

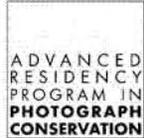


# **The Photographs of Alvin Langdon Coburn at George Eastman House**

## **A Characterization Study of Materials and Techniques**

**Valentina Branchini** | 5<sup>th</sup> Cycle Fellow, 2007-2009  
**Grant Romer** | Director of the Advanced Residency Program, Advisor

George Eastman House | Rochester, August 2009



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*This is a study of the Alvin Langdon Coburn holdings at George Eastman House, which consist of photographs, apparatus and manuscripts bequeathed by Coburn in 1966.*

*Examination and intersection of these collections have provided elements for reconstructing the photographer's working method and an insight of cause-and-effect relationships of materials, processes and aesthetics in his works. Methods of analysis and tools developed within the photograph conservation context have furnished the basis for a proper reading and estimation of technical features and deterioration present in photographs of the Edwardian era.*

*This study, which is an exercise in the newly evolving materials-based art history of fine photography, proves that photograph characterization research brings a significant contribution to the art-historical understanding and the preservation of Alvin Langdon Coburn's heritage.*

*Although extensively investigated, the Coburn holdings at George Eastman House still allow for new paths of research, as it is proven by the body of negatives on Cristoid film and by two lesser-known series of portraiture within the photographer's production, that this study has examined and put together.*

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## Acknowledgements



This research has been possible thanks to many people.

First and foremost, I wish to thank Grant Romer, who suggested the project and constantly guided me throughout its development.

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## Introduction



Gertrude Käsebier, *Alvin Langdon Coburn*, ca. 1907.  
George Eastman House.  
© George Eastman House

At George Eastman House, the collection of Alvin Langdon Coburn (1882-1966) is worthy of special mention. It was brought to the Museum through the solicitation of Beaumont Newhall.<sup>1</sup> In the late 1940s, Newhall began a regular correspondence with Coburn when the artist had been almost forgotten, having dropped out of the photographic scene in the 1920s. The interest of Newhall led to a revival of Coburn's fame and eventually to his bequest to the Museum. This gift arrived in 1967 and comprises more than 18,000 negatives, almost 2,000 prints with related cameras and lenses, books featuring the photographer's works, plus his correspondence, manuscripts, scrapbooks, articles, ephemera and some personal possessions. It is an extraordinary resource for anyone interested in the history of 20<sup>th</sup>-century photography and the transition from Pictorialism to Modernism. Coburn intended it to be the foundation for studying his life work in photography, and indeed the collection has been largely investigated with that purpose. Nonetheless, the amount and variety of its materials, as well as the richness of Coburn's relationships within the culture of the Edwardian era, still permit and reward innumerable inquiries, by no means limited to the field of photography.

Alvin Langdon Coburn was born in Boston in 1882. He began taking photographs at the age of eight and as a teenager he manifested a striking talent in

<sup>1</sup> Beaumont Newhall (1928-1993) served as the curator and director of the International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House during the formative years of the institution, from 1948 to 1971. Before working at George Eastman House, in 1937 Newhall had mounted the first comprehensive retrospective of the first hundred years of photography at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, where from 1940 to 1945 he was the founding director of the photography department.

photographic printing. At the age of seventeen, thanks to the encouragement and aid of his distant cousin F. Holland Day, he could show his prints in London within the exhibitions of the ‘New School of American Pictorial Photography’ and the British-based Brotherhood of the Linked Ring, the two most radical movements working with photography and striving to promote it as a fine art. Coburn was introduced by the well-established F. Holland Day to Pictorialists emerging in Europe and to Frederick H. Evans, a former bookseller who had devoted himself to photography and produced pure, unaltered platinum prints of architectural interiors. In America, Coburn worked for a year with Gertrude Käsebier and joined the Photo-Secession founded by Alfred Stieglitz. In 1906, the Royal Photographic Society invited the young American to give a one-man show in London, for which George Bernard Shaw wrote the catalog preface. This established Coburn’s fame in England where, throughout the first two decades of the century, the photographer worked indefatigably and with success, producing memorable portraits of celebrities, revolutionary landscapes and abstract compositions. Despite never giving up photography, in the 1920s Coburn retired to Wales and lived a contemplative, inner life pursuing mysticism and freemasonry until his death in 1966.

Before coming to Rochester, my knowledge of Coburn was minimal. Soon after the beginning of the Advanced Residency Program in Photograph Conservation (ARP), I commenced my survey of the Coburn photographs at George Eastman House, triggered by a series of classes that Grant Romer was giving to the fellows on the connoisseurship in fine art photography. My aim was to contribute to the Wiki resource that Luisa Casella and Grant Romer had created during the 4<sup>th</sup> cycle of the ARP, for compiling and illustrating relevant information that characterizes a photographer's work.<sup>2</sup> My research would be an exercise to develop methodology in the newly evolving materials-based art history of photography, an

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<sup>2</sup> The Photograph Connoisseurship Resource begun by Luisa Casella has evolved in the “Notes on Photographs” website at [www.notesonphotographs.org](http://www.notesonphotographs.org).

approach that had recently emerged out of photograph conservation research, encouraged by the need for higher expertise to assess authenticity.



Two variants of the portrait by Alvin Langdon Coburn, *George Meredith and Family*, 1904, George Eastman House. © George Eastman House

I started my research with a systematic inspection of the Coburn prints in the Museum holdings. Due to my background as an art historian, my instinctive approach to photographs was to look primarily at images and indeed, such a survey was an opportunity to become familiar with Coburn's aesthetics and iconography. However, this exercise, combined with the training received daily at the ARP and the contact with an extraordinary community of human and material resources in Rochester, taught me also to observe the variety of techniques and peculiarities that those photographs manifested. By examining, comparing and contrasting different prints showing the same image, I came to appreciate alterations in tonal values, in sharpness and contrast, in surface sheen and texture, in trimming, mounting, and in condition. Such discernments, which are obvious for one experienced in photography, were to me valuable steps of a learning process within a discipline that I had only partially touched.

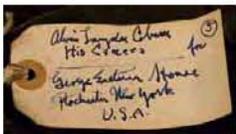
Naturally, these considerations opened further questions, concerning how the photographs had been produced, how much they complied with the creator's intent, what in their physical and chemical structure made them dissimilar from or similar to other photographs from the same period or aesthetics, and what in their current look was due to deterioration. The existing literature published on Coburn had not focused specifically on such technical aspects. Important studies such as Nancy Newhall's essay (1962),<sup>3</sup> Mike Weaver's monograph (1986),<sup>4</sup> the catalog of the retrospective exhibition organized by George Eastman House (1998-1999),<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Alvin Langdon Coburn, *A Portfolio of Sixteen Photographs by Alvin Langdon Coburn*, introduction by Nancy Newhall (Rochester, N.Y.: George Eastman House, 1962).

<sup>4</sup> Mike Weaver, *Alvin Langdon Coburn Symbolist Photographer, 1882-1966: Beyond the Craft* (New York: Aperture Foundation, 1986).

<sup>5</sup> Pamela G. Roberts, *Alvin Langdon Coburn*, in Sheila J. Foster, Manfred Heiting, Rachel Stuhlman, *Imagining Paradise: The Richard and Ronay Menschel Library at George Eastman House, Rochester* (Rochester, NY: George Eastman House; Göttingen: Steidl, 2007): 218-241. See also Pamela G. Roberts, *Alvin Langdon Coburn 1882-1966* (Rochester, NY: 31 Studio, Gloucester and George Eastman House, 2002).

Pamela G. Roberts' study about Coburn's published and unpublished books and albums in the collection of the Richard and Ronay Menschel Library (2007),<sup>6</sup> along with Coburn's autobiography edited by Helmut and Alison Gernsheim (1966),<sup>7</sup> had not produced a unified assessment that brought together an understanding of Coburn's aesthetics and his choice of materials and techniques. The photographs of Alvin Langdon Coburn had been studied mostly as images, although the photographer had virtually explored every process available at his time. Building an understanding of Coburn's photographs from a materials-based standpoint would deepen knowledge and appreciation of those works in line with the author's will. It would also enrich an art-historical interpretation by illustrating how aesthetics and techniques are interdependent in photography and how differing working methods can produce individual and varying expressions.



Case of the reflex camera owned by Coburn, and detail of the attached tag, George Eastman House. © George Eastman House

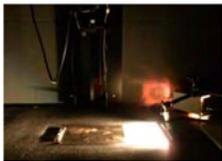
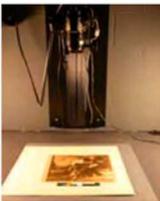
In order to clarify the above-mentioned points, I aimed my inquiry in different directions. In addition to the examination of original prints, I started to look at negatives, acquainted myself with literature written by, and on Coburn and other Pictorialists, and worked toward getting a comprehensive knowledge of Coburn's bequest by studying its various components. Direct contact with the photographs and books produced by Coburn, with the letters exchanged with his contemporaries, and with the objects that were part of his life, provide the researcher with an intimate access to the artist's life and personality. Coburn was aware of that and shaped his legacy to posterity accordingly, through a systematic selection and arrangement of the materials. This became clear to me in the numerous autograph notations which had recorded dates and descriptions on photographs, identified names of correspondents on the envelopes kept with letters, labeled pieces of equipment - "Alvin Langdon Coburn/ His Camera" read a tag that I found written in his hand, attached to a camera case. Intersecting these

<sup>6</sup> Catalog of the exhibition by Marianne Fulton, Karl Steinorth, Nancy Newhall *et al.*, *Alvin Langdon Coburn, 1900-1924* (Zurich: Edition Stemmle, 1998). Previously, George Eastman House had organized the 1977-1978 exhibition *Alvin Langdon Coburn, 1882-1966*.

<sup>7</sup> *Alvin Langdon Coburn Photographer: An Autobiography with Over 70 Reproductions of His Works*, ed. by Helmut and Alyson Gernsheim (London: Faber & Faber; New York: Praeger, 1966).

differing materials has been delightful and has furnished me with a sound basis upon which to corroborate conjectures, while consulting Coburn's works.

During my fellowship at George Eastman House I have been able to examine approximately 1,500 Coburn originals from the Museum collection, not counting his prints included in books, and have repeatedly perused through his 18,000 negatives reproduced in the cataloging system. Additionally, I have examined Coburn's works held in other institutions: at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Fine Arts Museum, Boston, the Library of Congress, and the National Media Museum in Bradford, England. These collections constitute an extraordinary repertoire of techniques, materials and aesthetic trends adopted by Coburn throughout his career that had not been thoroughly identified, compared and connected. At his most creative period of working, Coburn utilized many processes and materials (platinum print, gum-platinum print, gelatin silver print, photogravure, and the little known Cristoid film), which lent themselves for manipulation, producing individual and variant expressions.



Documentation in normal, raking and axial light.  
© George Eastman House

This research put into use my past experience in art history, transferring it to fine art photography. In my examination of Coburn's originals, I realized that in many aspects those photographs could be studied very much like paintings or drawings. Coburn's "hand" turned out to be detectable in many of his negatives and prints: retouching, attempts to mend tears or losses, inscriptions, marks, manufacture of mountings could all be discerned as autograph features and, if composed together, would provide valuable information about a creative process otherwise impalpable in photographs. At the same time, the variety of materials to characterize helped me to build a personal command of the methods and tools of analysis largely developed in the conservation context, which are invaluable in providing a proper reading and estimation of technical features and deterioration present in photographs of the Edwardian era. The two approaches brought together have furnished me with a better understanding of photography.

This report focuses on three aspects of Alvin Langdon Coburn's *oeuvre*. In the first section, the photographer's working method is elucidated in some selected works that can give an overall view of materials and techniques adopted by Coburn throughout his career. Comparative study of such works was integrated with evidence provided by primary sources held at George Eastman House, such as technology and correspondence and writings from the artist, many of which had never been published. Additionally, some of the prints were characterized physically, through photo-documentation with various lighting techniques and magnification, and chemically, through x-ray fluorescence spectrometry (XRF).

The second section illustrates conservation issues commonly related to Coburn's prints, on the basis of observations collected during my survey of originals and of two conservation treatments that I carried out, here enclosed in Appendix V.

The third section identifies two lesser known subject series within Coburn's portraiture: the *Musicians of Mark*, that the photographer intended to publish as a book but it never reached that stage, and the multiple-exposure portraits, of which George Eastman House holds a considerable group of negatives that were never printed or thoroughly studied.

Two side projects originated from this research and they are shown in addenda: the Coburn Correspondence Digitization Project, which I designed and supervised for making such assets accessible, and the survey of the "Redundant Alvin Langdon Coburn Material," that is, photogravures in multiple versions at George Eastman House, separate from the permanent collection. Both projects were carried out on my own initiative and, have greatly contributed to my insight of Coburn's life, activity and bequest to the Museum.

This study can serve as the starting point for a *catalogue raisonné* of Coburn's works, a project in which I have an interest. It can also be intended as a test for creating a methodology applicable to other photographers from the Edwardian era.

## 1 | Alvin Langdon Coburn's Working Method

The manuscripts collection bequeathed by Coburn to George Eastman House contains significant information about the photographer's working method. It consists of correspondence that Coburn exchanged with his contemporaries and of writings in different formats: handwritten or typed notes, lists and essays. The majority of them are related to Coburn's autobiography, a project to which the photographer passionately devoted his last years, and thanks to Helmut and Alison Gernsheim's collaboration he could see published in 1966, shortly before his death.<sup>8</sup> Although most of these writings are, as Gernsheim described, "disjointed notes on this and that, presenting no continuous life story that one could polish,"<sup>9</sup> still they reveal information that was not included in the book and can provide a better understanding of how Coburn utilized technology and produced his photographs. Excerpts from those and other manuscripts will be therefore quoted in this section, serving as reference and comparison for some pieces of equipment and for photographs selected from the George Eastman House collection.

This typewritten manuscript *Photography Through the Years* might have been the draft for an article that was never published. Coburn wrote it around 1954,<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *Alvin Langdon Coburn Photographer: An Autobiography with Over 70 Reproductions of His Works*, ed. by Helmut and Alyson Gernsheim (London: Faber & Faber; New York: Praeger, 1966). A second enlarged edition was published in 1978 (New York: Dover Publications), with an introduction by Helmut Gernsheim and five extra works reproduced.

<sup>9</sup> Helmut Gernsheim, "Introduction to the Dover Edition," in *Alvin Langdon Coburn, Photographer: An Autobiography with Over 70 Reproductions of His Works* (New York: Dover Publications, 1978): vii.

<sup>10</sup> The text starts: "If someone told you that he had been using a camera for over sixty-four years" and continues "I began photography in the year 1890 on June 11<sup>th</sup>."

providing a rather detailed description of materials he had been using in 1905, when he “had become quite a finished technician, a regular exhibitor in the Annual Photographic Exhibitions in London and elsewhere, with a “One Man Show” at the Royal Photographic Society in the offing!”



Alvin Langdon Coburn,  
A Tree in Greyfriars  
Churchyard, Edinburgh, 1905,  
George Eastman House.  
© George Eastman House

*“I was a strong lad on those days, and would you believe it, my weapon was a 10 x 8 stand camera, with six double dark slides loaded with Cristoid cut films (now no longer made) and a large bright green focusing cloth, under which I disappeared prior to each exposure. Cristoid films, by the way, had no celluloid backing, but just two superimposed layers of gelatine, one slower than the other. When they were put into the developer they went into a kind of pulp! It was like developing a jelly-fish! You dried them on ferrotyped plates such as those upon which, in those ancient days, you dried glossy prints, if you made them. You started with a 10 x 8 Cristoid but by the time you were finished it had stretched to 12 x 10; but they had a wonderful quality - great depth of tone, and no halation. The early 1905 negatives of the Edinburgh book were made on these films. I also used a soft focus lense which was especially made for me. This gave a kind of stereoscopic effect. The results seemed impressionistic if you looked at them too closely, but from a little distance they appeared sharper than prints of the F.64 variety. They were especially suitable for exhibition work, and I used this type of lense almost exclusively in those days, and it was thus armed that I descended upon Edinburgh in 1905.”*

Cristoid film was patented by J.T. Sandell in 1899 and put on the market in December of that year.<sup>11</sup> It was made of hardened gelatin cast into a sheet, devoid of any glass or plastic support. A fast, very light sensitive silver gelatin emulsion was cast on top of a slow, relatively insensitive one, thick enough to do away with any base. The two superimposed emulsions bonded together and acted in tandem. They formed a perfectly flat film, not very easily distinguishable from a rollable celluloid film, except for its greater degree of opacity. Cristoid film was supplied in cut sizes and in spools, with black paper ends for use in a daylight changing roll-holder. Every method used with other films could be applied to it.

<sup>11</sup> “Ealing Photographic Society,” *The British Journal of Photography*, v. 46, n. 2065 (December 1, 1899): 766.

PHOTOGRAPHY THROUGH THE YEARS

by Alvin Langdon Coburn.

If someone told you that he had been using a camera for over sixty-four years, and was still as keen as ever on the Art, would you believe him? Perhaps not, but you would be wrong, for it is not only true, but the person in question is a very intimate friend of mine, in fact he is none other than myself!

I began photography in the year 1890 on June 11th. I remember the date well because it happened to be my birthday, and my favorite uncle then gave me for a present a Kodak, one of the earliest made by that now famous firm. Its size was 5 x 4 and it was of the "box" type, and had to be loaded in a dark room with a strip of fifty films, which also had to be taken out in a dark room! The "daylight loading films" of today had not yet been invented!

The shutter was set by pulling up a little button attached to a piece of cat-gut, similar to a violin string. When you pressed the button, it released a spring, and cat-gut and button flew back into their place and the exposure was made.

The shutter was not very fast, something like a fifth of a second, so that you had to hold your box very steadily. In my first exposure which was of our neighbor's little dog, he being a friendly little animal, had several tails! Such was my beginning.

Let us now move forward to 1905, fifteen years later, when I had become quite a finished technician, a regular exhibitor in the Annual Photographic Exhibitions in London and elsewhere, with a "One Man Show" at the Royal Photographic Society in the offing!

It was in that year that I began to make the illustrations to Robert Louis Stevenson's "Edinburgh: Picturesque Notes".

I read it and re-read it, and gloated over its lovely descriptions of one of the most romantically beautiful cities in the world, and then decided to illustrate it by photography.

I was a strong lad in those days, and would you believe it, my weapon was a 10 x 8 stand camera, with six double dark slides loaded with "Cristoid" cut films (now no longer made) and a large bright green focussing cloth, under which I disappeared prior to each exposure.

"Cristoid" films, by the way, had no celuloyd backing, but just two superimposed layers of gelatine, one slower than the other. When they were put into the developer they went into a kind of pulp! It was like developing a jelly-fish! You dried them on ferro<sup>v</sup>type plates such as those upon which, in those ancient days, you dried glossy prints, if you made them.

You started with a 10 x 8 "Cristoid" but by the time you were finished <sup>it</sup> ~~they~~ had stretched to 12 x 10; but they had a wonderful quality - great depth of tone, and no halation.

The early 1905 negatives of the Edinburgh book were ~~xxxxxx~~ made on these films.

I also used a "soft focus lense" which was especially made for me. This gave a kind of stereoscopic effect. The results seemed impressionistic if you looked at them too closely, but from a little distance they appeared sharper than prints of the F.64 variety. They were especially suitable for exhibition work, and I used this

type of lense almost exclusively in those days, and it was thus armed that I descended upon Edinburgh in 1905.

Yes, I usually had a procession of small and persistent children following me through the "Old Town", but they were not unfriendly, just curious! I even made use of them in some of my exposures, and it is quite possible that the little girl sitting on the steps in the 1905 version of White Horse Close, might very well be the grandmother of the children playing in the 1950 picture of the same courtyard - so time marches on!

One of my favorite illustrations in the early series was that of two cats seated on a tomb in Greyfriars Churchyard: "all sleek and fat and complacently blinking, as if they had fed on strange meats" as Stevenson rather gruesomely puts it!

How I managed to get the cats to pose for me, is a wonder to me still. I just waited and waited until at last I succeeded.

Greyfriars Churchyard is a most strangely beautiful spot. It is as if the years had forgotten it. Probably it had not greatly changed since Stevenson knew it.

When ever I go back to Edinburgh, I always read Stevensons chapter on Greyfriars, and then pay a pious pilgrimage to my favorite haunt, to meditate on the past, and upon the transiency of mortality.

Every so often I have gone back to Edinburgh, and each time I have made a few more photographs for the book.

Photography is ever thus. It will not let you forget it. Once you are really inoculated with the germ, you can never be free of it. Nor do you especially wish to be so freed, for photography gives you

"an eye for beauty". It makes you look at life from another angle, for there are pictures everywhere, but we often pass them by unheeded until we take to photography.

