



fig. 2 Harold Mortimer-Lamb, Portrait - Lady Drummond, c.1907, platinum print, 25 x 19 cm, National Gallery of Canada. (Photo: National Gallery of Canada, 32247)

BETWEEN A HARD EDGE AND A SOFT CURVE

Modernism in Canadian Photography

This initial investigation into Modernism in Canadian photography begins with the first Toronto Camera Club *Salon* in 1903, and ends with the last *Canadian International Salon* that was held at the National Gallery of Canada in 1939. This also marks the year in which the National Film Board of Canada was established.

Although Modernist photography was not systematically institutionalized through the formation of societies and clubs in either Europe or North America, it was an international trend like Pictorialism. However, in Europe, the United States, Russia and Mexico, Modernist photography did not follow a simple evolutionary path, but was rather the result of diverse influences affecting specific sets of cultural circumstances. In Europe, for example, experimental, avant-garde movements such as Cubism, Futurism, Surrealism, and Constructivism helped to shape the form of Modernist photography. In the United States, it was the Pictorialism of the Photo-Secessionists that provided both a well-established formal vocabulary and a critical framework from which departures were made into the language of Modernism. In New York, the American photographer Alfred Stieglitz (1864-1946) started the Photo-Secession and tirelessly promoted photography as a medium of artistic expression, equal to painting, sculpture and the graphic arts, and he established important publishing and exhibition outlets for American and international photographers. In Russia and Mexico, other factors enabled Modernist photography to flourish in both these countries. A climate of cultural receptivity to new forms of artistic expression resulted from the social and political revolutions that both countries underwent in the late teens and 1920s. This was enhanced by the presence of either an indigenous avant-garde as in Russia, or the importation of a Modernist aesthetic by visiting photographers, such as the American Edward Weston (1886-1958) in the case of Mexico. Modernist photography in the United States shared a desire to demonstrate synchronicity with the present by exploring new ideas, subjects, and techniques and to define itself against the romantic, soft-focus aesthetic of Pictorialism, which by the 1920s had degenerated into mannerism. Sharp, crisp lines and smooth, uniform surfaces would eventually predominate over the aesthetic of soft edges and muted tones. This common language of Modernist photography evolved out of the instantaneity that new photographic technologies offered, an appreciation of the abstract values of light and dynamic form, and a wealth of new iconography that included

soaring skyscrapers, busy city streets, mesmerizing repetition of mass produced objects, and industrial machinery, among other images.

The question that this study raises is the relationship of Canadian photography of the 1920s and 30s to these other Modernist photographic practices. Was it closer to the American model of a direct movement out of Pictorialism or an example of the more experimental European model? Did Canadian Modernist photography exhibit any particular defining characteristics? And were there Canadian photographers whose work could be described as Modernist, and who were primarily interested in "refurbish[ing] the language of their art?"¹

Although the politics of nationalism would strongly influence the direction that Canadian photography took during the period from 1912 to 1939, it was the continuing presence of the Pictorialist movement that would determine its character. The conduit for the dissemination of Pictorialism in Canada was the camera club.² The tradition of camera clubs here was strong, going back to the 1880s and 1890s when they were first established in eastern Canada before spreading across the west. Such clubs brought together individuals who had a common interest in photography, either as a pastime or as a profession, and provided a network for sharing technical expertise and reinforcing the Pictorial aesthetic that borrowed heavily from the picturesque in nineteenth-century academic painting. Typical subjects included idyllic rural scenes, exotic, quaint villages and harbours, sentimental portraits of women and children, and the female nude.³ Undoubtedly, Canadian camera clubs like their counterparts in other nations, were often more dedicated to the establishment and observation of rules than to looking afresh at the world and its visual representation.

