

Modern Photography

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

The Pictorialist movement of the 19th century began to fade as modern photography came into play. This lesson covers:



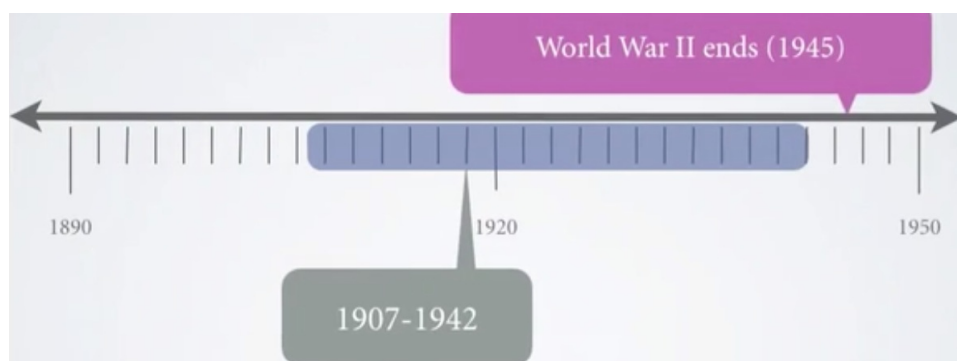
BIG IDEA

Modern photography was both an extension of and departure from the Pictorialist movement of the 19th century.

1. Period and Location: Modern Photography

The photography explored in this lesson dates from between 1907 and 1942, as highlighted in the timeline below. You will learn about photography from various geographic locations, including:

- New York City—Home of Alfred Stieglitz
- Big Sur California—Where Edward Weston lived and died
- San Francisco, California—Where Imogen Cunningham lived and died and where Ansel Adams was born in 1902



2. “The Steerage”

In a previous lesson on 19th-century photography, you learned that photographers developed a style of photography called pictorials. This style imitated the style of prints and paintings in an attempt to have photography considered a true art form. Alfred Stieglitz was part of this movement, and he devoted his life to promoting photography as an art form. In the process, he established a group known as the **Photo-Secession**

as well as a journal known as **Camera Work**.

During the 20th century, there was a movement to promote the photograph as its own art form. In other words, there was no longer an attempt to imitate prints or paintings. Photographers captured their subjects in staged occasions known as **photo sessions**.

One of the first examples of this is Stieglitz's photograph, *The Steerage*, which artistically frames an image of people in the steerage section, or the lower levels, of a passenger ship. This is an important image, marking the shift from Pictorialism to the acceptance of photography as an independent art form gaining significant traction within the art community.

➔ **EXAMPLE** Below is this photograph, titled “The Steerage.”



The Steerage by Alfred Stieglitz

1907

Photograph



TERMS TO KNOW

Photo-Secession

An early 20th-century movement founded by Alfred Stieglitz that involved the promotion of photography as a form of art.

Camera Work

An early 20th-century magazine published by Alfred Stieglitz that featured the artwork of the most important photographers from that period.

Photo Session

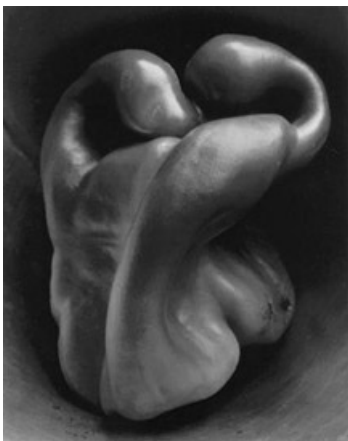
A term that is used to describe an occasion where a photographer will take professional photographs.

3. “Pepper No. 30”

A movement completely opposed to Pictorialism developed early in the 20th century called **straight photography**. It was largely promoted by a photographer named Paul Strand, who was inspired by Cubism and took ordinary objects and made them appear abstract through cropping. Cropping is essentially cutting off portions of the picture. Strand displayed his work within Stieglitz’s journal *Camera Work*, which was portraying more and more examples of modern photography.

Straight photography departed from the pictorialist emphasis on assembling a composition and instead kept images largely unaltered by relying on photographic technique. The work of Edward Weston is a great example of this in how he chose subjects, such as food, nudes, seashells, and other familiar objects, and photographed them in a way that made them appear abstract.

➞ **EXAMPLE** Below is an example of photography, *Pepper No. 30*, by Edward Weston.



Pepper No. 30 by Edward Weston

1930

Photograph



TERM TO KNOW

Straight Photography

A style of photography focused on capturing realistic images using unaltered prints.

4. “Succulent”

Weston and photographers Imogen Cunningham and Ansel Adams were members of a group called **f/64**,

which promoted straight photography over Pictorialism. It involved the unique aspect of western American themes.

➔ **EXAMPLE** One of the first examples is Cunningham's "Succulent" photo.



Succulent by Imogen Cunningham

1920

Photograph

This photograph displays careful attention to clear focus, sharp focus, and contrast of light and dark to frame the image. It is a wonderful example of how the photographer's skill can elevate an image from merely pedestrian to high art, in much the same way as the work of earlier still-life painters.



TERM TO KNOW

f/64 Group

A group of photographers in the San Francisco area who were united by a similar style of sharply-focused compositions.

5. "The Tetons and the Snake River"

Likely the most famous photographer to emerge from this group is Ansel Adams.

Take a look below at an image of Hudson River School from the 19th century.



The Tetons and the Snake River by Ansel Adams

1942

Photograph

Adams's photographs of the majestic beauty in unadulterated nature brought awareness to the American public of the breathtaking grandeur of the American landscape. His work remains closely associated with the environmental group The Sierra Club, who successfully lobbied for the preservation of millions of acres of the American wilderness, thanks in part to the photography of Ansel Adams.



SUMMARY

As modern photography grew in popularity, the pictorialist movement of the 19th century began to fade. In this lesson, you learned about the **period and location of modern photography**. In doing so, you explored examples that included:

- **“The Steerage”**—An image of the lower levels of a boat that marks the shift from pictorials to the acceptance of photography as an art form
- **“Pepper No. 30”**—An example of straight photography by Paul Strand
- **“Succulent”**—Imogen Cunningham’s photograph
- **“The Tetons and the Snake River”**—a photograph by Ansel Adams



TERMS TO KNOW

Camera Work

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Photo Session

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Photo-Secession

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Straight Photography

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