Edinburgh is a photographer's paradise, with its atmosphere, its romance, its quaint sun-lit corners, its constant surprises. And Stevenson is the most perfect initiator into its mysteries.

I often regret that I never met Stevenson. He had left for the South Seas before I ever visited Edinburgh, so the best I could do was to illustrate, by means of photography, his little gem of prose.

I venture to believe that if the happy thoughts of the happy soul of R. L. S. should now turn to his native town, that he would think of it in much the same way that I have photographed it! Perhaps this is visionary, perhaps it is presumptuous, I do not know or care. It is the way I feel about it!

My most recent visit to my old haunts in Edinburgh was in 1950 when I spent a month there, and found that the combination of Edinburgh and photography, or shall we say photography and Edinburgh had lost, for me, none of its associational charm.

The cats (bless them) still sat "complacently blinking" on the Greyfriars Tombs, and the washing still hung out of the adjacent windows, flapping against funereal sculpture. The Castle still towered majestically above the city, a thing of ever-changing and dramatic beauty. On a windy day, rosy-cheeked Scottish lassies still graced the pavements of Princess Street, while tourists and the hero worshipers of Scott and Stevenson still explored the mysterious closes of the Royal Mile.

Some of the quaint corners I knew and loved in 1905 have been demolished to make way for "modern improvements" but there is still much of ancient Edinburgh remaining.

As one grows older in photography its lure does not really decrease, and I honestly believe it even keeps one young in heart.

A man in love with his work does not grow old, as do those without an interest in life. It continually spurs him on to fresh conquests and ever richer achievement.

To portray the soul of a city, if one may put it thus, you must both know it and love it, and although it may begin by being "love at first sight", as was my happy experience with Edinburgh, this love must also be sustained, and this, I can testify, has ever been my experience through the years.

Now after nearly fifty years, the book with its twenty-three illustrations is published, but I am confident that I have not made my last photographs of Edinburgh. There are hundreds more I could do, and my enthusiasm is still boundless, and who is to say that there may not be a companion volume, if only I might discover another Stevenson to write my text!



*Cristoid Manual: The Cristoid Film and Notes on The "Perfect" Plate* (London: Sandell Films & Plates, Ltd., n.d.), George Eastman House.  
© George Eastman House



Label on original Cristoid film sleeve, n.d., London, Country Life Picture Library.

During exposure, the slower emulsion reacted to the very strong light, creating density in the highlight areas up to a maximum point; meanwhile, the faster emulsion took care of building density in the shadow areas during an extended exposure. The result was a negative that incorporated an extraordinary range of light levels. Demonstrations of the new product consisted of exposing four sheets of Cristoid to the same subject for 1, 5, 60 and 300 seconds respectively, all of which would produce useable negatives, thus proving Cristoid film's unrivalled latitude in exposure. But this was not its only valuable feature. Because it was unsupported gelatin, Cristoid film swelled during process and enlarged the image by 20%, an advantage in contact printing. Enlargement could be reversed back to original size by immersion in alcohol after drying. Before development, it was advised to harden the film through a solution of formaldehyde and water. As soon as the film was placed into the developer, the side upon which the exposure had been made would become blacker than the other. The film would then be rinsed, fixed in hypo solution, and washed, allowing for reduction or intensification if found to be too dense or weak. For drying, it had to be squeegeed on to a smooth, rigid, non-absorbent support, from which it would be stripped. Cristoid films could be varnished by immersion in Cristoid varnish, being then pinned up to dry, and could be retouched on either side.<sup>12</sup>

Cristoid film never enjoyed wide popularity, but it was highly appreciated in certain circles. Frederick H. Evans, who made it a full partner in his photographs, lamented one single fault with it, which might in fact have been the main reason for its limited success. That was, the difficulty of keeping those films, and especially the ones in larger sizes, perfectly flat during exposure. He suggested

<sup>12</sup> Cristoid film's properties, instructions, sizes and prices are described in *Cristoid Manual: The Cristoid Film and Notes on The "Perfect" Plate* (London: Sandell Films & Plates, Ltd., n.d.). Formats ranged from 4 ¼ x 3 ¼ to 15 x 12, covering all standard sizes.

Cristoid films should be issued on a temporary support that would made them stiff to avoid any impact to the sharpness of focus.<sup>13</sup>

In spite of such a defect, Cristoid film became one of Coburn's favorite photographic materials, as proven by 1,247 negatives of that sort held at George Eastman House. These measure approximately 10 x 12", deriving from 8 x 10" original size negatives. Coburn shot most of them (if not all) by the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, preferring them for portraits. Only one fifth of the group is in fact devoted to landscape, this being due to the fact that soon after his 1905 trip to Edinburgh, Coburn must have switched from an 8 x 10" view camera to a 4 x 5" reflex camera for his outdoor work.<sup>14</sup>

But how and when did Coburn become familiar with Cristoid film?

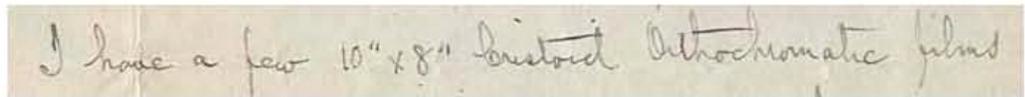
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<sup>13</sup> Frederick H. Evans, "Some Notes on Interior Work. Part IV. – Plates or Films," *The Amateur Photographer* (April 28, 1904): 332. Evans' Cristoid negatives are in the archives of *Country Life* in London. They are housed in conservation boxes, inside individual polyester sleeves with no support. A few of them show retouching; many are tinted pink.

<sup>14</sup> In the early 1906 Coburn was producing most of his outdoor work with a 4 x 5" reflex camera, as documented by the article "Alvin Langdon Coburn's One-Man Show at the R.P.S.," *The Photographic News*, v. 50, n. 527 (February 2, 1906): 90. In addition, the unpublished essay *Alvin Langdon Coburn, Artist-Photographer*, composed in 1912 by William Howe Downes and edited by Coburn, reads: "He began his outdoor photographic work by carrying on his shoulder a large eight by ten plate camera, with holder and lenses, weighing between thirty and forty pounds! But he soon found that this was an unnecessary waste of energy, for by the time he arrived at the battle-field he was too tired to fight. Nowadays he has come down to a three by four camera of the Reflex type in which may be seen the full size image right side up, reflected by a mirror to the top of the camera. This he is able to carry about all day long without any great fatigue. With four or five lenses of focal lengths varying from five to thirty inches, he is prepared for any subject above-ground. And he always uses films."

## 1.1 | F.H. Evans, G.B. Shaw and A.L. Coburn in a Garden, 1906

In 1904, Coburn contacted George Bernard Shaw soon after his arrival in London, and found in him a serious amateur photographer, eager to share equipment and ideas in the exploration of creative photography. The dramatist had been a prolific photographer since 1898, when he purchased his first camera and met Frederick H. Evans, who became his mentor in photography. Frequently, in his letters to Coburn, Shaw reported his enthusiasm and struggle in experimenting with innovative products and techniques. Cristoid film, adopted by Shaw upon Evans' recommendation, was one of these.<sup>15</sup> In his letter of July 26, 1904, when arranging Coburn's first visit, Shaw offered the use of his own fine equipment including some fresh 8 x 10 Cristoid Orthochromatic films.



From G.B. Shaw's letter to A.L. Coburn of July 26, 1904, George Eastman House.  
© George Eastman House

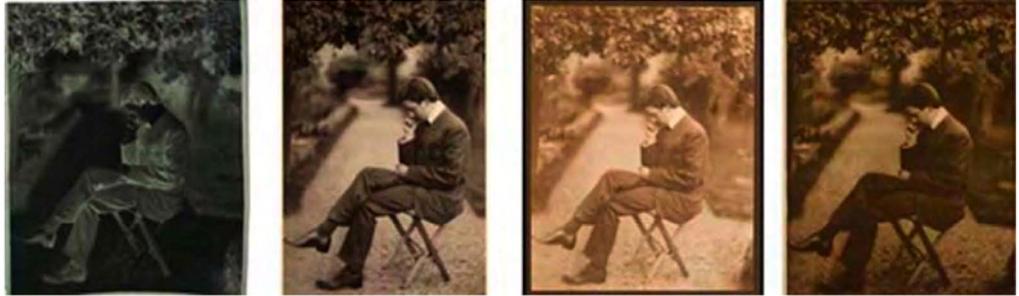
It is not unlikely that Coburn was introduced to that unusual product, which he came to master, thanks to George Bernard Shaw. On another occasion, when the first truly practical color system of photography was introduced, Shaw suggested that Coburn should get and try some of the Lumière Autochrome plates he had recently experienced with Steichen.<sup>16</sup>

Tangible evidence of the artistic collaboration of Shaw, Evans and Coburn is provided by two negatives from the George Eastman House collection that had never been compared before.

<sup>15</sup> Shaw referred to his use of Cristoid film in a letter to Frederick H. Evans written in Merionetshire, Wales, on 25 July 1907: "I am supposed to be holidaying here. Anyhow I bathe and take snaps on Cristoid films through a X3 screen on your recommendation." See George Bernard Shaw and Bill Jay, *Bernard Shaw on Photography* (Layton, UT: Gibbs Smith, 1989): 43. Those Cristoid negatives and others taken by Shaw in 1909, both in Parknasilla and during a trip to Algeria, are held in the archives of London School of Economics.

<sup>16</sup> Postcard dated August 6, 1907, George Eastman House.

Both of them are on Cristoid film and came to the Museum with Coburn's bequest.



George Bernard Shaw, *Alvin Langdon Coburn*, ca. 1906, George Eastman House. © *George Eastman House*



George Eastman House.  
© *George Eastman House*

Bradford, National Media  
Museum.

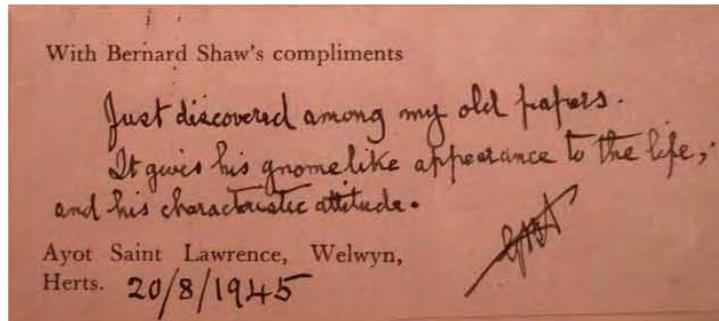
Alvin Langdon Coburn (?), George Bernard Shaw (?),  
*Frederick Evans*, ca. 1906.

One is a portrait of Coburn sitting in a garden, shot by George Bernard Shaw before February 1906. It was first published in issues of both *The Amateur Photographer* and *Camera Work*,<sup>17</sup> and is the only example of a Cristoid film in the George Eastman House collection by any photographer other than Coburn. From this negative, George Eastman House holds four original prints: two differing versions of platinum prints with warm and neutral tonalities, and two photogravures, one of which bears the inscription in Coburn's hand, on the verso: "Alvin Langdon Coburn by George Bernard Shaw (photogravure by Coburn)."

<sup>17</sup> George Bernard Shaw, "Photographs by Mr. Alvin Langdon Coburn," *The Amateur Photographer* (February 16, 1906): 111. *Camera Work*, n. 15 (July 1906): pl. VI.

The other negative is attributed to Coburn in the George Eastman House cataloging system and depicts Evans sitting in the same location, on the same chair in which Shaw immortalized Coburn. The light values and the setting, with only slight differences in the position of the view camera, suggest that these two images were shot in the course of the same sitting.

While there are no positives from this negative at George Eastman House, the Royal Photographic Society at the National Media Museum in Bradford holds a contact print in platinum. With respect to the positives made from the negative portraying Coburn in the garden, this photograph shows the image reversed, as it was one of the many properties of the Cristoid film to allow for contact printing on both of its sides. This platinum print bore a handwritten note by Shaw on its verso - now applied to the Museum matte - which reads: "Just discovered among my old papers. It gives his gnomelike appearance to the life, and his characteristic attitude. GBS 20/8/1945."



Note by G.B. Shaw accompanying the platinum print *Frederick Evans*, ca. 1906, Bradford, National Media Museum

It is not easy to identify the author of the portrait of Evans. It was either Coburn or Shaw. However, what can be assumed is that the three men at some point were photographing together, sharing a 10 x 8 view camera and Cristoid films.

At present, Evans, Shaw and Coburn are the only three photographers for whom the use of Cristoid film has been documented.

## 1.2 | George Bernard Shaw, 1904-1906

The earliest negatives that Coburn shot on Cristoid film can actually be assigned to 1904, when the young man traveled to London with the ambition to photograph literary and art celebrities in England. Such a project was to culminate in the publication of *Men of Mark* in 1913, and *More Men of Mark* in 1922. All portraits for the *Men of Mark* series were taken on Cristoid films.<sup>18</sup>

Shaw was the first “literary lion,” in Coburn’s words, to be captured. He loved being photographed and Coburn took many portraits of him, by using Cristoid film. One of these produced a gum-platinum print that bears Shaw’s handwritten inscription on the mount, reading: “Certified authentic, and my best portrait so far. G. Bernard Shaw, August 1904.”



Alvin Langdon Coburn, *George Bernard Shaw*, 1904, George Eastman House.  
© George Eastman House

When positive and negative of this image are compared, it is evident that the print contains some information which is missing in the negative. The sitter’s right arm represented in details in the foreground has been erased in the Cristoid film. This

<sup>18</sup> The group of iconic portraits produced by the end of 1905 gives evidence that Coburn rapidly became connected with the most prominent figures of the literary world in Great Britain, such as G.K. Chesterton, George Meredith, H.G. Wells, Edward Carpenter and Henry James. A pivotal role in providing these connections was played by George Bernard Shaw. On Shaw’s impact upon Coburn’s career, see Valentina Branchini, “An Artistic Intimacy: Alvin Langdon Coburn and George Bernard Shaw,” *Image*, v. 47, n. 1 (Spring 2009): 12-19, here enclosed in Appendix IV.

is an example of manipulation of a negative, operated by Coburn after the present print was produced. The treatment, performed on other negatives as well, consisted of local applications of Farmer's reducer, a solution of potassium ferricyanide and sodium thiosulphate, generally used to reduce density in overexposed or overdeveloped negatives. Where applied, it would remove quantities of metallic silver. In this particular case, Coburn might have wanted to attenuate the area at lower left corner, that in the print he had darkened by retouching. It is hard to say if he intentionally extended treatment to a larger area, covering Shaw's arm as well. Coburn might have not been satisfied with the result, as there is no print made from the manipulated negative.

The same treatment turned out successfully on another negative, that is, the celebrated portrait taken in April 1906, where Shaw posed as Rodin's *Le Penseur* (*The Thinker*). In that case, the photographer employed Farmer's reducer to eliminate the mid-tones in the brocade fabric set around the naked figure, in order to obtain a deep and continuous shadow in the contact print.



Alvin Langdon Coburn, *Le Penseur*, 1906, George Eastman House.  
© George Eastman House

### 1.3 | George Meredith and Family, 1904

Another kind of manipulation on a negative helps to reconstruct the printing sequence of George Meredith's family portrait, which is represented in the Museum collection in a Cristoid film negative and in three contact prints showing variations in technique, tonal values, trimming and finishing.



Alvin Langdon Coburn, *George Meredith and Family*, 1904, George Eastman House. © George Eastman House

George Eastman House holds an extensive documentation of this portrait, which was taken on October 24, 1904.<sup>19</sup> Four letters written by the novelist to Coburn between October 1904 and March 1905 relate to this photograph and sitting.<sup>20</sup> Further shots are preserved from the same sitting, amongst which a variant of the family group, and a profile portrait of George Meredith that Coburn chose for his *Men of Mark*.



Negatives on Cristoid films, George Eastman House. The photographer's autobiography reports about the sitting:

*"George Meredith under the kind but firm direction of his daughter was in a submissive mood and I was able to take as many groups as I wished, and several close-ups of the grand old man himself."*

© George Eastman House

<sup>19</sup> A handwritten note in pencil by Coburn reads: "Portrait made Oct. 24<sup>th</sup> 1904," on the recto of the envelope containing Meredith's telegram of October 20, 1904.

9. George Meredith 1904

This photograph was used as the frontispiece of the first volume of a collected edition of his work and is one of my portraits of which I think I <sup>may be</sup> justifiably proud.

In 1958 I delivered a broadcast entitled "Photography George Meredith" and this was printed in "The Listener" for May 1st of that year, ~~but I never~~ but to make this record ~~more~~ complete I am reprinting it in this book.

I once received a letter from a Chinese author in Hong Kong saying that he hoped to print a selection of essays by famous ~~other~~ writers such as Max Beer, Tolstoy, Shaw, Day Lewis, A. A. Milne, Joseph Conrad ~~and others~~ G. K. Chesterton, Arnold Bennett, T. S. Eliot and others and could he reprint my broadcast talk from "The Listener" in this volume?

~~Being~~ I greatly flattered to find myself in such good company, readily consented on condition that I should receive

\* and it was entitled "Essays for You" by T. C. L. 211

a copy of the book which ~~was~~ in time duly arrived. ~~Subsequently~~ Subsequently the author himself ~~Mr. T. C. L.~~ himself came to England and called upon me, which was a very pleasant indication of the writing influence of photography and the other arts.

I say no more of Moretith here but if you would know of my thoughts concerning this great man, read what I have to say of him <sup>in the broadest</sup> and also in my book "Men of Mark" where this photograph is also reproduced.

See also the ~~the~~ George Moretith  
Broadest on page \_\_\_\_\_

# Photographing George Meredith

By ALVIN LANGDON COBURN

**H**OW many people read the writings of George Meredith today? He is not exactly an 'easy' writer to understand and fully appreciate, but he is very rewarding to the intelligently persistent, and I am sure that his following, his public, will increase with the passing of the years.

When I photographed him, well over fifty years ago, he was seventy-six and I was only twenty-two, and he was almost but not quite at the pinnacle of his fame; he did not receive the Order of Merit until the following year—1905—and I was only at the beginning of my adventures with the great. In fact he now seems so remote in time from the present day that I am continually amazed that I ever met him. Yet meet him I did, and being a methodical person who keeps a diary I have the exact record of the very day on which this first occurred: it was October 6, 1904.

In those days I was busy photographing as many celebrated writers as I was able to capture. Mark Twain, Henry James, Andrew Lang—I photographed them all, and many others; and it was my practice, before meeting my subjects, to saturate myself in their books so that I might previously come to know something of the inner man. And so it was with George Meredith.

It was a crisp autumn day, with the leaves a golden brown with splashes of red in the sunshine, when I made my first pilgrimage to Box Hill in Surrey where the great man lived. Friends assured me with much emphatic and withal dismal waggings of their heads that I would never photograph Meredith, that he disliked the camera, and that it was useless to approach him.

I, however, in the exuberant optimism of youth, forever hopeful, the day being fine, took a little portfolio of my work under my arm and a train from Waterloo to Leatherhead. I had no letter of introduction, although I could easily have obtained one; I just walked up the drive to his little ivy-clad house, armed only with my portfolio, with a song in my heart to match the day, and my luck was with me. I was at once shown into his presence. I afterwards discovered that this was a mistake, that he was expecting another visitor, and that I was thought to be he!

And what a head! I think I have never seen any modern person who was even remotely like him. He resembled an ancient Greek bust, a head of Zeus, calm in its tranquillity, regal in its dignity. I felt that I simply must photograph him. And what a model of perfect gentle courtesy; he never let me know at the time that an error had been made in my favour, but looked through my portfolio with obvious interest, even with enthusiasm; but he was firm in his determination not to give me a sitting. He said that he did not want to be photographed in his age and made to look like an old monkey, as Tennyson had been.

Tennyson was photographed by that great pioneer of pictorial photography, Julia Margaret Cameron, who lived in Freshwater in the Isle of Wight, very close to Tennyson; she naturally had remarkable opportunities for photographing the interesting visitors who came to see the poet. Among these were such eminent per-

sonalities as Carlyle, Watts the painter, Longfellow, Darwin, Anthony Trollope, Ellen Terry when very young, and Robert Browning. I have the greatest admiration for Mrs. Cameron who was a very remarkable woman, and I must say in all honesty that her portrait of Tennyson, which Meredith must have seen, looks as little like 'an old monkey' as Meredith himself could have looked.

There was no possible doubt about it, Meredith looked the grand old lion that he was, with his great mane of shaggy white hair and his beard. There he sat with a rug over his knees in the window, his little dog Sandy by his side looking up lovingly into his face, with the sun shining upon them, a most perfect picture, but of course I hadn't my camera with me.