Were it not for two landmark events in the history of early twentieth-century photography in Canada that moved Canadian photography away from a provincial arena into the international context of the Pictorialist movement, the quiet rhythms of camera club meetings and contests might never have been interrupted. The first took place in 1903 when the Pictorialist photographer Sidney Carter (1880-1956) and the more adventurous members of the Toronto Camera Club, sought to create an environment where photography would be thoughtfully critiqued and exhibited in Canada. It organized its first *Salon* in which thirty prints from the Loan Collection of the Photo-Secession in New York were shown alongside work by club members.⁴ However, the conservative members within the club who preferred to maintain their traditional approach to print-making and methods of presentation, objected to the extreme manifestation of painterly effects in the work of the Photo-Secessionists. The second disruption occurred at the Art Association of Montreal in November of 1907, when Sidney Carter assembled a large international Pictorialist exhibition that included such luminaries in the field as David Octavius Hill and Robert Adamson, both of whom had furthered the cause of photography as art.⁵ The two exhibitions were met with a certain degree



fig. 1 Sidney Carter, *Evening or Sunset on Black Creek*, 1901, gum bichromate print, 15 x 9 cm, National Archives of Canada. (Photo: National Archives of Canada, PA 112002)

of resistance from different sectors of the community. In the case of the first Toronto Camera Club *Salon*, it was the conservative photographers who resented the introduction of a new aesthetic. In the case of the Montréal exhibition, it was local artists who took umbrage at Maurice Maeterlinck's reference in the catalogue to photography as an art form and persuaded the Secretary of the Association, John Bethune Abbott, to keep the offending pages from view.⁶

In addition to being the organizational and critical linch-pins of the Pictorialist movement in Canada, Sidney Carter and Harold Mortimer-Lamb (1872-1970) were both accomplished photographers. Strongly influenced by the work of the American Secessionists, they introduced a new vocabulary of form and new techniques to the Canadian photographic community. Their work not only received international recognition, but it brought an awareness of the importance of photography as an art form to Canada. The ability to translate the detailed forms of nature into broad atmospheric silhouettes is evident in Carter's *Evening or Sunset on Black Creek* (fig.1); while in Mortimer-Lamb's photographs, the introduction of theatrical presence into the portrait genre, as in *Portrait - Lady Drummond* (fig.2), provided an alternative to the more descriptive likenesses of earlier studio photography. Although both Carter and Mortimer-Lamb continued to exhibit and publish their photographs internationally up to 1920, their involvement with photography waned as the Pictorialist movement itself became less vital and more formulaic. Although still acting as the Canadian correspondent for the British annual, *Photograms of the Year*, by 1912 Mortimer-Lamb had turned his interest increasingly towards painting.⁷ By 1917, Sidney Carter had distanced himself from both national and international photographic associations.⁸ In 1928 he admitted, "I ... am doing less each year and with few regrets."⁹

The year 1910 became critical for the evolution of American Pictorialist and Modernist photography when the *International Exhibition of Pictorial Photography* was mounted at the Albright Art Gallery in Buffalo, New York. This was the largest exhibition of photographs (almost 600 prints, including two by Carter and one by Canadian Pictorialist J.P. Hodgins) ever to have been assembled.¹⁰ It was the exhibition that signalled "the victory in the battle for recognition of photography as an art form."¹¹ The occasion also marked both Stieglitz's denunciation of camera clubs with their rigid practices and the gradual moving away of a certain segment of the Pictorialist movement from the soft-focus aesthetic to what was called at the time "straight photography."

More significant than the schism within the Pictorialist movement was the fact that Alvin Langdon Coburn and Paul Strand, the mainstays of Stieglitz's exhibitions and publications, were among those American photographers who were searching for a new vocabulary of form. By opening his galleries at '291' to painting, drawing and sculpture by internationally acclaimed artists, and by championing modern art, Stieglitz almost single-handedly gave photographers licence to

look beyond the boundaries of their own medium in their desire for a radically different visual language.¹² Coburn's own interest in Vorticism led him to question the naturalist bias of current photographic representation. He asked:

