a print. French photographer Robert Demachy (1859–1936) promoted the technique in influential articles and worked extensively in it himself (Fig. 4.8). Another proponent of so-called gum printing was German photographer Heinrich Kühn (1866–1944), whose painterly photographs using the technique vexed viewers at the first amateur photographic exhibition held in Berlin (1896) (Fig. 4.9). Like Emerson, Kühn was a scientist and a doctor, but his training did not lead him to a scientifically based theory of art.

4.7
GEORGE DAVISON, *The Onion Field*, 1889, from *Camera Work*, January 1907. Photogravure. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

The blur in Davison's image was produced using a PINHOLE CAMERA, which softened edges and imparted a dreamy haze not necessarily present at the time of exposure. Printed as a GRAVURE, a technique favored by Pictorialists because it suppressed detail, the image seems to have flowed into the fabric of the paper on which it is printed.





4.8 (left)
ROBERT DEMACHY, *Struggle*, from *Camera Work*, January 1904. Photogravure. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Gum printing allowed Demachy to demonstrate that a camera's image was only the starting point for the production of an artwork. Like a painter, the photographer could use a brush or other instruments to alter and color a scene.

4.9 (above)
HEINRICH KÜHN, *On the Hillside*, 1910. Gum bichromate print. Gilman Paper Company Collection, New York.

Pictorialists' conservative philosophical outlook was sometimes countered by experiments with pictorial space. In this image, the background all but disappears, and the figure is pushed to the foreground, as in a Japanese print.

With photographers Hans Watzek (1848–1903) and Hugo Henneberg (1863–1918), Kühn exhibited under the name Das Kleeblatt (The Trifolium, or Cloverleaf, referring both to the three-lobed leaf, and the three-part window of Gothic architecture). Kühn moved easily between groups of European photographers and painters. American-born Frank Eugene (1865–1936) was equally international. He sometimes combined photography and printmaking (Fig. 4.10), and favored dreamy views of leisured women enjoying nature, a popular theme in Pictorial photography. In 1906, he moved to Germany, where he made both paintings and photographs.

Like Art Nouveau artists in Europe and America, the Pictorialists raised aesthetic experience to a paramount life goal. From their point of view, what was needed was aesthetic reform of the whole society, and they hoped to start the process by banishing the harsh and unsightly realm of industry from their

4.10 (right)
FRANK EUGENE, *Adam and Eve*, 1910, from *Camera Work*, April 1910. Photogravure. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Eugene scratched his photographic negative with obvious etching needle marks, creating a hybrid between photography and print-making. His method shocked photographers, printmakers, and painters, who objected to the mixing of techniques and to Eugene's refusal to make seamless illusions.

4.11
SERGEI LOBOVIKOV, *The Widow's Pillow*, c. 1900. Bromoil and varnish. Mikhail Golosovskii Collection, Krasnogorsk, Russia.

Despite the blurry image, the woman's raised hand makes clear that she has endured a life of manual labor. She clutches a bundle of straw gleaned, perhaps, from the field before her.

work. Pictorialism created international networks of artists and amateurs. In Russia Sergei Lobovikov (1870–1942) adopted it to render traditional peasant life, not as ethnographic data, but as an expression of nostalgia for nature and simpler times (Fig. 4.11). Like other Pictorialists, Lobovikov worked with gum bichromate and made platinum prints; he also favored the BROMOIL PROCESS, which allowed him to apply color to the print with a brush. In Japan, the Pictorial look dominated portraits, street scenes, landscapes, and ethnographic photography until the mid-1930s, when it finally gave way to the pressures of modernism and abstraction.

MOVEMENTS AND MAGAZINES

The first photographic associations brought together people with diverse interests and occupations. Their publications covered subjects from art exhibits and travel to technical instructions and new commercial products. In