This was before the days of the miniature camera. The photographer of today would probably have had one of these delightful and efficient little toys concealed somewhere about him, and already have made a number of surreptitious exposures and the deed would have been done. My camera of those early days was a large heavy thing with legs, size ten by eight, with a bright green focusing cloth, and nearly as impossible to hide as a Christmas tree!

Meredith was very deaf and so conversation was not easy, but my mother was deaf so I appreciated his difficulty and we got on very well. With a certain shyness, for I really was a diffident young man in those days, I confessed to Meredith my great admiration for his book *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, and asked him how he had been able to capture the perfect idyll of young love which this early masterpiece of his reveals. He smiled, evidently pleased with this tribute, and said that the romance of

youth was ever pure and wonderful to behold, and that to see it we had only to look back to our own first introduction to love to find the pattern. I was young enough, and near enough to this experience, to know exactly what he meant, and he himself was not so old that he had forgotten though the book was published in 1859 when he was thirty-one—that is now almost a hundred years ago.

In going through my portfolio Meredith came upon a study of a golden-haired young mother presenting her breast to a very young child, and I could see that this delighted him. His eager eyes lit up in a most wonderful way, and he exclaimed 'How beautiful!' Of all the features it is the eyes which do not really grow old.

I did not press him to give me a sitting; I had too much respect for him. But I made a mental note of his interest in the mother-and-child picture. When I returned to London I made up a little parcel containing this picture and posted it to Meredith, saying what a great pleasure it had been to meet him. I received in reply a letter written in his own hand, a letter which I still greatly treasure, in which he wrote:

You heap live coals on my head, I must be grateful, but your beautiful and undeserved present distresses me the more on account of the disappointment caused to you. It would relieve me in some degree if I could by chance be of any service to you.



'Calm in its tranquillity, regal in its dignity': portrait of Meredith by Alvin Langdon Coburn

Supposing that your poetically artistic work is not yet known on this side of the water, an introduction to an editor of illustrated journals might help, or you might photograph my daughter—who is unlike me in always being ready to submit a pleasing countenance to the practitioner. She lives hard by me, near Leatherhead; and as she is pretty well known a good likeness of her would be useful.

Accept my thanks and believe me, Very truly yours,  
George Meredith.

And, believe me, it was very useful indeed, for his daughter, Mrs. Sturgis, not only insisted on a family group to consist of herself, her two young daughters and the dog Sandy, but that her father should also be in the picture. Thus, miraculously and without any pressure from me, my fondest wish was accomplished, and I ultimately received a wire: 'Come Monday 11.02 from Waterloo South Station to Leatherhead. Carriage will meet you. Meredith'.

'Carriage will meet you'. How this determines the period, and how long ago it seems, and it was indeed not yesterday. The date of the photographing in my diary is October 24, 1904. Yet important events, and this was an important event for me, remain vividly in one's memory, and on my arrival in the carriage which met me at Leatherhead there they all were awaiting me. Luckily it was again a fine day. Meredith, under the kind but firm direction of his daughter, was in a submissive mood, so that I was able to make as many groups as I wished, and these included several close-ups of the grand old man himself, which although the others were present consisted of him alone. In the most successful of the groups they are all in profile facing the window, including Meredith's beloved Sandy who posed exactly as a well-behaved dog should.

The best head of Meredith himself is also in profile, and this became the frontispiece of the first volume of the memorial edition of his works which was published in twenty-seven volumes in 1910. I think it is one of the finest portraits I have ever made. It

has an indrawn serenity worthy of the author of so many literary masterpieces.

Meredith said little on this day of the photographing, but I could see that he was very happy in his home and with his family, and he treated me with that gentle rich courtesy which almost included me in the family gathering. After lunch I returned to London a happy young man.

I cannot, of course, claim friendship with Meredith. I only saw him twice, but the making of a photograph implies a close personal contact, so close that whenever I read any of his novels or poems—and how glorious and satisfying they are—I can hear again his great mellow yet resonant voice behind and within the printed word, and behold once more the finely chiselled profile and the deep-set eyes.

One last memory. One springtime, my wife and I went along the old Pilgrim's Way from Winchester to Canterbury. This romantic old track passes most appropriately along the southern slope of Box Hill, so that any literary pilgrims will include a special tribute in passing this other shrine. We paused to see if the little chalet in the garden on the slopes of the hill where Meredith wrote so many of his masterpieces was still there. And it was. We thought lovingly of him and then made our way on to Canterbury, which we reached as the light of the sunset came through the glorious west windows of the great cathedral.

Memories have a way of lingering on in the places with which they are associated, and so Meredith's little chalet in the garden on the hillside will for many of us bring back thoughts of the poet who found such a rich fund of inspiration there. It perches on the slope overlooking the distant landscape, an unrestricted vista dear to Meredith's heart. He was always something of a rebel, and could not abide to be shut in or limited in any way.

Part of the art of life is to choose our surroundings, and that Meredith was an artist in life few will deny; the slopes of Box Hill were his perfect setting.—*Home Service*

## Collecting Old Clocks

By H. ALAN LLOYD

AS with most other things in life, there is no easy road to success in this business of acquiring old clocks; experience must be bought, either by going to a reputable specialist clock dealer and paying for his knowledge and advice in the price he asks, or by the hard way—that is, by first studying all the reliable literature you can find and then backing your own judgement in visits to the shops of general antique dealers. You will meet with disappointments, but there are many nice pieces, especially of the late eighteenth-century period, still to be picked up; and there is always a turnover of the earlier pieces. You will make mistakes and they will cost you money, but provided it is not too much, it is money well spent.

I remember in my early days buying a bracket-clock from a miscellaneous dealer for a very moderate price; it was a three-train clock—that is, a clock with hour and quarter striking, in what is known as a wooden basket case. It was not a fake in the true sense of the word, it was just a 'built up' clock. When I got home and examined it I found that its workmanship was very coarse, its going period was between three and four days, an awkward period. A going period of anything less than eight days seriously detracts from the value of a clock; conversely, clocks with going periods of one month, three months, or still more rarely, a year, are correspondingly more expensive.

Returning to my clock, the case was late

seventeenth century but not original to the movement, which, however, was also of about that period, but the engraving on the back plate, when compared with late seventeenth-century work, was found to be very coarse and modern. My recollection is that the name engraved on the back plate did not tally exactly with that on the dial, and that neither agreed exactly with entries under that name in the standard books of reference on makers' names, a detail to which I should have paid more attention in later years. The dial and the hands were in harmony with the period of the case, but had been assembled. The quarter striking train, instead of ringing a different chime at each quarter, merely repeated the same chime one, two, three, and four times. I have since come to the conclusion that the movement was some apprentice's early effort. I subsequently disposed of that clock at a loss of £5, but I consider that £5 as the best I have ever spent on old clocks.

I mean that: I handled that clock and learnt much from it and was able to see where I had gone wrong. In fairness to the antique shop that sold me the clock, I have no evidence that the dealer knew more about the clock than I did. I must say that no extravagant claims were made for it; he probably bought it cheaply and sold it cheaply, too cheap for a good piece. I knew that, but I thought that I was being clever; a case of a little knowledge being a dangerous thing.

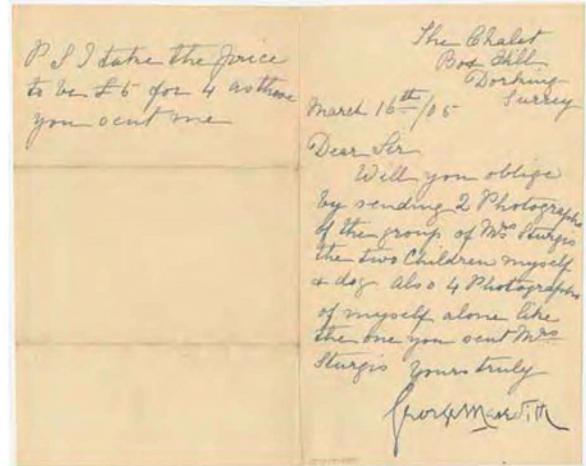
The very English style of lantern clock,



Brass lantern clock, c. 1670, by Thomas Knifton at the Cross Keys, Lothbury

A few months after the sitting, on March 16, 1905, George Meredith purchased from Coburn two copies of the family portrait, in a letter written in his daughter's hand that bears the novelist's signature. Meredith was seventy-seven year old.

*"Dear Sir,  
Will you oblige by sending 2  
Photographs of the group of Mrs  
Sturgis, the two Children, myself &  
dog. Also 4 Photographs of myself  
alone like the one you sent Mrs.  
Sturgis. Yours truly George Meredith  
PS I take the price to be £5 for 4 as  
those you sent me."*



George Eastman House.  
© George Eastman House

Coburn kept for himself the three following prints.



1967:0155:0042

Platinum print 1967:0155:0042 is tipped at top corners to an original mount, which is composed of a light brown wove textured paper and a light brown board. That fashion of multiple mounting was usual for Coburn, who had borrowed it from F. Holland Day.<sup>21</sup> On verso of the tertiary support, a note written by Coburn in pencil reads: "George Meredith and Family 1904."

The image color is warm, which in platinum printing was achieved by increasing the temperature of the processing solutions or by toning the image with mercury.

<sup>20</sup> Coburn described his encounter and sitting with George Meredith on various occasions: in *Men of Mark* (1913), in his broadcast on the BBC "Photographing George Meredith," published in *The Listener* (May 1, 1958), and in his autobiography.

<sup>21</sup> A manuscript written by Coburn on one of his photographs reads: "The mounting of this print is an example of the method of "multiple mounting" employed by Holland Day in presenting his photographs at that time. He procured literally hundreds of patterns of "cover papers" from various firms and superimposed them in layer above layer behind the print. Evans also embellished his architectural prints by thus mounting them, and great care was taken in trimming the very narrow stripe of the delicately adjusted inner lines. This is a sepia platynotype print on a sage green mount with buff thin inner lines in which a very pleasing colour scheme is produced."



1) GEH 1967:0155:0042 normal light, overall, recto



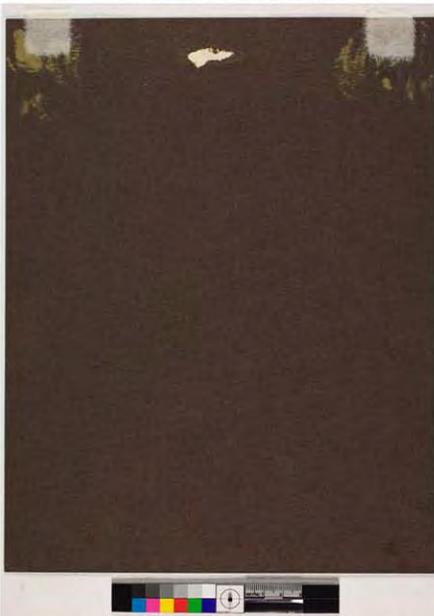
2) GEH 1967:0155:0041 normal light, overall, recto



3) GEH 1967:0155:0040 normal light, overall, recto



4) GEH 1967:0155:0042 normal light, overall, verso



5) GEH 1967:0155:0041 normal light, overall, verso



6) GEH 1967:0155:0040 normal light, overall, verso



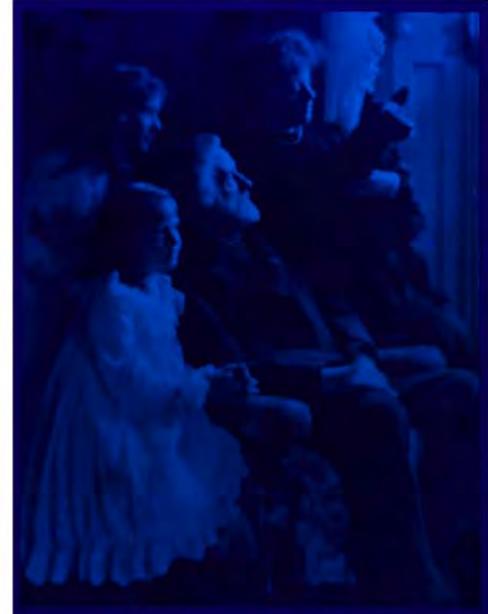
7) GEH 1967:0155:0042 normal light, print, recto



8) GEH 1967:0155:0041 normal light, print, recto



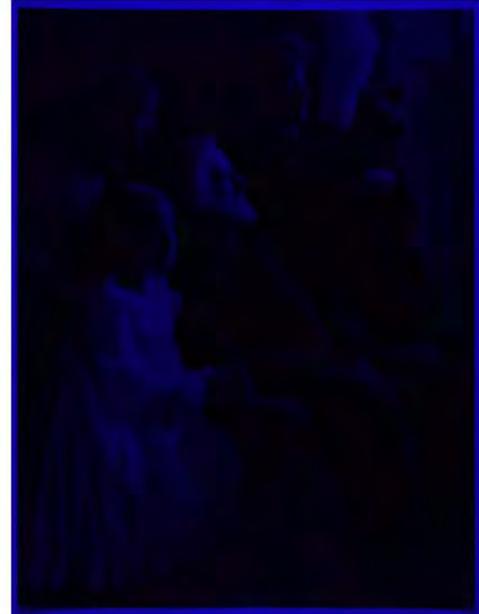
9) GEH 1967:0155:0040 normal light, print, recto



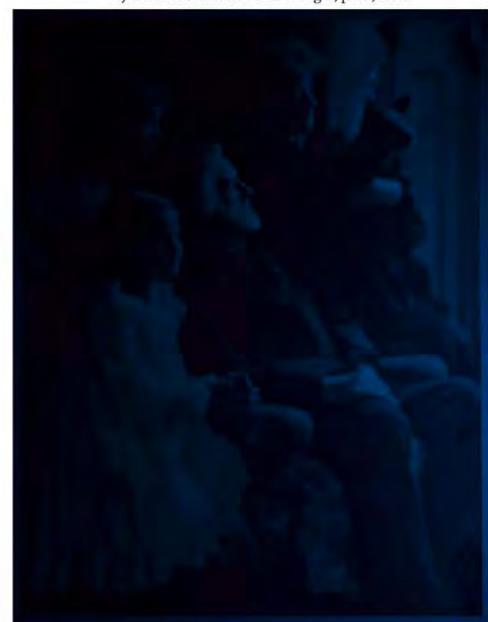
10) GEH 1967:0155:0042 UVA light, print, recto



11) GEH 1967:0155:0041 UVA light, print, recto



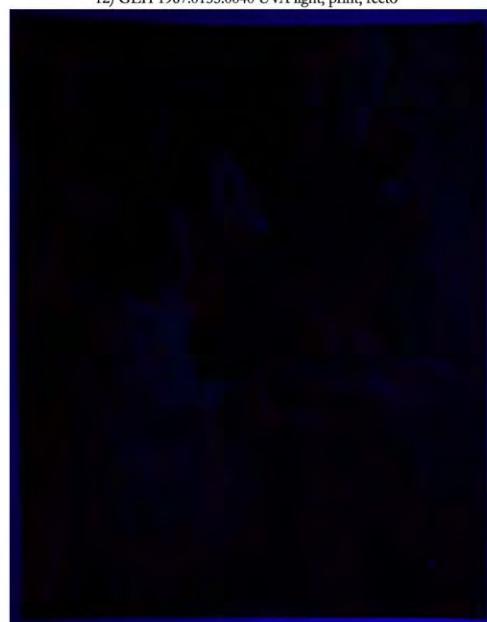
12) GEH 1967:0155:0040 UVA light, print, recto



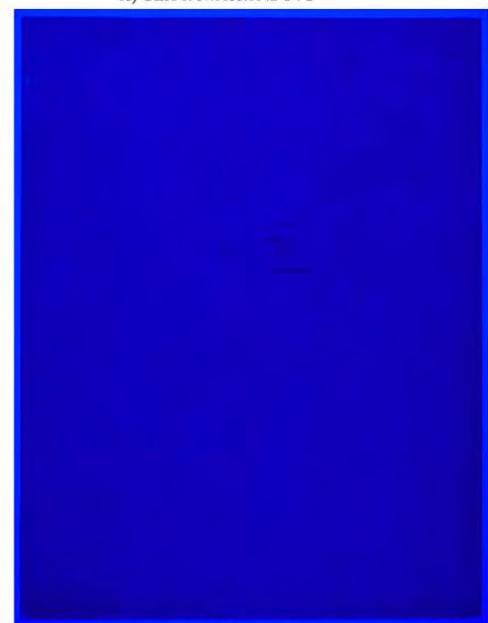
13) GEH 1967:0155:0042 UVC



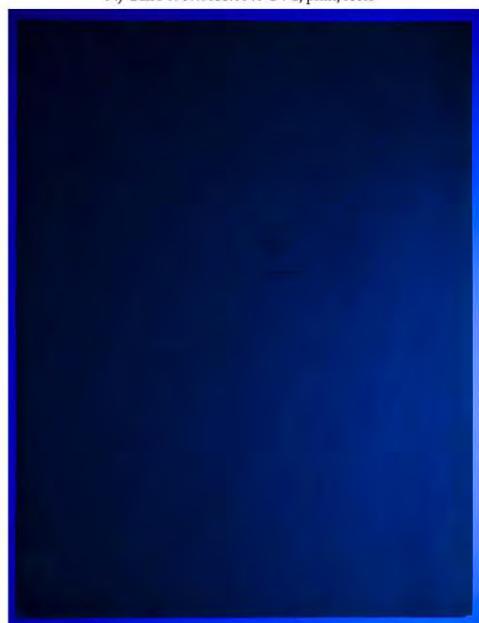
14) GEH 1967:0155:0041 UVC, print, recto



15) GEH 1967:0155:0040 UVC, print, recto



16) GEH 1967:0155:0040 UVA, print, verso



17) GEH 1967:0155:0040 UVC, print, verso



18) GEH 1967:0155:0042 normal light, top left corner, recto



19) GEH 1967:0155:0041 normal light, top left corner, recto



20) GEH 1967:0155:0040 normal light, top left corner, recto



21) GEH 1967:0155:0042 normal light, bottom left corner, recto



22) GEH 1967:0155:0041 normal light, bottom left corner, recto



23) GEH 1967:0155:0040 normal light, bottom left corner, recto



24) GEH 1967:0155:0042 normal light, bottom left corner, recto



25) GEH 1967:0155:0041 normal light, bottom left corner, recto



26) GEH 1967:0155:0040 normal light, bottom left corner, recto



27) GEH 1967:0155:0042 normal light, top right corner, recto



28) GEH 1967:0155:0041 normal light, top right corner, recto



29) GEH 1967:0155:0040 normal light, top right corner, recto



30) GEH 1967:0155:0042 normal light, bottom center, recto



31) GEH 1967:0155:0041 normal light, bottom center, recto



32) GEH 1967:0155:0040 normal light, bottom center, recto



33) GEH 1967:0155:0042 normal light, bottom left corner, recto



34) GEH 1967:0155:0041 normal light, bottom left corner, recto



35) GEH 1967:0155:0040 normal light, bottom left corner, recto



36) GEH 1967:0155:0042 axial light, top left corner, recto



37) GEH 1967:0155:0041 axial light, top left corner, recto



38) GEH 1967:0155:0040 axial light, top left corner, recto



39) GEH 1967:0155:0042 axial light, center, recto



40) GEH 1967:0155:0041 axial light, center, recto



41) GEH 1967:0155:0040 axial light, center, recto



42) GEH 1967:0155:0042 axial light, bottom right corner, recto



43) GEH 1967:0155:0041 axial light, bottom right corner, recto



44) GEH 1967:0155:0040 axial light, bottom right corner, recto



45) GEH 1967:0155:0042 axial light, top right corner, recto



46) GEH 1967:0155:0041 axial light, top right corner, recto



46) GEH 1967:0155:0040 axial light, top right corner, recto



48) GEH 1967:0155:0042 raking light, top left corner, recto



49) GEH 1967:0155:0041 raking light, top left corner, recto



50) GEH 1967:0155:0040 raking light, top left corner, recto



51) GEH 1967:0155:0042 raking light, center, recto



52) GEH 1967:0155:0041 raking light, top left corner, recto



53) GEH 1967:0155:0040 raking light, top left corner, recto



54) GEH 1967:0155:0042 raking light, bottom left corner, recto



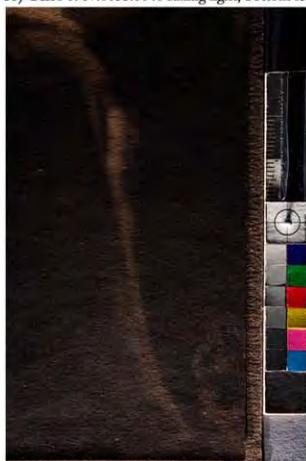
55) GEH 1967:0155:0041 raking light, bottom left corner, recto



56) GEH 1967:0155:0040 raking light, bottom left corner, recto



57) GEH 1967:0155:0042 raking light, bottom right corner, recto



58) GEH 1967:0155:0041 raking light, bottom right corner, recto



59) GEH 1967:0155:0040 raking light, bottom right corner, recto



60) GEH 1967:0155:0042 raking light, top right corner, recto



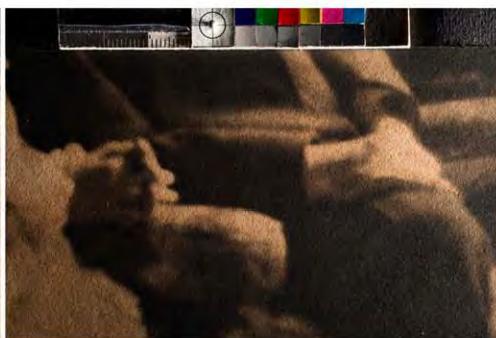
61) GEH 1967:0155:0041 raking light, top right corner, recto



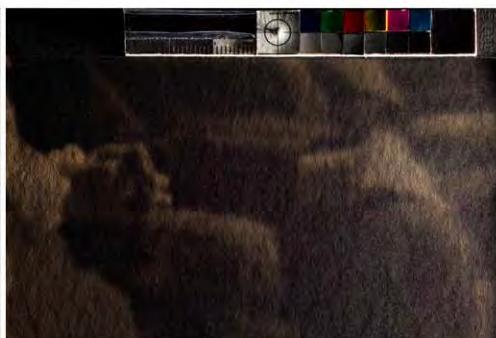
62) GEH 1967:0155:0040 raking light, top right corner, recto



63) GEH 1967:0155:0042 raking light, bottom center, recto



64) GEH 1967:0155:0041 raking light, bottom center, recto



65) GEH 1967:0155:0040 raking light, bottom center, recto



66) GEH 1967:0155:0042 raking light, bottom left corner, recto



67) GEH 1967:0155:0041 raking light, bottom left corner, recto



68) GEH 1967:0155:0040 raking light, bottom left corner, recto



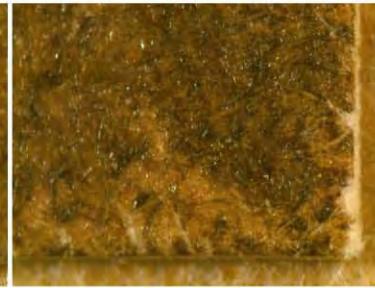
69) GEH 1967:0155:0042 top left corner, 50x magnif.