Why should not its subtle rapidity be utilized to study movement? Why not repeated successive exposures 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 that may be sorted into groups of landscapes, portraits and figure studies? Think of the joy of doing some-thing which it would be impossible to classify, or to tell which was top and which was the bottom!....I do not think we have begun even to realize the possibilities of the camera.¹³

By 1917 Coburn had made his first singular photographic abstractions, calling them Vortographs, which were images made of an assemblage of kaleidoscopic mirrors, he constructed for the purpose. In the same year Paul Strand published a group of photographs in the last issue of *Camera Work* which showed how effectively photography could describe abstract form. His ability to render the abstract and geometric essence of commonplace objects can be seen in *Rock, Point Lorne, Nova Scotia* (fig.3), an image Strand made during his first visit to Canada in 1920.¹⁴ At this time in Europe, one of the initial signs of radical experimentation in photography was the creation of the first self-consciously artistic photograms by the painter Christian Schad in Germany in 1918. The making of these images dispensed entirely with elaborate photographic techniques and equipment, as it required only the simple exposure and development of a sheet of photographic paper upon which scraps of paper and translucent materials had been placed.

Stieglitz's undermining of the supremacy of Pictorialist photography in the United States through his support of modern art and his questioning of the Pictorialist aesthetic, as well as the European experiments with new photographic techniques, had little or no effect on photography in Canada where the Pictorialist aesthetic was kept alive through the network of camera clubs.¹⁵ One major force that did influence photographers during the period 1910-1920 was Pictorialism. Through the annual reports of Mortimer-Lamb and other Canadian correspondents in the pages of *Photograms of the Year*, we learn that the excitement that Carter and Mortimer-Lamb had earlier infused into the Canadian photography scene was dissipating. In 1914 the latter observed that: "Once the claims of photography for recognition as a medium of artistic expression excited fierce controversy. The subject now is rarely debated; it has perhaps ceased to excite general interest." Perhaps wanting to put a more positive slant on this apathetic state of affairs, Mortimer-Lamb went on to announce, in somewhat equivocal terms, that "photographers have won a sort of standing which places them nearly on a plane with amateur painters."¹⁶ However, a "sort of standing on a plane with amateur painters" was not a promising position for more adventurous photographers to enjoy in Canada.

While international camera club exhibitions were still taking place in major Canadian cities, they had neither changed their content nor been successful in taking photography out of its ghettoized status. In addition to noting a lack of seriousness by most Canadian photographers (whom he perceived as mere hobbyists), Mortimer-Lamb attributed the dearth of outstanding photographers to a number of social and cultural deficiencies in Canada: the shortage of members of a leisured class, the small number of serious photographers, the lack of a market for Pictorial photographs, and the absence of representation of photography in public art galleries and museums. On this last point he presciently wrote that: "The educative effect of such a movement, if successfully prosecuted, would be widespread. It would place pictorial photography on an altogether better footing, and it would unquestionably stimulate photographic endeavour."¹⁷ Informing his observations was the knowledge that the Albright Knox Gallery had recently purchased a number of Pictorialist works from its landmark exhibition in 1910.

As if the handicaps of working in vast countries with small populations, and a lack of institutionalized support for photography were not bad enough, Canadian photographers, like their Australian counterparts, referred to as "colonials" by critics from the "mother country," were often addressed in rather patronizing tones of voice. In 1914, the editor F.J. Mortimer, reviewing the years Pictorialist work for *Photograms of the Year* wrote: "It is pleasing also to record that the leading workers [photographers] in the Colonies are progressing steadily towards higher ideals, and this year's Colonial Exhibition held at The A.P. Little Gallery indicated in no uncertain manner that a new generation of eager and clever workers is coming to the front, particularly in Australia and Canada."¹⁸ As satisfying as it would be to ascribe the drive for an independent style of photography to this kind of commentary, it would be historically inaccurate. Rather it was both Pictorialism and the Group of Seven's nationalist message that triggered a desire among the more vocal Canadian photographers (many of whom were living in Toronto when the Group had their first exhibition in 1920 at the Art Gallery of Toronto), to produce a typically Canadian school of photography that would capture the character of the land.

As early as 1913, Harold Mortimer-Lamb commented that: "Most of the pictorial work one sees — and this also applies to Canadian painting — could have been done anywhere; in Holland or France, or England. ...yet to some man some day inspiration will come, and he will give expression to the spirit of our northern solitudes."¹⁹ He then went on to discuss the vast and varied character of the Canadian landscape, a theme to which writers on the topic of a Canadian school of photography would frequently return. In 1920 Arthur Goss wrote, "I believe it will be along the lines adopted by a group of Canadian painters to paint our scenery in a Canadian way, that photographers must progress ... [to produce] something worthwhile and characteristic of our climate and our country."²⁰



fig.3 Paul Strand, *Rock, Port Lorne, Nova Scotia*, 1919, gelatin silver print, 24 x 20 cm, National Gallery of Canada. (Photo: National Gallery of Canada, 33309)

But the will to retain the Pictorialist style and at the same time to capture the specificity and essence of Canada in a literal way almost always meant adopting nature as a subject, thereby setting up an inherent contradiction. With its insistence upon gestural effects and its propensity for creating atmospheric mood through the reduction of form to silhouette, Pictorialism was by definition, a style that subordinated the specific to the general. Joseph T. Keiley's claim — that with the 1898 *Philadelphia Salon* a truly American school of Pictorial photography had been created — is supportable only if it is predicated upon the origins of the photographers and not upon the content or style of the photographs.²¹ It should be added that the Modernist style would not have provided Canadian photographers with a solution to the problem of this struggle with national identity. Modernist photographers simplified the forms of nature by reducing them to abstract patterns and thus subordinated the particular to the universal, just as the



fig.4 John Kirkland Hodges, *Idle Moments*, 1926, Gelatin silver print, 21 x 29 cm, National Archives of Canada. (Photo: National Archives of Canada, PA 125728)

Pictorialists had done. The impossibility of trying to realize in a soft-focussed, generic style what was distinctively Canadian about our landscape reduced Canadian photographers and writers on the subject to bitter complainers about the impossible bigness of the land compared to the smallness of the photographic paper as well as the unphotogenic quality of snow.²² To make matters worse a comparison of the Canadian landscape with Great Britain only deepened the sense of the untenableness of their mission. English scenery, claimed one of the photographers, was not only more adaptable to the average sheet of photographic paper because of its smaller scale, but also more full of "pretty bits" when compared to the vast and uncontainable Canadian landscape.²³

Nevertheless, it is likely that it was a later variant of Pictorialism, rather than the Vortographs of Coburn, the abstractions of Strand or the photograms of Schad, that eventually motivated Canadian photographers to introduce a sharper focus to their images. This other style within the Pictorialist movement evolved out of a slow and somewhat decorative adaptation to the growing use of sharp-focus