70) GEH 1967:0155:0042 top right corner, 50x magnif.



71) GEH 1967:0155:0042 bottom left corner, 50x magnif.



72) GEH 1967:0155:0042 bottom right corner, 50x magnif.



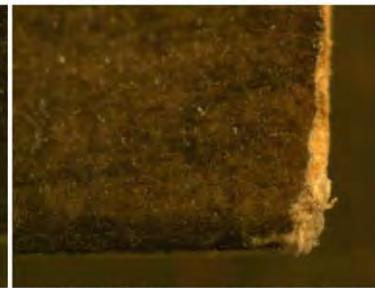
73) GEH 1967:0155:0041 top left corner, 50x magnif.



74) GEH 1967:0155:0041 top right corner, 50x magnif.



75) GEH 1967:0155:0041 bottom left corner, 50x magnif.



76) GEH 1967:0155:0041 bottom right corner, 50x magnif.



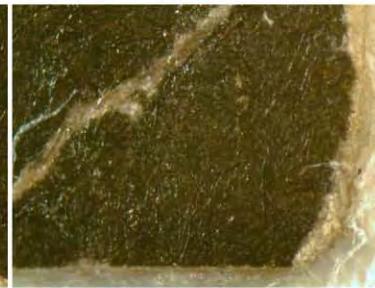
77) GEH 1967:0155:0040 top left corner, 50x magnif.



78) GEH 1967:0155:0040 top right corner, 50x magnif.



79) GEH 1967:0155:0040 bottom left corner, 50x magnif.



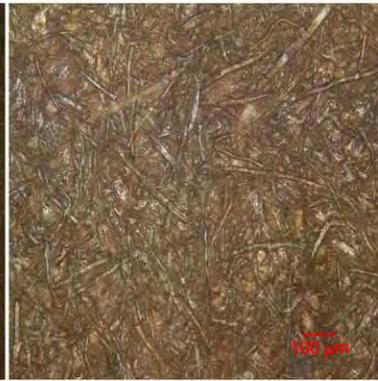
80) GEH 1967:0155:0040 bottom right corner, 50x magnif.



81) GEH 1967:0155:0042 Dmax, bright field, refl. light



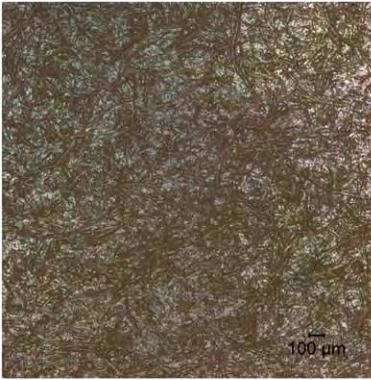
82) GEH 1967:0155:0042 Dmax, dark field, refl. light



83) GEH 1967:0155:0042 Dmax, bright field, refl. light



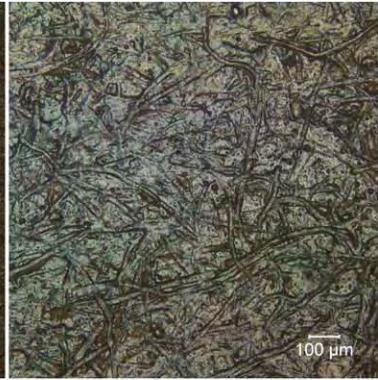
84) GEH 1967:0155:0042 Dmax, dark field, refl. light



85) GEH 1967:0155:0041 Dmax, bright field, refl. light



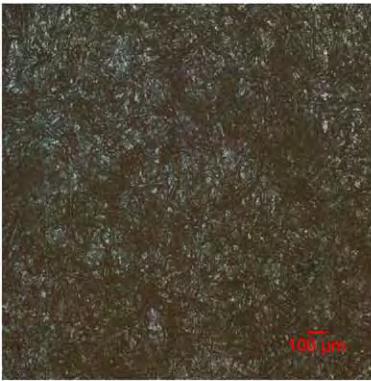
86) GEH 1967:0155:0041 Dmax, dark field, refl. light



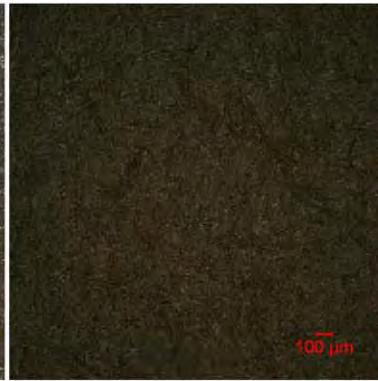
87) GEH 1967:0155:0041 Dmax, bright field, refl. light



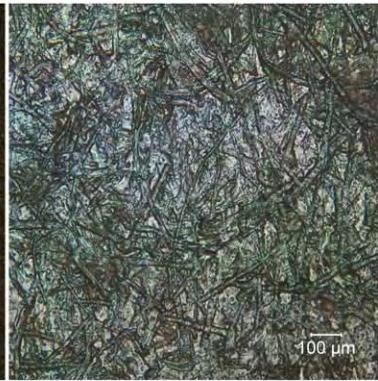
88) GEH 1967:0155:0041 Dmax, dark field, refl. light



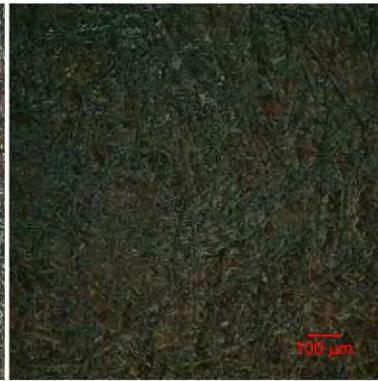
89) GEH 1967:0155:0040 Dmax, bright field, refl. light



90) GEH 1967:0155:0040 Dmax, dark field, refl. light



91) GEH 1967:0155:0040 Dmax, bright field, refl. light



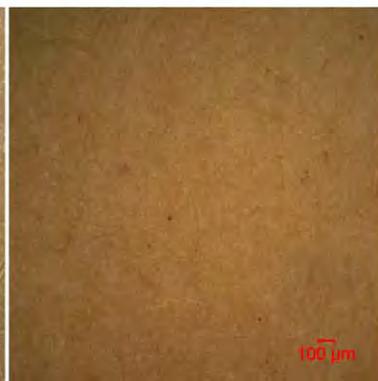
92) GEH 1967:0155:0040 Dmax, dark field, refl. light



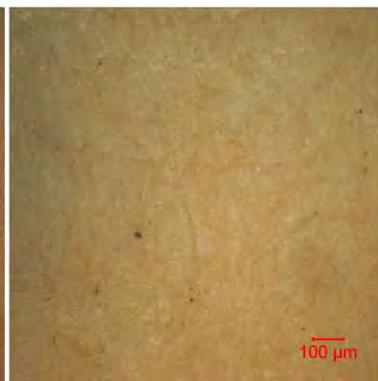
93) GEH 1967:0155:0042 Dmin, bright field, refl. light



94) GEH 1967:0155:0042 Dmin, bright field, refl. light



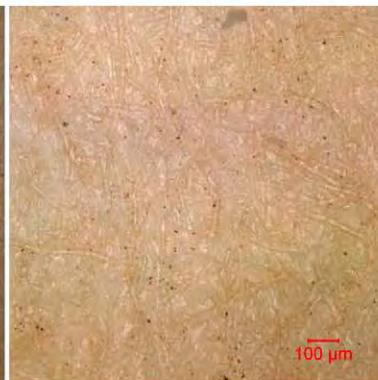
95) GEH 1967:0155:0042 Dmin, dark field, refl. light



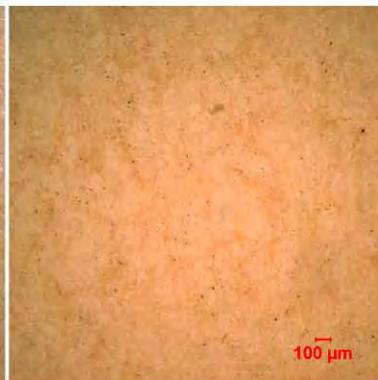
96) GEH 1967:0155:0042 Dmin, dark field, refl. light



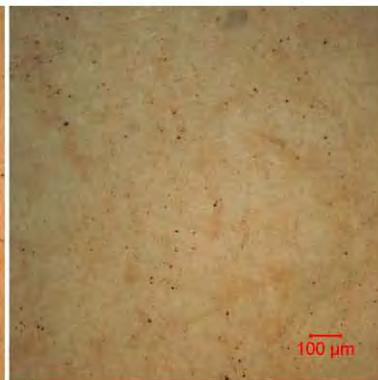
97) GEH 1967:0155:0041 Dmin, bright field, refl. light



98) GEH 1967:0155:0041 Dmin, bright field, refl. light



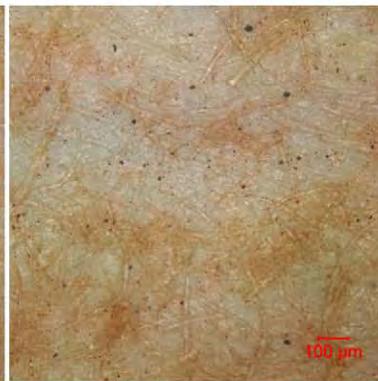
99) GEH 1967:0155:0041 Dmin, dark field, refl. light



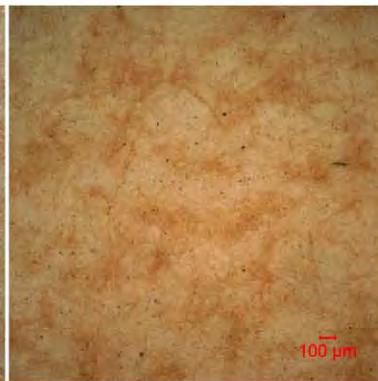
100) GEH 1967:0155:0041 Dmin, dark field, refl. light



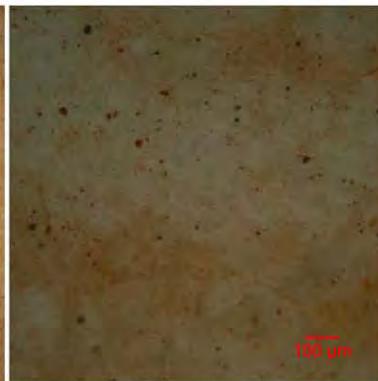
101) GEH 1967:0155:0040 Dmin, bright field, refl. light



102) GEH 1967:0155:0040 Dmin, bright field, refl. light



103) GEH 1967:0155:0040 Dmin, dark field, refl. light



104) GEH 1967:0155:0040 Dmin, dark field, refl. light

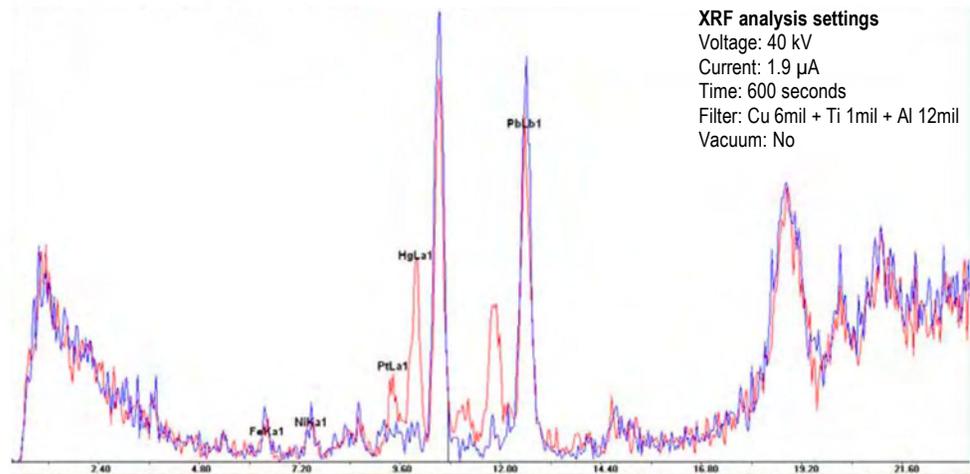
X-ray fluorescence analysis conducted on maximum and minimum density areas proved presence of platinum and mercury in the imaging substance.<sup>22</sup>



Dmax

Dmin

Dmax and Dmin areas were identified and analyzed consistently in the three prints.



Spectrum overlay: Dmax (red) and Dmin (blue).

The image has faded, as it is particularly evident at bottom right corner, where a retouch on the print stands out with a darker tone (fig. 24).

The surface presents no sheen, as photo-documentation in axial light shows (fig. 6, 39, 42, 45), meaning that this photograph is not coated. Under magnification paper fibers are clearly discernible, confirming the one-layer structure for this print, made of raw paper and image (fig. 69-72, 81-84, 93-96).

The other two photographs are both gum over platinum prints. Coburn was well known at his time for excelling at this mixed printing technique:

<sup>22</sup> The photograph had been identified as a silver gelatin print in the Museum cataloging system (TMS), before this analysis was carried out.

*“Now what are the distinctive qualities that differentiate the work of Coburn from that of other artist photographers? In a purely technical direction, the best thing he has done for the art is to have brought to light the gum-platinum process. He did not invent it; that was done by some German gentlemen years ago, as a means for subduing contrasts. Coburn, however, was the first pictorial photographer to realize the importance of the process as a means for building up and enriching the shadows of a platinum print. He uses it rather as a glaze than as an actual printing, and it enables him to get the color best suited to the subject in hand, without the gloss of carbon or the greasiness of the bromide or oil printing processes. In fact, after having experimented with every known printing process, he prints now in only three ways, platinum, gum-platinum, and photogravure.”<sup>23</sup>*

And Coburn gave a detailed report of his printing method:

*“In the gum-platinum process the first step was to make a platinum print, which could be either in the normal silver grey colour, or toned to a rich brown by the addition of mercury to the developer. The finished print was then coated with a thin layer of gum-bichromate containing pigment of the desired colour. I found Vandyke brown especially suitable owing to its transparency, and by having the underlying platinum print in the grey, a very pleasant two-colour effect was produced. The bichromated print was replaced behind the original negative, great care being taken to get it accurately in register. It was then re-exposed and developed in the usual way. It was in the nature of platinum prints that the shadows were somewhat weak; by superimposing a gum image they were intensified. The whole process added a lustre to the platinum base comparable to the application of varnish, at the same time preserving the delicacy of the highlights in the platinum print. If the shadows were still not deep enough, a second coating of pigmented gum, or even a third, could be added and the print re-exposed, but with skill and practice one coating of gum was usually sufficient. To my regret, platinum paper was no longer manufactured after World War I, for it gave very delicate gradations of tone and had the advantage of absolute permanence.”<sup>24</sup>*

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<sup>23</sup> From William Howe Downes' manuscript, *Alvin Langdon Coburn, Artist-Photographer*, 1912.

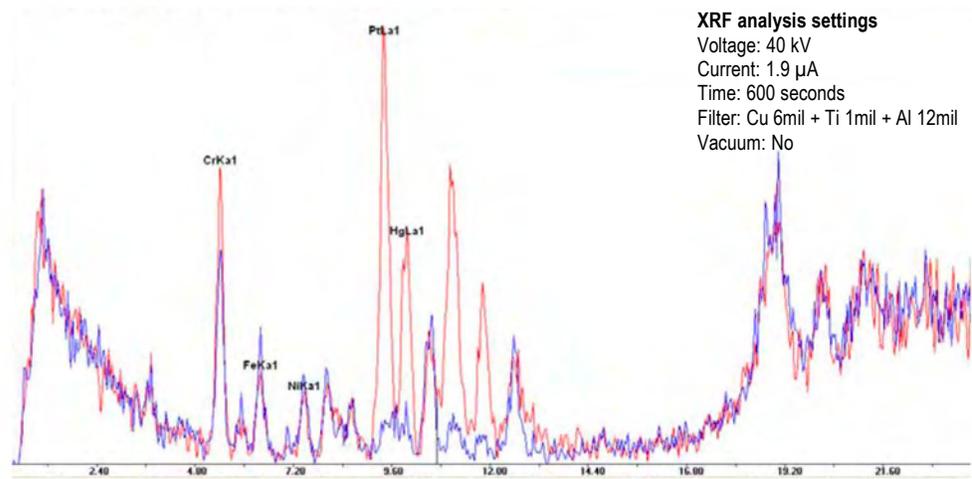
<sup>24</sup> *Alvin Langdon Coburn, Photographer: An Autobiography with Over 70 Reproductions of His Works* (New York: Dover Publications, 1978): 18.



1967:0155:0041

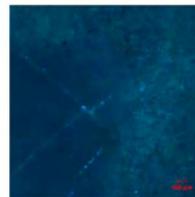
Gum-platinum print 1967:0155:0041 is tipped at top corners to a secondary support made of dark brown paper. Originally it was attached to a tertiary support which is now lost. Fragments of paper fibers and adhesive on the verso of the secondary support provide evidence of that (fig. 5).

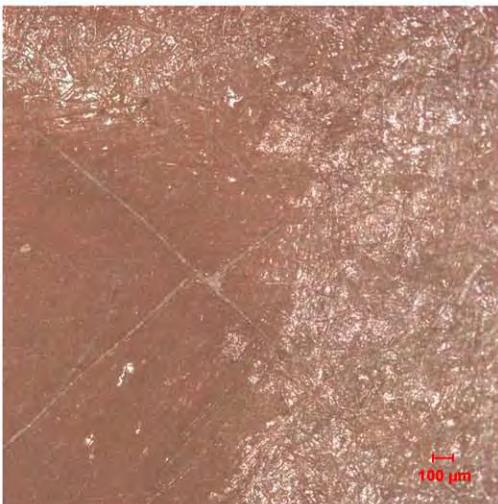
The image color is warm. XRF analysis proved presence of platinum, mercury and chromium in the imaging substance.



Spectrum overlay: Dmax (red) and Dmin (blue).

The surface presents an even sheen, as photo-documentation in axial light shows (fig. 37, 40, 43, 46), possibly due to some overall coating applied in addition to the gum-dichromate layer. Two drip marks of a yellowish-brown thicker substance localized in the gown of the girl in the foreground might provide some clue to that. Microscopic examination of the solidified substance revealed cracks, at the base of which some fluorescence was visible under UV light (fig. 105-113).

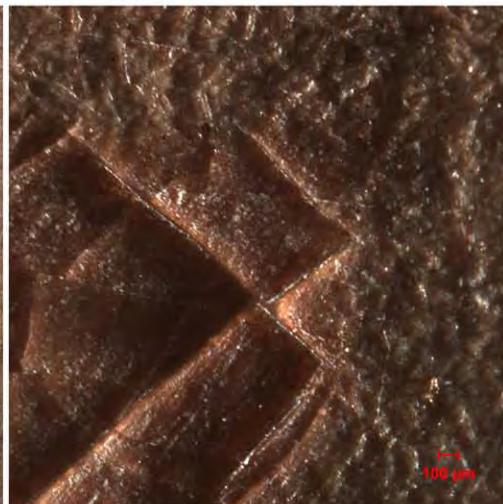




105) GEH 1967:0155:0041 drip mark, bright field + crossed polarizers, refl. light



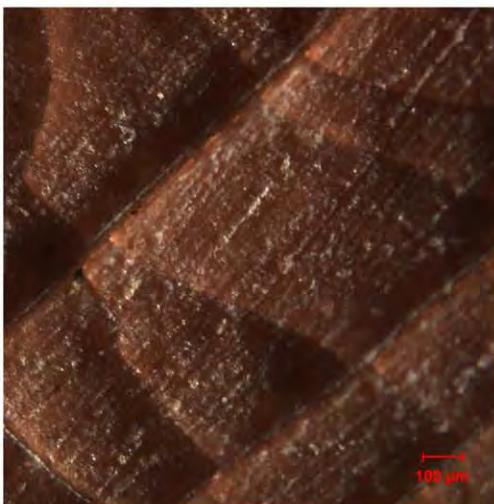
106) GEH 1967:0155:0041 drip mark, dark field, refl. light



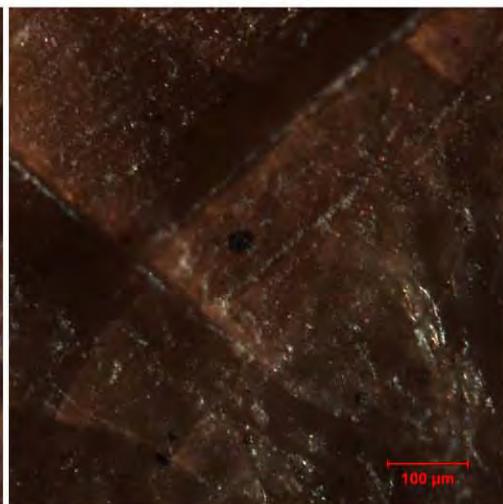
107) GEH 1967:0155:0041 drip mark, raking light



108) GEH 1967:0155:0041 drip mark, raking light



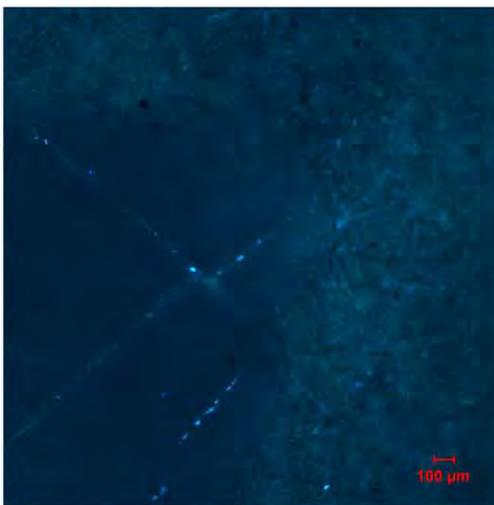
109) GEH 1967:0155:0041 drip mark, raking light



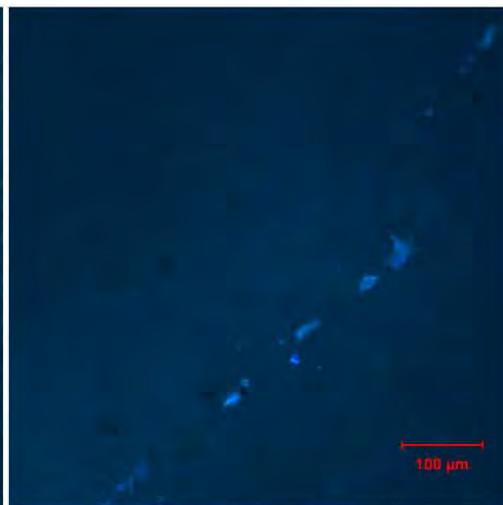
110) GEH 1967:0155:0041 drip mark, raking light



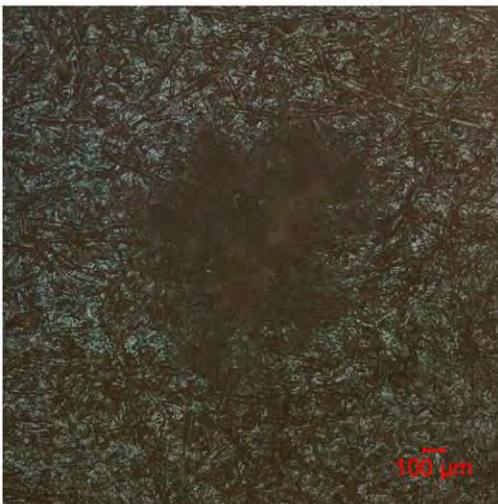
111) GEH 1967:0155:0041 drip mark, raking light



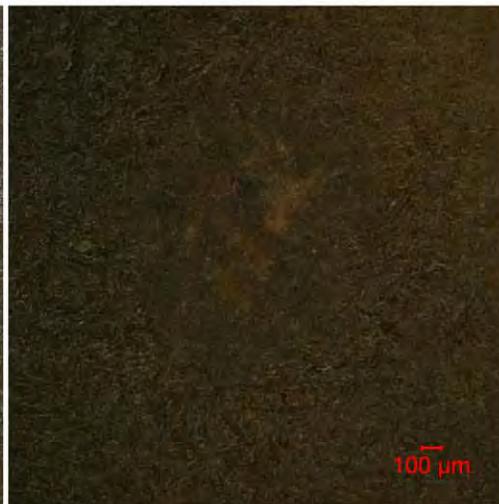
112) GEH 1967:0155:0041 drip mark, UV light



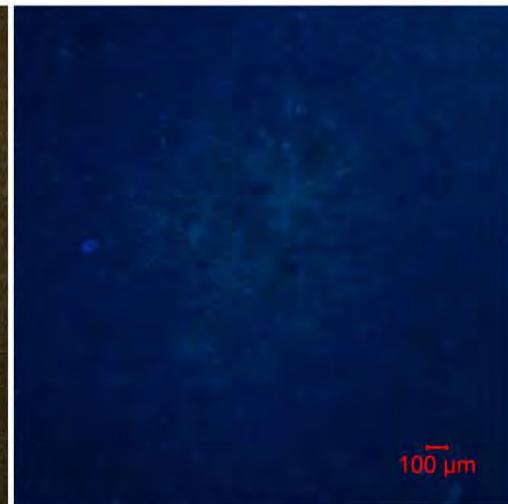
113) GEH 1967:0155:0041 drip mark, UV light



114) GEH 1967:0155:0041 retouch at top center, bright field, refl. light



115) GEH 1967:0155:0041 retouch at top center, dark field, refl. light



116) GEH 1967:0155:0041 retouch at top center, UV light



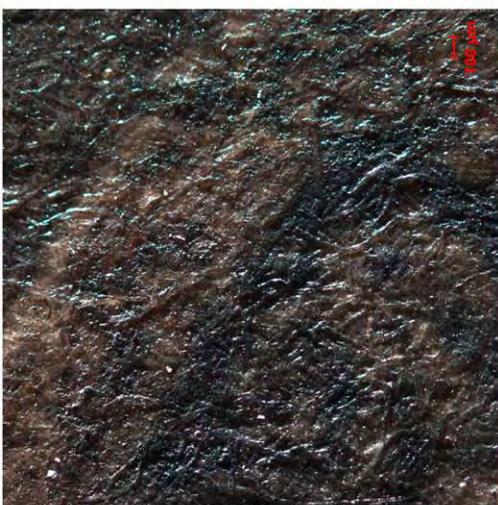
117) GEH 1967:0155:0041 retouch at bottom right corner, bright field and polarizers, refl. light



118) GEH 1967:0155:0041 retouch at bottom right corner, bright field and crossed polarizers, refl. light



119) GEH 1967:0155:0041 retouch at bottom right corner, dark field, refl. light



120) GEH 1967:0155:0041 retouch at bottom right corner, raking light



121) GEH 1967:0155:0041 retouch at bottom right corner, UV light

Beeswax can be excluded, because it would fluoresce when illuminated with UV light, while it does not. The substance might be gum, but only Fourier Transform Infrared spectroscopy (FTIR) would confirm. Under magnification, paper fibers and pigment particles from the gum layer are evident (fig. 73-76, 85-88, 97-100).

There are numerous retouchings on the print, noticeably different in tone, color and sheen from the surrounding image areas (fig. 114-121). That is a common feature in Coburn's photographs, where retouchings are not very well blended with the imaging material. Either Coburn's retouching technique was poor, or that contrast has been possibly accentuated over time by deterioration of both the imaging substance and the material used for inpainting.



1967:0155:0040

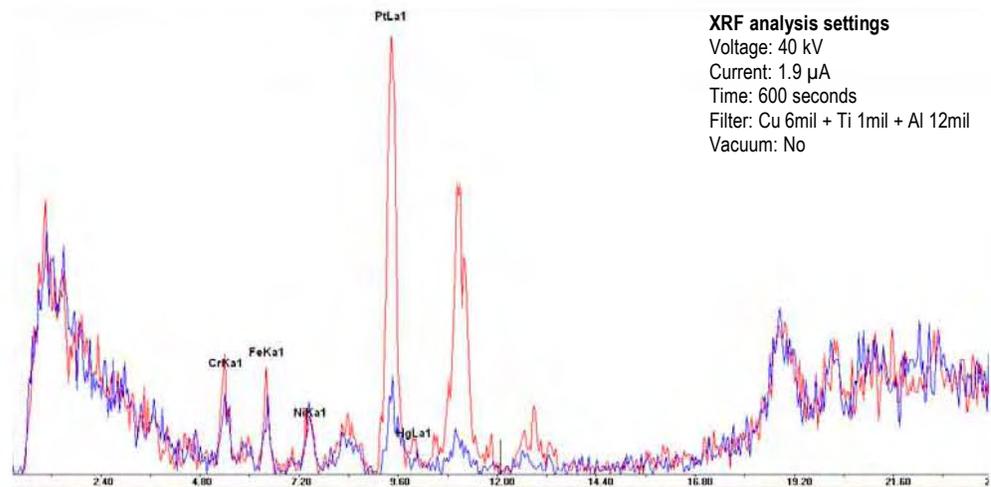
Gum-platinum print (1967:0155:0040) is loose and shows no evidence of having ever been mounted. It is trimmed slightly differently than the other two photographs, that contain more information along the right edge.

The image color is both cool and warm, adhering to Coburn's description of a "two-colour effect." In photography at that time there was a distinct taste for split tone, and this is an excellent example of that. An article by Joseph T. Keiley published in the April 1900 issue of *Camera Notes* assured that "very beautiful effects can be gotten through the use of mercury-bic. in combination with the ordinary developer, as suggested by Mr. Stieglitz, and by the application of the developing bath without mercury to one part of the print and that containing it to another, a double toned print will result, whose beauty will depend entirely on the correctness of the maker's taste."<sup>25</sup> Instead of applying mercury locally by means of brushes, Coburn preferred to achieve the effect by re-exposing his prints coated with pigmented gum.

<sup>25</sup> Joseph T. Keiley, "The 'Camera Notes' Improved Glycerine Process for the Development of Platinum Prints," *Camera Notes*, v. 3, n. 4 (April 1900): 225.

The platinum image in this print was printed darker than in the other two variants. Here the highlight areas carry more details, and luminosity is focused on the girl in the foreground and on George Meredith, pivotal point of the composition. In order to obtain that effect, Coburn toned down with bluish-green watercolor the poet's hands and the arms of the chair, whose surface reflectance is more matte than in the surrounding areas.

XRF analysis confirmed the presence of chromium (from the gum dichromate), iron (possibly contained in pigments), platinum and mercury in the imaging substance. There is a much smaller quantity of mercury than in the other two photographs.



Spectrum overlay: Dmax (red) and Dmin (blue).

The surface presents a pronounced relief in the areas of higher density, where the gum layer is thicker, and differential gloss between the highlight and shadow areas, as photo-documentation in axial light shows (fig. 38, 41, 44, 47). This print carries a greater amount of gum than the previous one. It is very likely that Coburn applied to it multiple pigmented-gum layers.

Microscopic examination shows paper fibers and pigment particles (fig. 101-104). Small brownish spots that seem to cover the entire surface of the print appear accentuated under magnification but are clearly visible at naked eye.



It is unclear if these are a manifestation of deterioration of the paper support due to residual iron salts in the platinum process, or if they are instead related to the gum layers.

After examining these three prints, the negative reveals further interesting aspects. It has a tear at the top left corner and a loss at the bottom right corner (fig. 122-124). Both flaws were mended with a thin cloth gauze on the verso of the film, probably applied by Coburn himself. The cloth is toned with graphite where it compensates for the loss. These manipulations are more or less visible in the prints, depending on the process adopted. In the plain platinum print 1967:0155:0042 both repairs are evident, along with a retouching in the print surface at the bottom right corner, where the loss was in the negative (fig. 126-127). In the gum-platinum print 1967:0155:0041 they are less visible, because of the layer of pigmented gum. There is a retouching on the print surface where the loss was in the negative (fig. 129-130). In the gum-platinum print 1967:0155:0040, where the layer of gum is thicker and has relief, the shadows are very dense and cover any defect deriving from the negative. Still, when looking carefully at the area where the loss was in the negative, faint outlines can be seen (fig. 132-133).

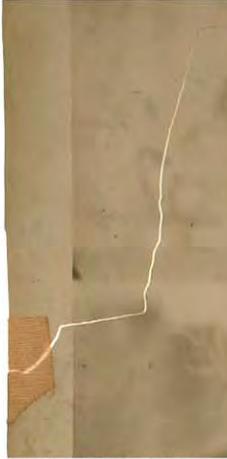


George Eastman House.

Multiple layers of pigmented gum on the third print might have been needed in order to cover some defects due to damage in the negative. It can be assumed that photograph 1967:0155:0040 was the final stage of the print sequence. *The Illustrated London News* published George Meredith's family portrait on May 22, 1909, four days after the novelist's death. The image reproduced on the newspaper front page, which might have been one of the two prints purchased by Meredith in 1905, shows light values similar to photograph 1967:0155:0040.



122) GEH 1978:0050:0959, with tear and loss



123) GEH 1978:0050:0959 tear



124) GEH 1978:0050:0959 loss



125) GEH 1967:0155:0042



126) GEH 1967:0155:0042 top left corner



127) GEH 1967:0155:0042 bottom right corner



128) GEH 1967:0155:0041



129) GEH 1967:0155:0041 top left corner



130) GEH 1967:0155:0041 bottom right corner



131) GEH 1967:0155:0040



132) GEH 1967:0155:0040 top left corner



133) GEH 1967:0155:0040 bottom right corner

## 1.4 | Alfred Stieglitz, ca. 1907

In the case of this celebrated photograph of Alfred Stieglitz, the comparative study of negative and print proved to be particularly valuable. It clarified a significant aspect in the aesthetics of the portrait, that is, its round shape.

Because of its uniqueness within Coburn's work, the tondo format raised questions of a potential symbolic emphasis. Although such an assumption is plausible, inspection of the negative showed that the round format of the contact print was a consequence of damage in the negative. The Cristoid film negative, composed of unsupported gelatin, was easily injured in handling. A black tape applied along the edges of the negative was meant to consolidate the loss at the top left corner and the break at the bottom left corner. These flaws, which would ruin a powerful image, were overcome by Coburn by trimming the print round.



Alvin Langdon Coburn, *Alfred Stieglitz*, ca. 1907, George Eastman House.  
© George Eastman House

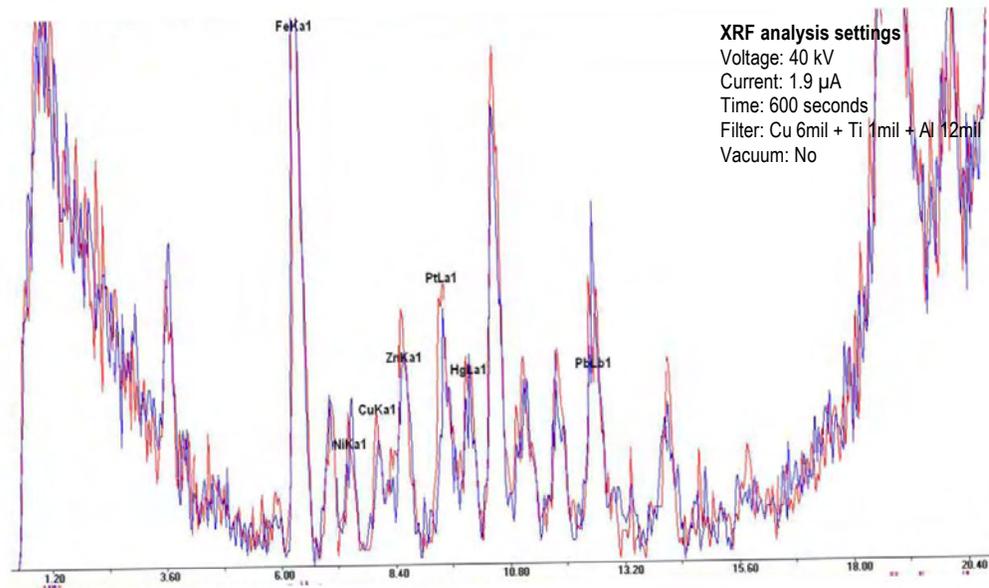
George Eastman House holds three printed variants of this image. From left to right: a contact platinum print (1967:0155:0087) on black mount, a photogravure with neutral tones (1967:0155:0088), and one with warm tones (1967:0155:0089).

XRF analysis was conducted on the platinum print.



Dmin

Dmax



Spectrum overlay: Dmax (red) and Dmin (blue).

The XRF spectra record presence of platinum and mercury in the imaging substance. That is interesting because the image color is not warm, and by visual examination this photographs could hardly be identified as a mercury-toned platinum print. Its neutral tones might have been determined by the temperature of the developer set in the darkroom.

The platinum print shows surface sheen, that implies presence of some coating.

Coburn wrote in the drafts for his autobiography that he took this portrait in 1912. An inscription in his hand reads: “Alfred Stieglitz (1912),” on the back of photogravure 1967:0155:0089.

The portrait, which was published in *Camera Work* n. 21 (January 1908), is in fact to be dated before July 1907, when it appeared in *The Craftsman*.<sup>26</sup> According to Weston Naef, it “was presumably made about the time of Coburn's first show at

<sup>26</sup> Vol. 12, n. 4: 395.

the Little Galleries (March 11 - April 10, 1907), for which he had expressly returned from London to New York.”<sup>27</sup>

The Metropolitan Museum of Art holds a platinum print (33.43.197) and a photogravure (33.43.205) of the same subject. The photogravure is signed in pencil: “Alvin Langdon Coburn ’07,” while the platinum print bears a handwritten inscription in pencil on the verso of the primary support, which reads: “Coburn, Alvin Langdon / Portrait of Alfred Steiglitz / May 1907. / “July 5 – [...] dark mounting band in cut” (AS) / Plat.”

The Royal Photographic Society collection at the National Media Museum in Bradford includes another variant of this portrait, printed in platinum (C28 9793). A label on the original mount of the photograph, now detached, bears Coburn’s signature and a RPS label reading: “Plat 1905.”



*Other portraits of Alfred Stieglitz by Alvin Langdon Coburn*

Two negatives on Cristoid film (1978:0050:0268-0269) held at George Eastman House, possibly taken during the same sitting as the previous portrait. There are no prints from these negatives in the Museum collection.

© George Eastman House



A gum print of unknown location, exhibited in Coburn’s one-man show at the Royal Photographic Society in 1906. It is reproduced in *Photographische Rundschau und Photographisches Centralblatt*, 1906, illustrating a review on Coburn’s exhibition in London, by E.O. Hoppé. There are no photographs with this image at George Eastman House.



A platinum print taken in 1903 held at The Metropolitan Museum of Art (33.43.194). There is no photograph with this image at George Eastman House.

[www.metmuseum.com](http://www.metmuseum.com)

<sup>27</sup> Weston J. Naef, *The Collection of Alfred Stieglitz. Fifty Pioneers of Modern Photography* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art; The Viking Press, 1978): 307.