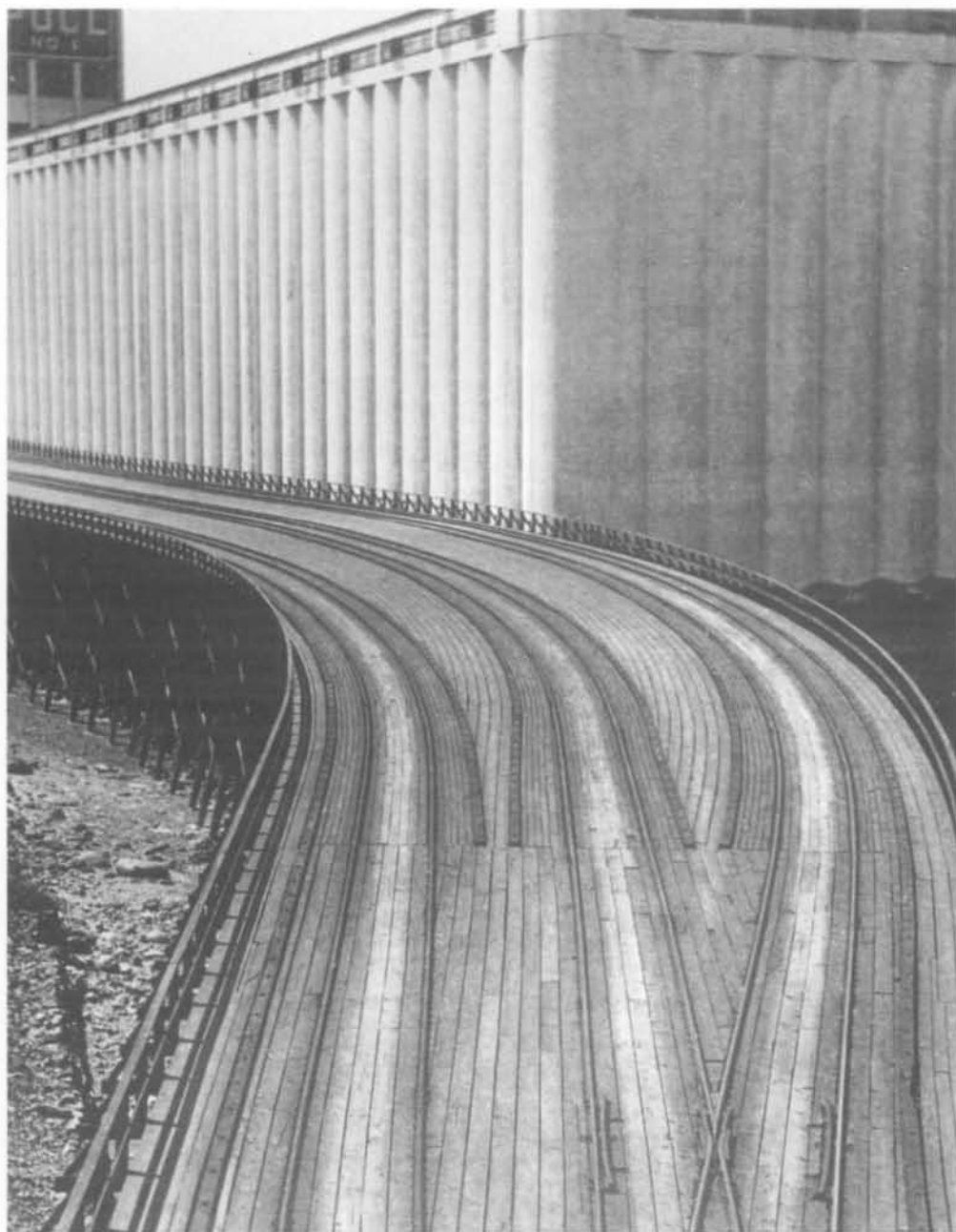


fig. 5 Johan Helders, *Pool No.1*, c.1925, Gelatin silver print, 43 x 34 cm, Vancouver Public Library. (Photo: Vancouver Public Library, 54767)