18 Alfred Stieglitz 1912.

There is no doubt that the most outstanding photographic magazine ever produced was "Camera Work." It functioned from 1903 to 1917 and it was edited and published by Alfred Stieglitz who devoted his life to the furtherance of photography and its recognition as a medium of personal expression.

I am happy to think that three of its issues: No. 6 (April 1904), No. 15 (July 1906), and No. 21 (January 1908) presented samples of my work reproduced ~~the~~ with the greatest care and fidelity.

We all owe much to the ability and enthusiasm of Stieglitz and his own pioneer work in photography itself is of outstanding merit.

~~His little gallery~~ On November 24<sup>th</sup> 1905 he opened "The little Gallery of the Photo-Secession" at 291 Fifth Avenue, New York, which came to be affectionately known as "291" where the cream of photography was exhibited, and also later some of the most modern examples in other of the out <sup>was</sup> (as) published in Camera Work.

On this work he was helped with <sup>the</sup> a group

and practical enthusiasm of Edward Steichen  
to whom photography also owes much,  
and to that little group known as the  
Photo-Secession who fought the good fight  
for photography's recognition in those  
early days.

made in 1912

This portrait of Stieglitz, does I think  
convey the dynamic character of the man.  
No one could ~~not~~ come to know him without  
being impressed by his sincerity and devotion  
to the cause to which his whole life was  
dedicated.

## 1.5 | The Octopus, 1912

*The Octopus*, that is, the view looking down upon Madison Square Park from the topmost floor of the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company's skyscraper, has often been identified as Coburn's iconic photograph. Coburn defined it "revolutionary, depending as it did more upon its pattern than upon its subject matter." To the question "What is it?" he would answer that it was "a composition or exercise in filling a rectangular space with curves or masses."<sup>28</sup> Beaumont Newhall reproduced this view in his 1949 edition of the *History of Photography* as a pioneer exercise in abstract photography.



J.F. Shew & Co.  
Delta Reflex.  
© George Eastman House

Switching now to landscape photographs, it is worth reminding that around 1905-1906 Coburn abandoned the view camera for a handier 4 x 5 reflex camera.<sup>29</sup>

The photographer's gift to George Eastman House comprised three cameras: a J.F. Shew & Co. Delta Reflex, a Houghton-Butcher Ensign Carbine and a Folding Pocket Kodak. Several photographs depict Coburn holding the Shew Delta reflex, such as platinum prints by Fannie Coburn and Rudolf Dührkoop, and an autochrome by Arnold Genthe.



Detail from Fannie Coburn, *Alvin Langdon Coburn at the Grand Canyon*, 1911, George Eastman House.  
© George Eastman House



Arnold Genthe, *Alvin Langdon Coburn*, ca. 1910, Library of Congress.



Rudolf Dührkoop, *Alvin Langdon Coburn*, ca. 1908, George Eastman House.  
© George Eastman House

<sup>28</sup> *Alvin Langdon Coburn, Photographer: An Autobiography with Over 70 Reproductions of His Works* (New York: Dover Publications, 1978): vii.

<sup>29</sup> That is confirmed by an early 1906 article that reads: "[Mr. Coburn's] outdoor work is mostly made with a 5 x 4 reflex camera, and his indoor portrait work was produced with a 10 x 8 camera and single lens working at *f*/8." See "Alvin Langdon Coburn's One-Man Show at the R.P.S.," *The Photographic News*, v. 50, n. 527 (February 2, 1906): 90.

It seems plausible to think that the recurring mentions throughout Coburn's autobiography should refer to this very camera (which is also the one that the photographer carefully labeled when preparing his bequest to George Eastman House). In two letters of 1907-1908 addressed to Stieglitz, Coburn alluded to a Graflex of his, which evidently has not been preserved.<sup>30</sup>

Along with the cameras, Coburn equipment at George Eastman House includes fifteen lenses, the majority of which were made or adapted to fit the Shew Delta Reflex camera.<sup>31</sup>

- 5 semi-achromatic lenses (Pinkham & Smith)
- 1 pictorialist lens (Pinkham & Smith)
- 1 soft focus portrait lens (J.H. Dallmeyer Ltd.)
- 1 Adon lens (J.H. Dallmeyer Ltd.)
- 1 telephoto lens (J.H. Dallmeyer Ltd.)
- 1 Voigtländer Dynar (Voigtländer & Sohn AG)
- 1 Bodine pictorial lens (unidentified maker)
- 3 barrel lenses (unidentified maker)
- 1 meniscus lens (unidentified maker)



Pinkham & Smith semi-achromatic lens with embossed inscription "Made expressly for Alvin Langdon Coburn," George Eastman House. © George Eastman House

Pinkham & Smith semi-achromatic lens was Coburn's favorite one. He wrote a tribute to that lens titled *The Question of Diffusion*, that was published in several Pinkham & Smith Co. catalogs. Quoting from it:

*I now have about a dozen P. & S. (Semi-Achromatic) lenses of various focal lengths, most of which have been especially made for me. [...] It is difficult for me to imagine what modern photography would be without the Semi-Achromatic lens, when you consider that F. Holland Day, Baron de Meyer, Stieglitz, White, Steichen, Kuehn, Seeley, Mrs Käsebier are only a few of*

<sup>30</sup> Letters dated June 1907 and June 1908, Alfred Stieglitz/Georgia O'Keeffe Archive, Yale Collection of American Literature. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

<sup>31</sup> The Coburn correspondence contains mentions of photographic lenses. In a letter from Paris dated May 30, 1906, George Bernard Shaw announced he would give to Coburn a lens from Robert Demachy, which would need a contraption in order to work on his camera. In June 1908,

*the workers who use it, practically to the exclusion of other lenses. [...] With the S.A. Lens you get modeling, roundness, suggestive of sculpture, atmosphere and texture. [...] Just a few words of practical advice in regard to the use of these lenses. Under-exposure (bad in any case) plays you queer pranks when the S.A. Lens is used. Never stop down to any great extent, as in so-doing you lose much of the special quality of the lens. In several of my lenses that have Waterhouse Stops (the kind you always lose) I have discarded them entirely, and closed up the slot in the mount with a rubber band to prevent leakage of light, and use the lens wide open.”*

In 1911, for his Californian landscapes, Coburn was using a new telephoto lens.<sup>32</sup> When capturing *The Octopus* the following year, he might have used that type of lens attached to his Shew Delta reflex camera. The telephoto lens would contribute in compressing perspective, which seemed to comply with the creator’s intent focused this time on the image pattern.

One might think there is just one *Octopus*, whereas Coburn produced two slightly different images of it, which are represented in various versions at George Eastman House.



*Left:* two 5x4 nitrate negatives and a copy negative on glass. *Right:* four silver gelatin DOP prints of varying dimensions, a 17x14 platinum print and a 17x14 negative on Cristoid film.

The platinum print here reproduced is a modern facsimile made from Coburn’s negative by Michael Hager and Carlos Guzman in 1989. I have not seen Coburn’s platinum print, since it has been out of the Museum since November 2006.

© George Eastman House

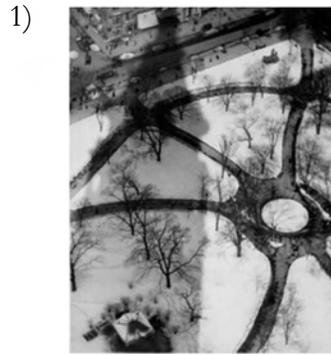


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Coburn wrote to Stieglitz about a Goerz lens, which worked almost like a Smith after having been slightly unscrewed in the mount.

<sup>32</sup> In a letter addressed to Stieglitz on May 1911 from California, Coburn informed he had got a new telephoto lens. Alfred Stieglitz/Georgia O’Keeffe Archive, Yale Collection of American Literature. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

Although very similar, the two views differ in the orientation of the shadow and also of the camera, which produced two differing framings. Furthermore, the focus of the second image is softer.



© George Eastman House



© George Eastman House

1) For the image at left, which is the most represented, there are six versions:



Nitrate negative  
12 x 9 cm  
GEH 1979:4108:0001  
© George Eastman House



Glass copy negative  
12 x 9 cm  
1979:4110:0001  
© George Eastman House



Negative on Cristoid film  
41.9 x 31.2 cm  
GEH 1980:0528:0058  
© George Eastman House



Platinum print  
42.3 x 32.3 cm  
GEH 1967:0144:0289  
© George Eastman House



Gelatin silver print  
20.2 x 15.3 cm  
GEH 1967:0144:0290  
© George Eastman House



Gelatin silver print  
20.6 x 15.7 cm  
GEH 1967:0144:0286  
© George Eastman House

This series consists of three negatives (a nitrocellulose film pack that was exposed in the reflex camera, a large format Cristoid film and a copy negative on glass that reproduces a thumbtacked print) and three prints (a contact platinum print obtained from the Cristoid film, and two gelatin silver prints).

The 1912 unpublished essay *Alvin Langdon Coburn, Artist-Photographer* by William Howe Downes describes a working method that Coburn would adopt at that time, which is reflected in this series:

*“From the small original negatives he makes a positive or transparency on glass, which, being only an intermediate stage, may be destroyed after it has fulfilled its purpose. From the positive he makes by projection in an enlarging camera, constructed much like a magic lantern, a new and large negative on film. His favorite size has been fourteen by seventeen for exhibition prints, and ten by twelve or eight by ten for portraits. From the negatives he makes a direct contact print on platinum paper, with, occasionally, a very thin after-glaze of gum to give richness to the shadows. This he does by a modification of the gum bichromatic process, printing in register over the original platinum.”*

Therefore, from the film pack Coburn produced the 17 x 14” printing negative by means of an inter-positive that probably got destroyed - George Eastman House holds no inter-positive of his. From the enlarged printing negative, the photographer made the platinum print. What is not easy to understand is why for such a purpose Coburn employed Cristoid film. Moreover, that is not the only instance of such a choice. The Museum collection includes eighty-two negatives sharing same size and medium of this one, whereas Coburn’s handwritten list of points to mention in his autobiography contains a quick note stating: “Most of large films destroyed. Very few large original prints made.” The majority of those printing negatives represent landscapes, but there are also a few portraits.

Physical characteristics of the Cristoid film are pronounced thinness and flexibility. In most of cases, these films suffer from planar distortion, their surface adjusting to an undulated shape. This one in particular, showing gloss on either

side, was varnished. Otherwise, in absence of coating, one side of Cristoid film (the fast emulsion side) is more matte than the other. Some of Coburn's negatives on Cristoid films have developed silver mirroring.



1980:0528:0058  
© George Eastman House

As for the glass copy negative, because it carries a smaller image than the film pack, it was not meant to be a step of an enlargement process. Instead it might have been made in order to modify the quality of the image, by losing a little sharpness of focus. Or, perhaps the photographer was unable to access his original negatives. Coburn's bequest brought to the Museum a total of twelve copy negatives on glass, including this one, all measuring 9 x 12 cm. This miscellaneous group includes, besides *The Octopus*, copies of views taken in Madeira and copies of illustrations from books of mystic themes. They might be all related to a later time in Coburn's life, in the 1950s.

2) The other image is shown in a nitrate film pack and two gelatin silver prints:



Nitrate negative  
12 x 9 cm  
1979:4107:0001  
© George Eastman House



Gelatin silver print  
31 x 23.2 cm  
1967:0144:0287  
© George Eastman House



Gelatin silver print  
20.5 x 15.1 cm  
1982:0140:0001  
© George Eastman House

It is documented that Coburn printed photograph 1982:0140:0001 in 1947 for Beaumont Newhall, who wanted to reproduce *The Octopus* in his book. When comparing the four gelatin silver developed-out prints made from the two nitrate negatives, differing qualities of tones, surface sheen and texture emerge. With reference to the *Silver Gelatin DOP Sample Book* developed by Tania Passafiume and Grant Romer in 2001,<sup>33</sup> these photographs can be characterized as follows:

*Print 1967:0144:0290*

Surface Base Tint: Pinkish white

Surface Texture: Smooth

Surface Sheen: Glossy

Base Material: Fiber Base

Base Weight: Single Weight

Manufacturer: Not Available

*Print 1967:0144:0286*

Surface Base Tint: Pinkish white

Surface Texture: Fine-Grained

Surface Sheen: Semi-Matte

Base Material: Fiber Base

Base Weight: Single Weight

Manufacturer: Not Available

*Print 1982:0140:0001*

Surface Base Tint: Greenish white

Surface Texture: Fine-Grained

Surface Sheen: Semi-Matte

Base Material: Fiber Base

Base Weight: Single Weight

Manufacturer: Not Available

*Print 1967:0144:0287*

Surface Base Tint: Cool white

Surface Texture: Smooth

Surface Sheen: Glossy

Base Material: Fiber Base

Base Weight: Single Weight

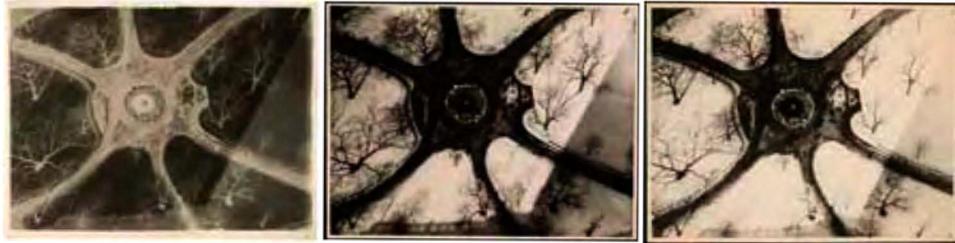
Manufacturer: Not Available

The cool white tint of the surface base in photograph 1967:1044:0287 suggests that there might be optical brightening agents in the paper. Presence of optical brighteners agents, which should be confirmed through examination under ultraviolet (UV) light, would set a later date for this print. That would range from the late 1950s to the mid-1960s, whereas the other three prints are likely to be dated before 1950. Print 1967:0144:0287 might have been made for Coburn's solo exhibition at the University of Reading in 1962.

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<sup>33</sup> Tania Passafiume, *A Silver Gelatin DOP Sample Book and a Characteristic Catalogue of the Edward Weston Collection at the George Eastman House* (Rochester NY: George Eastman House, 2001).

Two more views of the *Octopus* are featured in the George Eastman House collection. A close-up of Madison Square Park seen from above, which Coburn printed in two gelatin silver developed-out papers with different contrast, and a view from a lesser elevated standpoint which has no related print in the Museum.



Nitrate negative  
GEH 1979:4111:0001  
© George Eastman House

Gelatin silver print  
GEH 1967:0144:0291  
© George Eastman House

Gelatin silver print  
GEH 1967:0144:0292  
© George Eastman House



Nitrate negative  
GEH 1979:4109:0001  
recto & verso

© George Eastman House

This negative illustrates how Coburn would crop his nitrocellulose film packs, by means of a paper mask and black paper tape, remnants of which can be found on many of his nitrate negatives.

53. The Octopus, New York 1912

This photograph was even more revolutionary, depending as it did, <sup>more</sup> upon its pattern than upon its subject matter.

It was made from the summit of the Metropolitan Tower looking down <sup>on</sup> upon Madison Square, ~~from~~ where such its shadow is to be seen, and its name "The Octopus" is obviously derived from ~~the~~ its resemblance to that creature. ~~and~~ It was considered quite mad when it was first shown, and even now it is often <sup>sometimes</sup> greeted with such questions as "what is it"?

The answer is, of course, it is a composition, an exercise in the filling of a ~~square~~ rectangular space with curve and mass.

In an article which I <sup>wrote</sup> ~~wrote~~ not long after this <sup>in 1916</sup> on "The Future of Pictorial Photography" I wrote: "Why should not the camera also throw off the shackles of conventional representation and attempt something fresh and untried? Why not ~~represent~~ ~~represent~~ Why not? Why should not it be subtle

rapidly be utilized to study movement? Why  
~~should~~ not repeated successive exposure of an  
object in motion on the same plate? Why should  
not perspective be studied from angles hitherto  
neglected or unobserved? Why, I ask you  
earnestly need we ~~we~~ go on making common place  
little exposure of subjects that may be sorted  
into groups of landscape, portraits and figure  
studies? Think of the joy of doing something  
which it would be impossible to classify? \*

I like to think of this as prophesy!

\* "Photogram of the Year" 1916

## 1.6 | Pigment Prints, Photogravures and Halftones

Other photographic processes employed by Coburn and represented in the George Eastman House collection include pigment prints, photogravures and letterpress halftones.

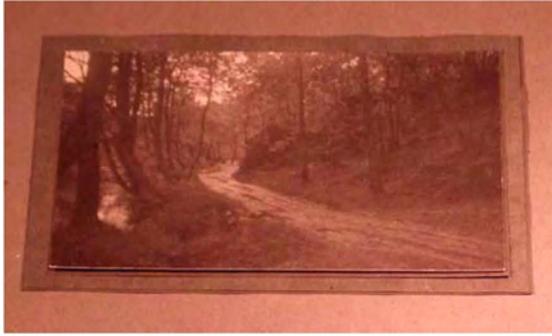
### Pigment Prints

*“I must confess that I do not approve of gum prints which look like chalk drawings, nor of drawing on negatives, nor of glycerine-restrained platinotypes in imitation of wash-drawings as produced by Joseph T. Keiley, a well-known American photographer and a friend of Alfred Stieglitz. Nevertheless, I do not deny that Demachy, Eugene, Keiley and others produced exciting prints by these manipulated techniques, which differentiated them from the ordinary run of amateurs which in the 1880s and '90s inundated the world of photography in their hundreds of thousands after the introduction of factory-produced dry plates (and from 1889 onward celluloid roll film) and simple hand-cameras had removed the necessity for any particular skill. In most of the so-called controlled processes it was possible by manual treatment of negative or print to create a hybrid of graphic and photographic art. This I rarely did, for I am myself a devotee of pure photography, which is unapproachable in its own field. The combined gum platinum printing process which I used for some years, though complicated, was purely photographic. My only concession to the taste of the time was the use of a soft-focus lens, made especially for me by my friend Henry Smith of Boston.”<sup>34</sup>*

Although Coburn wrote he did not approve of controlled processes that would assimilate photographs to drawings, he himself must have practiced pigment printing techniques in his early years, as it is proven by a few gum prints at George Eastman House and at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and by a carbon print from the Royal Photographic Society collection.

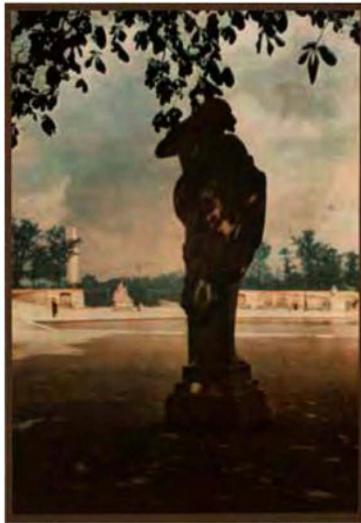
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<sup>34</sup> *Alvin Langdon Coburn, Photographer: An Autobiography with Over 70 Reproductions of His Works* (New York: Dover Publications, 1978): 16-18.



Alvin Langdon Coburn,  
*A Woodland Road*, 1900-1902,  
carbon print,  
Bradford, National Media Museum.

Among the three gum prints by Coburn held at George Eastman House, only one, *Place de la Concorde, Paris*, is a color print. On the verso, it bears an inscription by the photographer: “Triple Gum Print.” Another multiple color gum print by Coburn was shown in the De Meyer - Coburn exhibition at the Goupil Galleries in 1908.<sup>35</sup> It was a portrait of George Bernard Shaw and I have not yet located it.



Alvin Langdon Coburn,  
*Place de la Concorde*, ca. 1905,  
three-color gum print,  
George Eastman House.  
© *George Eastman House*

Furthermore, an unusual advertisement in *Photo Era* indicates that Coburn was personally manufacturing and supplying gum bichromate papers in 1903.

<sup>35</sup> “The De Meyer – Coburn Exhibition at the Goupil Galleries,” *The Photographic News*, v. 53, n. 643 (March 20, 1908): 273.

# Photographic Supplies

Most of the more advanced workers in photography use Willis & Clements or American Platinum Paper. If you do our prices ought to interest you—drop us a line and find out what Right Prices are.

## GUM BICHROMATE PAPER

Prepared by Alvin Langdon Coburn can be obtained of us or from Mr. Coburn at his studio—Full instructions by mail.

*Do you use a Kodak?* A special lot of Film Negative Albums to preserve your negatives in. Each album holds 100 negatives.