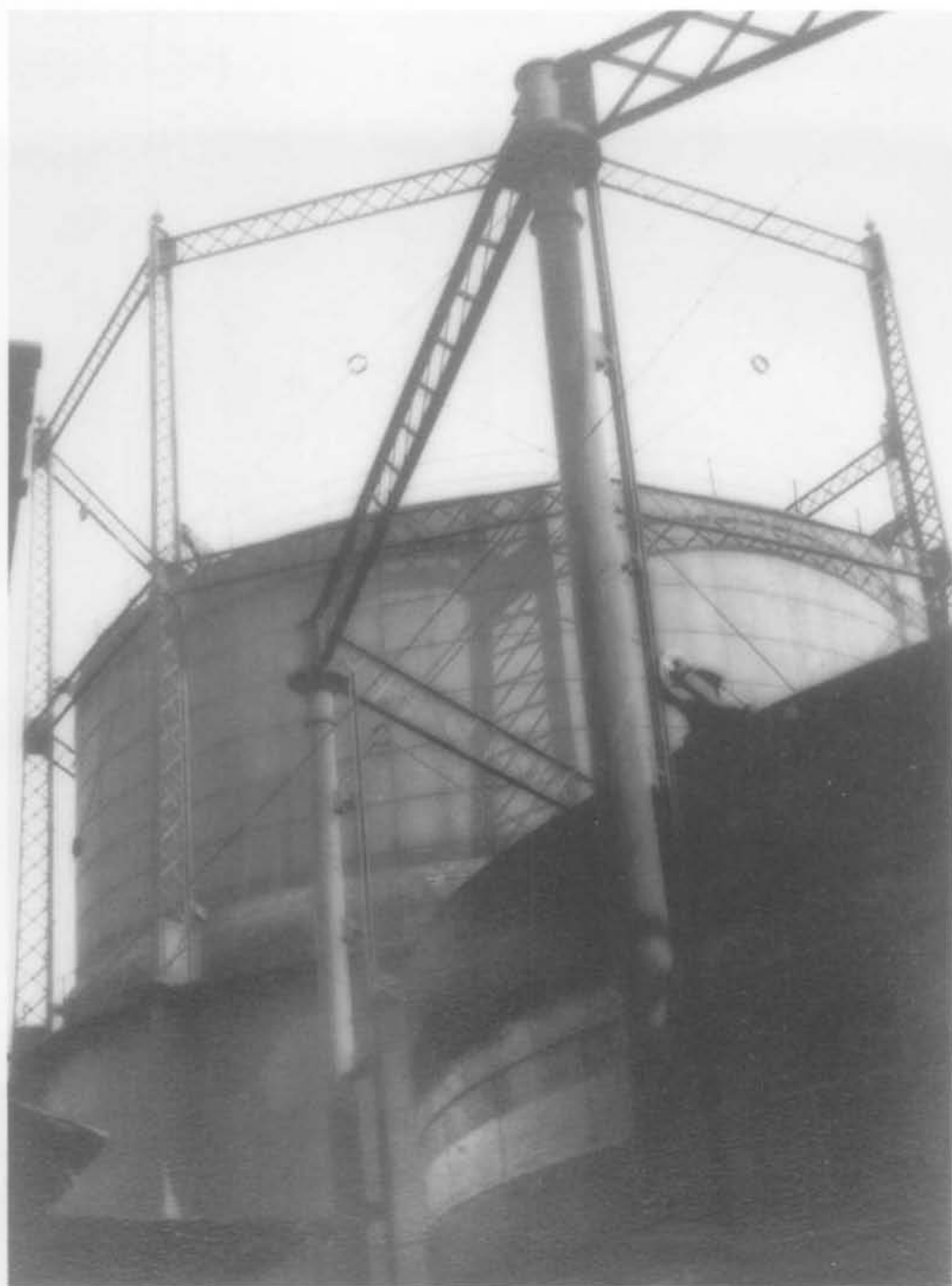


fig. 6 Brodie Whitelaw, *Gas Tanks*, c.1928, gelatin silver, 17 x 13 cm, National Archives of Canada. (Photo: National Archives of Canada, PA 126638)

photography in advertising. What is certain is that the shift towards "compositions with an emphasis on clarity and design" did not represent a conversion to the Modernist desire to challenge the past and be in synchrony with the modern environment.²⁴ The appropriation of straight photography as an extension of Pictorialism was summed up by the Editor of *Photograms of the Year* in 1922 when he wrote, "This tendency [straight photography] has continued to develop, and during the present year the exhibitions have given a still greater indication that more straight photography, or what purports to the eye to be straight photography, has been made use of for pictorial purposes."²⁵