Sizes:  $3\frac{1}{2} \times 3\frac{1}{2}$ ;  $3\frac{1}{4} \times 4\frac{1}{4}$  and  $4 \times 5$  —Price 25c. each, while the lot lasts

PINKHAM & SMITH, 288 Boylston Street  
B O S T O N

Advertisement from *Photo Era*, v. 10, n. 5. May 1903.

Coburn also experimented with a lesser-known variant of the carbon printing process, that is, the ozotype.<sup>36</sup> In his article, “Ozotype: A Few Notes on a New Process,” the photographer wrote:<sup>37</sup>

*“Ozotype is one of the simplest non-transfer carbon processes that have been discovered up to the present time. [...] I have been making some experiments with ozotype during the past week, and find it easy to manipulate and satisfactory in many ways, quite apart from effect of different*

<sup>36</sup> Quoting from Mark Osterman: “This method of pigment printing was invented by Thomas Manly in 1899 and later replaced by the ozobrome process. It was a form of carbon printing. A sheet with bichromated gelatin was contact exposed to a negative. It was then placed in contact with a pigmented carbon tissue soaked in a dilute solution of acetic acid and hydroquinone and squeegeed together. A chemical reaction took place that hardened the carbon emulsion in direct proportion to the degree of exposure. The sheets were separated and the unexposed and therefore unhardened pigment was washed away, which left the hardened areas to form the image.” See *The Focal Encyclopedia of Photography: Digital Imaging, Theory and Applications, History, and Science*, ed. by Michael R. Peres (Burlington, MA: Focal Press, 2007): 100.

<sup>37</sup> Alvin Langdon Coburn, “Ozotype: A Few Notes on a New Process,” *Photo Era*, v. 5, n. 3 (August 1900): 33-35. A few ozotypes by Coburn are reproduced with the article by Thomas Harrison Cummings, “Some Photographs by Alvin Langdon Coburn,” *Photo Era*, v. 10, n. 3 (March 1903): 87-92.

*methods. [...] The feeling here in England is decidedly in favor of the ozotype. Let us hope that in it we have a medium which will be turned to good account, combining as it does permanency, delicacy and adaptability to all surfaces, and the possibility of being kept under nearly if not quite as much control as the gum bichromate.”*

George Eastman House does not hold any identified ozotypes by Coburn. Among the works bequeathed by the photographer to the Museum, there is one ozotype made by Robert Demachy around 1905 that is a portrait of Coburn. It can be identified as an ozotype thanks to the inscription in Coburn’s hand on the verso: “Thomas Manly (ozotype).”



Alvin Langdon Coburn, *Portrait of Miss C.H.*, reproduced in *Photo Era*, v. 10, n. 3, March 1903. Caption reports: “From ozotype on Japanese vellum.”

## Photogravures

Like other Pictorialist photographers, Coburn considered photogravure as an artistic printing process and acknowledged its permanence as an invaluable quality.<sup>38</sup> He proudly reported to have produced 40,000 photogravures with his own presses. For an overview of how Coburn worked with photogravure, see Appendix III.

<sup>38</sup> See Alvin Langdon Coburn, “Alvin Langdon Coburn, Artist-Photographer,” *The Pall Mall Magazine*, v. 51, n. 242 (June 1913): 757-763.

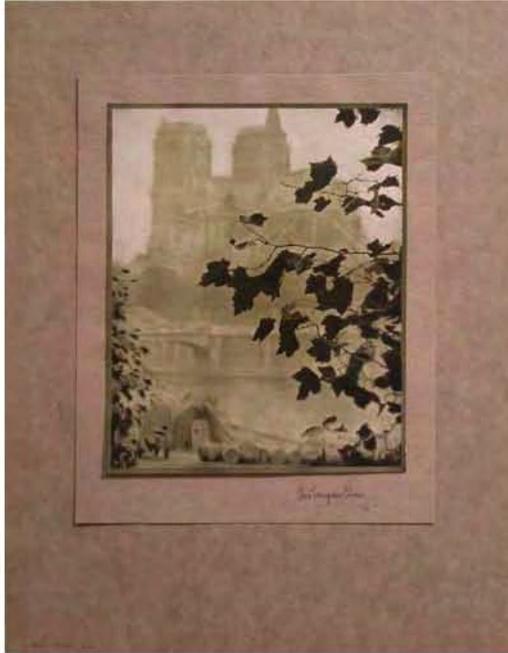
## Letterpress Halftones

It seems that even letterpress halftone was considered by Coburn as an expressive printing technique. Indeed, the photographer was creative in that photomechanical process as well, as a shot of a bridge in Venice shows. In this image, titled *Shadows and Reflections*, Coburn played with the registration of the letterpress printing stages, in order to increase the intricacy of the pattern reflected in the canal. This is evident when comparing the letterpress halftone print with the negative and with the gum-platinum print of the same image.



Alvin Langdon Coburn, *Shadows and Reflections, Venice*, 1905, letterpress halftone, nitrate negative and gum-platinum print, George Eastman House. © George Eastman House

Some letterpress halftones held at George Eastman House and at the Metropolitan Museum of Art document an interesting aspect, as they are mounted and signed exactly as Coburn would do with his platinum prints. This suggests that Coburn regarded those photomechanical prints as equals to photographs.



Alvin Langdon Coburn, *Notre Dame*, ca. 1908, letterpress halftone, George Eastman House.  
© George Eastman House

Yet it is not clear if Coburn meant these mounted prints for exhibition purposes.

## 2 | Conservation Issues of Coburn Photographs

For printing his positives, Coburn mainly used the following photographic processes: platinum prints, gum-platinum prints, gelatin silver developing-out papers and photogravures. In the course of my study of the photographer's works at George Eastman House and other institutions, I have been able to appreciate that their overall condition is good in most of cases. Nonetheless, they present some common conservation issues that can be divided into three main categories.

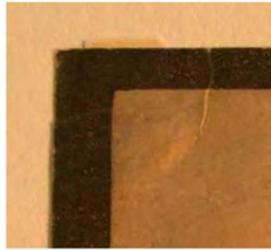
Firstly, as to process: while the imaging substance in platinum, gum-platinum and photogravure prints is considered stable, it has deteriorated in most of Coburn's gelatin silver prints. Most of them show presence of silver mirroring, which is quite severe in some cases.



Alvin Langdon Coburn, *Self-Portrait*,  
New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art,  
1986.1008.1.

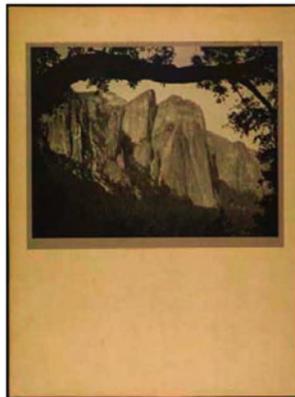
Secondly, mounted prints often present physical problems in their corners, due to various factors such as cockling of primary or secondary support in proximity of adhesive, loss of adhesion, discoloration and migration of adhesive. These cases are individually illustrated.

Mounted photogravures often present creases at top corners, close to areas where adhesive was applied. Different rates of expansion and contraction in the adhered primary and secondary support can provoke cockling in the print. Often times those creases show surface abrasion along their edge, due to friction in housing where prints are stacked one upon the other.



Alvin Langdon Coburn,  
*Capri*, Boston, Museum  
of Fine Arts, 1985.320.

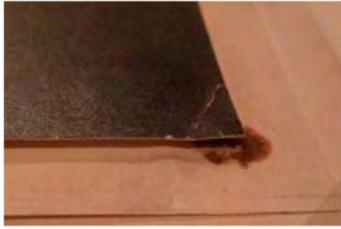
Same problem occurs in some cases with mounts. Secondary support cockles where adhered to a tertiary support and therefore it brings stress to the print and constitutes a potential for damage (see Appendix V: conservation treatment report of gum-platinum print GEH 1967:0157:0080).



Alvin Langdon Coburn,  
*The Three Brothers*,  
*Yosemite*, 1911,  
GEH 1967:0157:0080.  
© George Eastman House

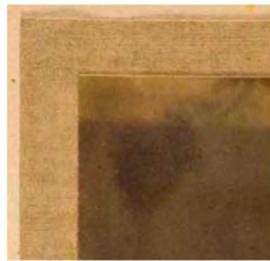


The adhesive used to tip prints to secondary supports has progressively lost its adhesion properties, so that photographs have detached from their mounts. In addition, the adhesive discoloration has affected some works in their aesthetics.



Alvin Langdon Coburn, *Vortograph II*,  
1917, silver gelatin print,  
Bradford, National Media Museum,  
RPS 9792 C28

Exceptionally, mounted platinum prints present stains at the top corners, due to migration of adhesive used to tip the photograph to the secondary support.



Alvin Langdon Coburn,  
*George Meredith and Family*, 1904,  
GEH 1967:0155:0042.  
© *George Eastman House*

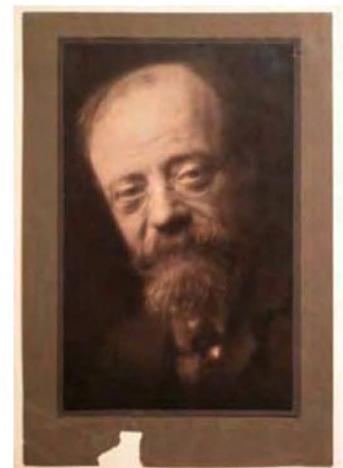
Thirdly, mounted works commonly show deterioration in their mounts, under the form of discoloration and loss.



Alvin Langdon Coburn,  
*The Amphiteatre, Grand Canyon*, 1912,  
GEH 1967:0157:0073.  
© *George Eastman House*



Alvin Langdon Coburn,  
*Désiré Defauw*, 1916,  
GEH 1967:0097:0023.  
© *George Eastman House*

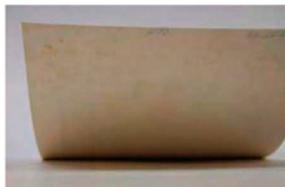


Alvin Langdon Coburn,  
*Frederick H. Evans*,  
New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art,  
1949.55.212.

A less frequent manifestation of deterioration is presented by platinum prints and photogravures affected by foxing, on recto or on verso.



Alvin Langdon Coburn,  
*Alfred Stieglitz*, ca. 1907,  
GEH 1967:0155:0087  
and 1967:0155:0089.  
© *George Eastman House*



For what concerns Coburn's negatives, the extensive body of Cristoid films at George Eastman House (1,329 in total, of which eighty-two are enlarged printing negatives) should undergo a conservation survey. Nothing similar has been done, nor a study has been produced on the deterioration of these particular negatives. It is therefore an absolute priority to evaluate condition and understand preservation needs of this special type of objects, which were clearly preferred by some of the most innovative and artistically motivated photographers of the Edwardian era. These materials in fact stimulated and served artistic expression particular to that period.

At George Eastman House these negatives are currently stored individually, with no support, in polyester sleeves stacked horizontally in conservation boxes. It is of great importance to clarify whether this kind of housing and the current environmental conditions in the Museum vaults are appropriate for these objects, or if they are contributing to their deterioration.

At the archives of Country Life Picture Library, Frederick H. Evans' negatives on Cristoid film are stored in the same way. No condition monitoring has been carried out overtime in that institution either.

Finally, George Bernard Shaw's negatives at the archives of the London School of Economics were surveyed by various photo-conservators in 1994 and 2000. That collection should include some Cristoid films that Shaw shot in Ireland, Wales and Algeria between 1907 and 1909.<sup>39</sup> However, the reports of both 1994 and 2000 surveys did not make allusion to any Cristoid film or gelatin film, mentioning only the presence of nitrate and acetate films. Therefore, parameters described in those conservation surveys cannot be used as reference for these photographic objects.

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<sup>39</sup> See note 15 of this report and George Bernard Shaw and Bill Jay, *Bernard Shaw on Photography* (Layton, UT: Gibbs Smith, 1989). I was not allowed to view Shaw's negatives at the London School of Economics, since they had not been re-housed and were considered too fragile to be issued to users.

### 3 | Subject Series

In the course of my research I became fascinated with two lesser-known subject series within Coburn's portraiture: firstly, the *Musicians of Mark*, a planned but never published book that would have concluded the photographer's trilogy of notable figures of the Edwardian world, and secondly, the multiple-exposure portraits, contemporary with the celebrated *Vortographs*.

#### 3.1 | Reconstruction of the *Musicians of Mark*

In 1904, at the time of his second visit to London, Coburn was commissioned by *The Metropolitan Magazine* in New York to photograph literary and art celebrities in England. His autobiography recalls: "this long-term project resulted in my books *Men of Mark* (1913) and *More Men of Mark* (1922)." A third book should have completed the series: "I regret that the intended third volume *Musicians of Mark*, for which I took thirty-three portraits, never reached the stage of publication."

The Richard and Ronay Menschel Library holds no maquette of this book. However, among the papers bequeathed by the photographer to George Eastman House, are a manuscript list of names of musicians.

The manuscript list is written in Coburn's hand on two pages. Thirty-four musicians are mentioned, each accompanied by a date which may indicate the day of the sitting. The two sheets are alike and show the letterhead of a Masonic organization, the North Wales Mark Benevolent Fund, of which Coburn was evidently the secretary. This could help to date the manuscript.

Sir Arnold Bay Feb 18<sup>th</sup> 1916  
Ysaye ~~Mar 15<sup>th</sup> 1916 (?)~~ 4<sup>th</sup> Feb 1916 ?

Albert Sammons December 10<sup>th</sup> 1916

P. de Bachmann June 30<sup>th</sup> 1914

York Bowen Feb 14<sup>th</sup> 1916

Gustav Holst ~~Nov 16<sup>th</sup> 1919~~ March 13<sup>th</sup> 1916

Sir Thomas Buchanan April 1<sup>st</sup> 1916

Siond Terts. March 1<sup>st</sup> 1916 March 1<sup>st</sup> 1916

Daniel Mela Nov 23<sup>rd</sup> 1916 January 24<sup>th</sup> 1917 ✓

Mark Hambourg - October 30<sup>th</sup> 1915

Eugene Goossens Feb. 13<sup>th</sup> 1916

Arnold Dolmetsch (27 Aug. 1914) 21<sup>st</sup> June 1914

Sir Henry Wood March 12<sup>th</sup> 1914

Sir Granville Bantock October 8<sup>th</sup> 1916

Daisy Kennedy January 19<sup>th</sup> 1917

Benno Moiseiwitsch ~~Dec 15<sup>th</sup> 1915 (?)~~ Nov 17<sup>th</sup> 1916

Chaliofine July 1<sup>st</sup> 1914

Cyril Scott Dec 6<sup>th</sup> 1915 June 10<sup>th</sup> 1921 (?)

Igor Stravinsky ~~Feb. 22<sup>nd</sup> 1918 (?)~~

Arthur Rubinstein 31<sup>st</sup> Jan. 1916.

Joseph Holbrook Jan. 24<sup>th</sup> 1916.

John Ireland March 20<sup>th</sup> 1916

Sord Berners ~~Jan 5<sup>th</sup> 1919~~ Feb 12<sup>th</sup> 1919 ✓

Frank Bridge Feb 9<sup>th</sup> 1916

Bernard van Dieren Feb. 17<sup>th</sup> 1917

Sibelius December 11<sup>th</sup> 1918

Jesire Defaney Oct 30<sup>th</sup> 1916

~~November 1<sup>st</sup> 1916 (?)~~ Nov. 13<sup>th</sup> 1916

Boris Lensky

Night Gordon Woodhouse August 1<sup>st</sup> 1916

Guilhemina Suggia Nov. 3<sup>rd</sup> 1916

Astra Diamond ~~November 12<sup>th</sup> 1917 (?)~~ Sept 15<sup>th</sup> 1919

Fredrick Jelius Feb 18<sup>th</sup> 1919

(address back of 1920)

W. M. Safonoff April 15<sup>th</sup> 1916

~~May 12<sup>th</sup> 1916 (?)~~ April 6<sup>th</sup> 1916

Myra Hess

34

ПРЕСЛОВА

НАУЧНО-ИССЛЕДОВАТЕЛЬСКИЙ ЦЕНТР

У ПЕЧАТНИ СОВЕТСКИХ ВУЗОВ

ИОБЛН МУПЕС

ЦУБРЕСН

ВЛАИВРСЕИГЛДД

ИОБЛН МУПЕС МУВК ВЕНЕЛОГЕНЕ ЕОИД





# NORTH WALES MARK BENEVOLENT FUND

A. LANGDON COBURN, P.M.,  
PAST GRAND OVERSEER (ENG. & WALES, ETC.)  
SECRETARY

BRYNBUGEILYDD,  
HARLECH,  
NORTH WALES.

---

MUSICIANS

Sir Henry Wood.	March 12th 1914	
Arnold Dolmetsch	June 21st 1914	
V. de Pachmann	June 30th 1914	
Chaliapine	July 1st 1914	
Mark Hambourg	October 30th 1915	
Cyril Scott	December 6th 1915	
Joseph Holbrook	January 24th 1916	
Arthur Rubenstein	January 31st 1916	
Ysaye	February 4th 1916	
Frank Bridge	February 9th 1916	
Sir Eugene Goossens	February 13th 1916	
York Bowen	February 14th 1916	
Sir Arnold Bax	February 18th 1916	
Lionel Tertis	March 1st 1916	
Gustav Holst	March 13th 1916	
John Ireland	March 20th 1916	
Sir Thomas Beecham	April 1st 1916	
Dame Myra Hess	April 6th 1916	
* W. Safoneff	April 15th 1916	
Mrs Gordon Woodhouse	August 1st 1916	
Sir Granville Bantock	October 8th 1916	
Desire Defaux	October 30th 1916	
Guilhema Suggia	November 3rd 1916	(Guilhemina)
Boris Lensky	November 13th 1916	
Benno Moiseiwitsch	November 17th 1916	
Albert Salmons	December 10th 1916	
Daisy Kennedy	January 19th 1917	
Daniel Melsa	January 24th 1917	
Lord Berners	February 12th 1919	
Bernard van Dieren	February 17th 1917	
Sibelius	December 11th 1918	
Frederick Delius	February 18th 1919	
Astra Desmond	September 11th 1919	
Igor Stravinsky	June 19th 1921	

The same names and dates, differently arranged, are contained in a document typed in purple ink on thin paper, possibly a carbon copy. An identical version of this is housed along with Coburn's prints of musicians in the Photograph Collection. The musicians are here listed in chronological order, from March 1914 to June 1921. Wassily Safonoff is crossed out, so that the names become thirty-three and suggest they could possibly be the portraits selected by Coburn for his publication.

George Eastman House holdings include sixty-one prints and hundreds of negatives depicting over fifty musicians photographed by Coburn. Among these, I could identify the portraits of the thirty-three listed musicians. They are here reproduced following the chronological order set in the typed list in a virtual reconstruction of Coburn's planned book.

All prints are gelatin silver process, mounted on one or two layers of paper according to an aesthetic trend common to the photographer's body of work. Most of the photographs show a dedication to Coburn inscribed by the sitter on the mount. The date of the dedication is in every case later than the date recorded in the lists, reinforcing the hypothesis that the dates in those documents refer to these sittings.

When two or more photographs of the same musician were available, the one signed by the sitter was chosen for this series. Only in the case of Mark Hambourg, two almost equal prints were found, both with a very similar dedication. Therefore, the two of them have been included.

On July 17, 1960, Coburn dedicated his BBC broadcast, *Musicians in Focus*, to musicians he had photographed between 1914 and 1921. He reported Sir Henry Wood had been the first portrait made, Stravinsky the last. These two names open and close the lists described above. In three short essays held at the Richard and Ronay Menschel Library, Coburn described his sittings with Chaliapin, Sibelius and Stravinsky.

Chaliapine. 1914

Just before the first world war I photographed <sup>that</sup> ~~the~~ great singer and actor Chaliapine,

I prepared for this by seeing him in most of his roles in the Russian Opera Season then in full swing in London.

He was a difficult "lion" to capture, but when I finally succeeded in reaching his presence, it seemed as if he had all the time in the world to place at my disposal.

He was great in every possible way, both as an actor and a musician. Over six feet in stature with a presence that came to meet you with a tremendous impact, yet with it all he was calm and serene, as if there was within him a vast reserve of power.

Chaliapine had a little English and I had a little French, so we managed to get on famously.

I made a large number of negatives of him, and when later I took the results to him for his acceptance, he was so pleased with them that he suggested that I should make more photographs of him in his various characters in the Russian Opera, the fateful summer of 1914; but war was then suddenly declared, and so, to my regret this never happened.

I have, however, a much treasured souvenir of our meeting in a signed print, inscribed in his strong and characteristic handwriting: "Bravo et Merci". The print I chose for him to sign was a profile with the light gleaming on his golden hair, with a silk shirt and a flowing black tie, such as were worn by the French Artists of that period. This photograph is, as was the man, virile

and dynamic.

The whole episode was to me unforgettable and very satisfying

Sibelius. 1918.

In this year, 1918, I was greatly priveleged to photograph Sibelius. Sir Granville Bantock arranged for him to sit for me for they were great friends and admired each others music. Sir Granville subsequently wrote the music for my Children's Play: "Fairy Gold" which was first performed at the Liverpool College for Girls in 1938.

Sibelius had one of the most powerful heads I have ever photographed. It was square and reminded me of a bust by Rodin.

For so great a man he was very shy, and in theory it was said that he disliked being photographed, but as Bantock came along to the sitting, after we three had lunched together, it all worked out very satisfactorily, for as they chatted I got on with my work.

I think I made a worthy portrait of him. He was very akin to his music: reserved but with great spiritual power, living within himself, yet sharing his dreams with us to our great refreshment.

In the year 1960 in a B.B.C. Broadcast entitled "Musicians in Focus" given in the interval of a Sunday Symphony Concert, I mentioned this photographing of Sibelius, and my talk was followed in the programme by a performance of the First Symphony of this great composer.

Stravinsky. 1921.

The last photograph of my series of musicians is Stravinsky of whom I am a great admirer.

I photographed him in the middle of the morning in his dressing gown, but there was nothing sleepy or relaxed about him! He was as alive and forceful as any one I have ever photographed, and this is exemplified by the variety, vitality and scope of his music.

My best portrait of him seems to be looking at you, taking your measure, as it were, ready to plough down upon you and overwhelm you even as the figure head on the prow of a great ship as it cleaves the waves!

This is the effect that his music often has upon one. It can not be heard with indifference, nor can Stravinsky himself be met and known with indifference.



**Sir Henry Wood (1869-1944)**

1914

gelatin silver print

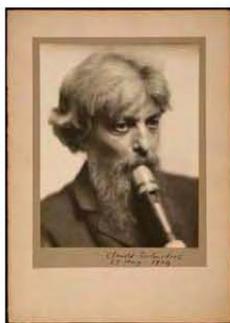
28.7 x 19.8 cm

INSCRIPTION: mount recto, by A.L. Coburn in pencil: "Sir Henry Wood"

GEH 1967:0097:0044

Bequest of Alvin Langdon Coburn

© George Eastman House



**Arnold Dolmetsch (1858-1940)**

1914

gelatin silver print

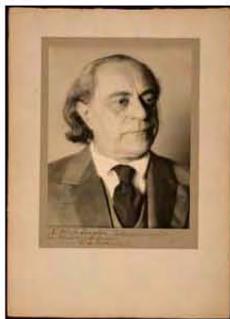
27.5 x 21.1 cm

INSCRIPTION: mount recto, autographed in ink: "Arnold Dolmetsch/ 27 Aug. 1914"

GEH 1967:0097:0029

Bequest of Alvin Langdon Coburn

© George Eastman House



**Vladimir de Pachmann (1848-1933)**

1914

gelatin silver print

24.9 x 19.1 cm

INSCRIPTIONS: mount recto, signed in pencil: "Alvin Langdon Coburn/ 1914"; mount recto, autographed in ink: "To Alvin Langdon Coburn/ in kind remembrance/ V. de Pachmann"

GEH 1967:0097:0031

Bequest of Alvin Langdon Coburn

© George Eastman House



**Feodor Chaliapin (1873-1938)**

1914

gelatin silver print

28.5 x 20.3 cm

INSCRIPTION: mount recto, autographed in ink: "A Monsieur Alvin Langdon Coburn./ bravo, et merci! F. Chaliapin/ 19 Juillet/ 1914. London"

GEH 1967:0097:0049

Bequest of Alvin Langdon Coburn

© George Eastman House



**Mark Hambourg (1879-1960)**

1915

gelatin silver print

26.6 x 20.5 cm

INSCRIPTION: mount recto, autographed in ink: "To Alvin Langdon Coburn in sincere admiration/ from/ Mark Hambourg/ 14/2/17"

GEH 1967:0097:0025

Bequest of Alvin Langdon Coburn

© George Eastman House



**Mark Hambourg (1879-1960)**

1915

gelatin silver print

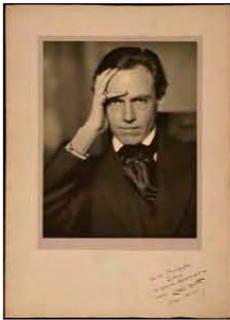
25.4 x 20 cm

INSCRIPTION: mount recto, autographed in ink: "To Alvin Langdon Coburn in complete admiration/ of his wonderful art/ from/ Mark Hambourg/ 14/2/17"

GEH 1967:0097:0048

Bequest of Alvin Langdon Coburn

© George Eastman House



**Cyril Scott (1879-1970)**

1915

gelatin silver print

26.5 x 20.4 cm

INSCRIPTION: mount recto, autographed in ink: "For Mr Alvin Langdon/ Coburn/ in genuine appreciation/ from Cyril Scott./ Dec. 1915."

GEH 1967:0097:0026

Bequest of Alvin Langdon Coburn

© George Eastman House



**Joseph Holbrooke (1878-1958)**

1916

gelatin silver print

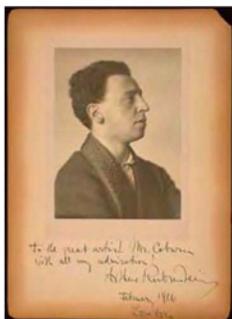
29.2 x 20.9 cm

INSCRIPTION: mount recto, autographed in ink: "With admiration of/ L. Coburn's fine work./ Joseph Holbrooke/ 1916, Feb."

GEH 1967:0097:0037

Bequest of Alvin Langdon Coburn

© George Eastman House



**Arthur Rubinstein (1887-1982)**

1916

gelatin silver print

23.5 x 17.4 cm

INSCRIPTION: mount recto, autographed in ink: "To the great artist Mr. Coburn/ with all my admiration!/ Arthur Rubinstein/ February 1916/ London"

GEH 1967:0097:0002

Bequest of Alvin Langdon Coburn

© George Eastman House



**Eugène Ysaÿe (1858-1931)**

1916

gelatin silver print

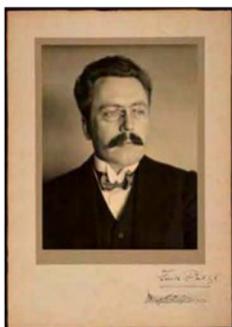
21.5 x 26.3 cm

INSCRIPTION: mount recto, autographed in ink: "Cordial souvenir et mes meilleurs compliments/ à l'excellent artiste Mr Alvin Langdon Coburn/ E. Ysaÿe/ 1916"

GEH 1967:0097:0041

Bequest of Alvin Langdon Coburn

© George Eastman House



**Frank Bridge (1879-1941)**

1916

gelatin silver print

27.2 x 20.8 cm

INSCRIPTION: mount recto, autographed in ink: "Frank Bridge"

mount recto-(by sitter, in ink) musical notations

GEH 1967:0097:0040

Bequest of Alvin Langdon Coburn

© George Eastman House



**Sir Eugène Goossens (1893-1962)**

1916

gelatin silver print

26.6 x 20 cm

INSCRIPTION: mount recto, autographed in ink: "To my friend/ Alvin Langdon Coburn/ with all sympathy & appreciation/ Eugène Goossens Jr./ 12/3/16"; mount recto, by sitter in ink) "Jack O' Lantern" and musical notations

GEH 1967:0097:0035

Bequest of Alvin Langdon Coburn

© George Eastman House



**York Bowen (1884-1961)**

1916

gelatin silver print

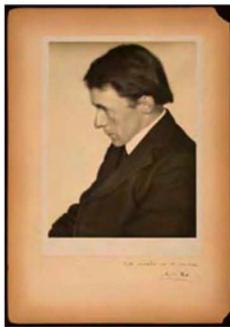
26 x 19 cm

INSCRIPTIONS: mount recto, signed in ink: "Alvin Langdon Coburn"; mount recto, autographed in ink: "To my friend/ Langdon Coburn Esq./ With kindest regards/ from/ York Bowen/ 1916"; mount recto, by sitter in ink: "from slow movement of string quartet/ poco lento" and music notations labeled: "Violin I, Violin II, Viola, V-Cello"

GEH 1967:0097:0012

Bequest of Alvin Langdon Coburn

© George Eastman House



**Sir Arnold Bax (1883-1953)**

1916

gelatin silver print

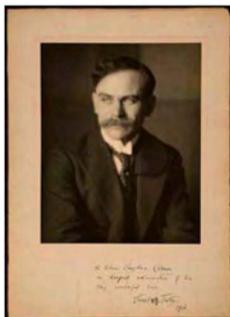
26.4 x 20 cm

INSCRIPTION: mount recto, autographed in ink: "With admiration and all good wishes/ Arnold Bax."

GEH 1967:0097:0027

Bequest of Alvin Langdon Coburn

© George Eastman House



**Lionel Tertis (1876-1975)**

1916

gelatin silver print

27.3 x 21.6 cm

INSCRIPTION: mount recto, autographed in ink: "To Alvin Langdon Coburn/ in deepest admiration of his/ very wonderful art./ Lionel Tertis/ 1916"

GEH 1967:0097:0011

Bequest of Alvin Langdon Coburn

© George Eastman House



**Gustav Holst (1874-1934)**

1916

gelatin silver print

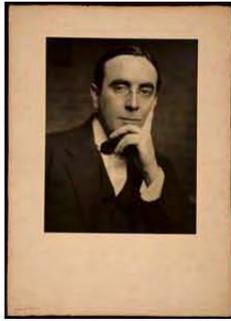
27.3 x 21.2 cm

INSCRIPTION: mount recto, autographed in ink: "Yours gratefully/ Gustav von Holst"

GEH 1967:0097:0028

Bequest of Alvin Langdon Coburn

© George Eastman House



**John Ireland (1879-1962)**

1916

gelatin silver print

26.7 x 20.2 cm

INSCRIPTION: mount recto, by A.L. Coburn in ink: "John Ireland"

GEH 1967:0097:0038

Bequest of Alvin Langdon Coburn

© George Eastman House



**Sir Thomas Beecham (1879-1961)**

1916

gelatin silver print

27.2 x 20.2 cm

INSCRIPTIONS: mount recto, signed in pencil: "Alvin Langdon Coburn"; mount recto, autographed in ink: "With kindest regards/ Thomas Beecham"

GEH 1967:0097:0030

Bequest of Alvin Langdon Coburn

© George Eastman House



**Dame Myra Hess (1890-1965)**

1916

gelatin silver print

20.2 x 27.1 cm

INSCRIPTION: mount recto, autographed in ink: "With very great admiration/ Myra Hess."

GEH 1967:0097:0033

Bequest of Alvin Langdon Coburn

© George Eastman House



**Violet Gordon-Woodhouse (1872-1951)**

1916

gelatin silver print

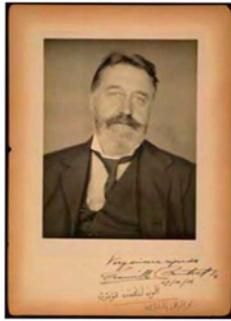
28 x 20.6 cm

INSCRIPTIONS: mount recto, signed in pencil: "Alvin Langdon Coburn"; mount recto, autographed in ink: "To Mr. Alvin Langdon Coburn, with deep admiration for/ his great talent, from/ Violet Gordon Woodhouse, August/ 1916"

GEH 1967:0097:0042

Bequest of Alvin Langdon Coburn

© George Eastman House



**Sir Granville Bantock (1868-1946)**

1916

gelatin silver print

27 x 20.6 cm

INSCRIPTION: mount recto, autographed in ink: "Very sincere regards/ Granville Bantock/ 27/10/16" and notation in Arabic

GEH 1967:0097:0043

Bequest of Alvin Langdon Coburn

© George Eastman House



**Désiré Defauw (1885-1960)**

1916

gelatin silver print

20.3 x 27.1 cm

INSCRIPTION: mount recto, autographed in ink: "Avec une profonde admiration/ pour le grand artiste et très charmant ami/ Alvin Langdon Coburn/ Désiré Defauw"

GEH 1967:0097:0023

Bequest of Alvin Langdon Coburn

© George Eastman House



**Guilhermina Suggia (1885-1950)**

1916

gelatin silver print

25.5 x 18 cm

INSCRIPTION: mount recto, autographed in ink: "À Monsieur Coburn,/ en souvenir d'une matinée/ musicale et en admiration/ Guilhermina Suggia./ London 23 Nov. 1916."

GEH 1967:0097:0018

Bequest of Alvin Langdon Coburn

© George Eastman House



**Boris Lensky**

1916

gelatin silver print

25.8 x 19.2 cm

INSCRIPTION: mount recto, autographed in ink: "Mr. Langdon Coburn in friendship/ and great admiration of his art/ Boris Lensky./ London/ Nov. 23.16"

GEH 1967:0097:0016

Bequest of Alvin Langdon Coburn

© George Eastman House



**Benno Moiseiwitsch (1890-1963)**

1916

gelatin silver print

25.8 x 19.9 cm

INSCRIPTION: mount recto, autographed in ink: "To Langdon Coburn/ In sincere admiration/ from Benno Moiseiwitsch/ London/ X-mass 1916"

GEH 1967:0097:0046

Bequest of Alvin Langdon Coburn

© George Eastman House



**Albert Sammons (1886-1957)**

1916

gelatin silver print

20.9 x 27.4 cm

INSCRIPTION: mount recto, autographed in ink: "To A. Langdon Coburn Esq. in sincere admiration of his wonderful photography/ Yours very sincerely/ Albert Sammons/ 1917."

GEH 1967:0097:0020

Bequest of Alvin Langdon Coburn

© George Eastman House



**Daisy Kennedy (1893-1981)**

1917

gelatin silver print

25.3 x 18.9 cm

INSCRIPTION: mount recto, autographed in ink: "Yours very sincerely,/ and in admiration,/ Daisy Kennedy/ Feb. 1917"

GEH 1967:0097:0036

Bequest of Alvin Langdon Coburn

© George Eastman House



**Daniel Melsa**

1917

gelatin silver print

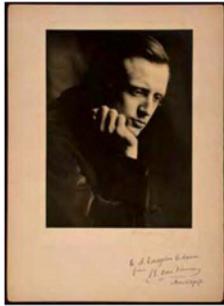
27.9 x 21.3 cm

INSCRIPTION: mount recto, autographed in ink: "With my sincerest admiration/ and affection/ Daniel Melsa/ Febr. 10th 1917"

GEH 1967:0097:0014

Bequest of Alvin Langdon Coburn

© George Eastman House



**Bernard van Dieren (1887-1936)**

1917

gelatin silver print

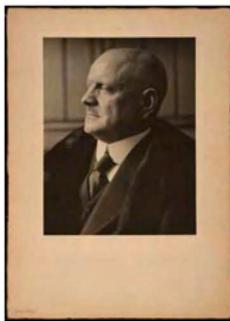
27.9 x 20.5 cm

INSCRIPTIONS: mount recto, signed in pencil: "Alvin Langdon Coburn"; mount recto, autographed in ink- "To A. Langdon Coburn/ from/ B. Van Dieren./ March 1917."

GEH 1967:0097:0034

Bequest of Alvin Langdon Coburn

© George Eastman House



**Jean Sibelius (1865-1957)**

1918

gelatin silver print

27 x 20.1 cm

INSCRIPTION: mount recto, by A.L. Coburn in pencil: "Jean Sibelius."

GEH 1967:0097:0045

Bequest of Alvin Langdon Coburn

© George Eastman House



**Lord Berners (1883-1950)**

1919

gelatin silver print

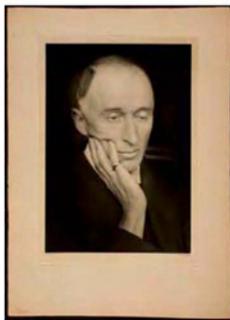
27.6 x 21.1 cm

INSCRIPTION: mount recto, autographed in ink: "Berners/ March 6, 1919"

GEH 1967:0097:0039

Bequest of Alvin Langdon Coburn

© George Eastman House



**Frederick Delius (1862-1934)**

1919

gelatin silver print

28.4 x 19.1 cm

INSCRIPTION: mount recto, by A.L. Coburn in pencil: "Delius"

GEH 1967:0097:0032

Bequest of Alvin Langdon Coburn

© George Eastman House



**Astra Desmond (1893-1973)**

1919

gelatin silver print

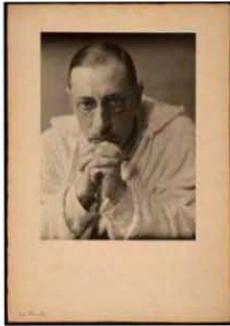
28.9 x 21.6 cm

INSCRIPTION: mount recto, autographed in ink: "Yours affectionately/ Astra Desmond."

GEH 1967:0097:0017

Bequest of Alvin Langdon Coburn

© George Eastman House



**Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971)**

1921

gelatin silver print

27.6 x 21 cm

INSCRIPTION: mount recto, by A.L. Coburn in pencil: "Igor Stravinsky"

GEH 1967:0097:0047

Bequest of Alvin Langdon Coburn

© George Eastman House

### 3.2 | Multiple-Exposure Portraits

*“It has occurred to me, why should not the camera also throw off the shackles of conventional representation and attempt something fresh and untried? Why should not its subtle rapidity be utilized to study movement? Why not repeated successive exposure of an object in motion on the same plate? Why should not perspective be studied from angles hitherto neglected or unobserved? Why, I ask you earnestly, need we go on making commonplace little exposures of subjects that may be sorted into groups of landscapes, portraits, and figures studies? Think of the joy of doing something which it would be impossible to classify, or to tell which was the top and which the bottom!”<sup>40</sup>*

This is how Coburn envisioned the future of pictorial photography in 1916. Indeed, he followed that path. He was involved with the Vorticists, a group of British artists, including Wyndham Lewis and Ezra Pound, who sought to construct a dynamic visual language as abstract as music. Before creating his ‘vortoscope,’ a kaleidoscope-like instrument with three mirrors clamped together, which when fitted over the lens of a camera would reflect and fracture the image, Coburn experimented with multiple exposures.

George Eastman House holds a group of twenty-nine negatives made with multiple exposures. They either consist of multiple exposures of the same subject, as in the case of Ezra Pound, Marius de Zayas, Sir Henry Maximilian Beerbohm and other unidentified sitters, or they combine two different subjects, as in three portraits which seem to depict at once Coburn’s mother (larger face) and his wife Edith (smaller face).

Only two of these twenty-nine nitrate negatives have corresponding prints within the George Eastman House collection (see third and fifth images in the series shown below). They are two well-known portraits of Ezra Pound. The remaining negatives might have never been printed; for sure they have never been studied.

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<sup>40</sup> Alvin Langdon Coburn, “The Future of Pictorial Photography,” *Photograms of the Year* (1916): 23.



Above: five portraits of Ezra Pound,  
five portraits of Marius de Zayas,  
one portrait of Max Beerbohm,  
three portraits of Fannie and Edith Coburn.  
Next page: fifteen portraits of seven unidentified sitters.  
George Eastman House.  
© *George Eastman House*



*The Photographs of Alvin Langdon Coburn at George Eastman House*

## Conclusions

This study demonstrates that methods of analysis and tools, which were developed within the photograph conservation field mainly for assessing authenticity, do bring a significant contribution to the understanding of a photographer's production when they are applied to the context of the creation of works. Particularly in the case of Coburn, who was such a devotee of the darkroom. The approach adopted in this research has illustrated that in his case slight variations in the appearance of prints from the same negative are the results of refined and laborious creative processes; that aesthetic choices can be stimulated by technical and material factors that should be correctly identified; that there are still aspects to be studied as to the material structure and the deterioration of these photographs, which can provide additional knowledge on Coburn's method of working. This is the first time that these well-known truths have been scholarly applied to the study of Coburn's photographs.

The investigation on the photographic materials used by Coburn has led to the find of an extensive corpus of negatives on Cristoid film at George Eastman House that had never been studied and that establishes a further bond among Coburn and other innovative photographers of his time. It has also determined conservation issues and set priorities for action.

From a historical viewpoint, this study has advanced the knowledge on Coburn by composing information from various documentary sources that have brought to light some inedited information and photograph series.

Future work should include analysis of photograph coatings, conservation survey of the Cristoid film negatives at George Eastman House, and study of the six Coburn's scrapbooks covering the years 1901-1915 in the Museum collection.

The rationale for continuance of this and related works on Coburn and other Pictorialist photographers should be widely recognized, since there is so much potential for further discovery and conservation intervention. It is an obligation of conservators and curators to build better and stronger collaborations for the planning, development and sharing of this knowledge.

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