Although John Kirkland Hodges' (1888-1916) *Idle Moments* (fig.4) illustrates this shift by showing an awareness of a new formal language in its adoption of a slightly angled view, by both its inclusion of the rear view of the subjects and its emphasis on geometric forms, its title betrays a continuing attachment to the anecdotal and picturesque aspects of the camera club aesthetic. This was not an isolated example. When photographers like Johan Helders (1888-1956), in his dynamic arrangement of curving and vertical forms of *Pool No.1* (fig.5) or Brodie Whitelaw (b.1910) in *Gas Tanks* (fig.6), began to favour subject matter with geometric forms and sharp contrasts of light and shade, the austerity of the Modernist aesthetic was softened by printing the images on warmer, textured papers. As Andrew Rodger has noted, these photographers could never quite bring themselves to make a radical departure from the past.²⁶ Their restraint is well illustrated by comparing the starkness of American Pictorialist photographer Paul Outerbridge's (1896-1958) *Idle Collar* (fig.7) with Canadian Bruce Metcalfe's (1890/1891-1962) *Collars* (fig.8), which retains a playful, curving movement in contrast to the severity of the American's image.

One of the foremost practitioners of this hybrid style of Pictorialism and Modernist photography was John Vanderpant (1884-1939).²⁷ As one writer has pointed out, Vanderpant did not start to introduce geometric forms and more abstract compositions until 1929, and even then, "the persistent soft focus, the use of tonal paper, and significant retouching at the time of printing, mark him as an artist that always had one foot firmly anchored in the early precepts of Pictorialism, as did his use from time to time, even as late as 1935, of poetic titles."²⁸ An example of such a title along with his most extreme expression of the Modernist aesthetic can be seen in *Creations of Man* (fig.9).²⁹

This ambiguity of intention and hybridity of Pictorialist and Modernist styles was not confined to Canadian photographers who worked exclusively within the Canadian milieu, but also marks the images of others who maintained affiliations with the Pictorialist movement. In spite of the strongly Modernist aspects of her later work, Margaret Watkins (1884-1969) is one such photographer.³⁰ As late as 1920 she was an influential member of the Pictorial Photographers of America and its Vice-President in 1926. Born in Hamilton, Ontario where she



fig. 7

Paul Outerbridge, *Idle Collar*, 1922, gelatin silver print, 12 x 9 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Ford Motor Company Coll., gift of Ford Motor Company and John C. Waddell, 1987. (Photo: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1987.1100.462)

probably learned photography in her teens from an uncle, Thomas Watkins, an art collector and member of the local camera club, her career as a photographer was formed in the United States. In 1914, at the age of thirty, Watkins left Hamilton for New York to study at the Clarence White School of Photography, where both Stieglitz and Max Weber were on the faculty and where she herself, six years later, would be an Assistant Instructor.³¹ Watkins was associated with advertising and wrote the first in-depth essay on the subject of advertising and photography in 1926.³² A palladium print of subtle and warm tonality, *Domestic Symphony* (fig.10) exemplifies her ability to integrate the simplified patterns of Modernist photography with the muted qualities of Pictorialism.

Although there were Canadian photographers in the twenties and thirties who sought to "refurbish the language of their art," they were willing to do so only to a degree that allowed them to remain within the conceptual and formal tradition of Pictorialism. The influence that camera clubs and the imperative for a nationalist style in photography exercised over photographers is demonstrated by the fact that Man Ray's (1890-1926) two *Rayograms*, which were shown with his



fig.8 Bruce Metcalge, *Collars*, 1927, gelatin silver, 18 x 23 cm, National Archives of Canada.
(Photo: National Archives of Canada, PA 126505)

painting *Arc de Triomphe*, in the *International Exhibition of Modern Art* organized by the Société Anonyme and exhibited at the Art Gallery of Toronto in April 1927, went completely unnoticed by commentators.³³ Rather than drawing readers' attention to the radical contribution that his *Rayograms* made to the evolution of photography, reviews of the *International Exhibition* commented instead on the Toronto Camera Club's annual *Salon*. The latter had been installed concurrently with the *International* with the supposed intention of countering some of the heat generated by the radical exhibition.

There are various reasons that could account for why a hybrid form of Pictorialism and straight photography prevailed in Canada over the purer form

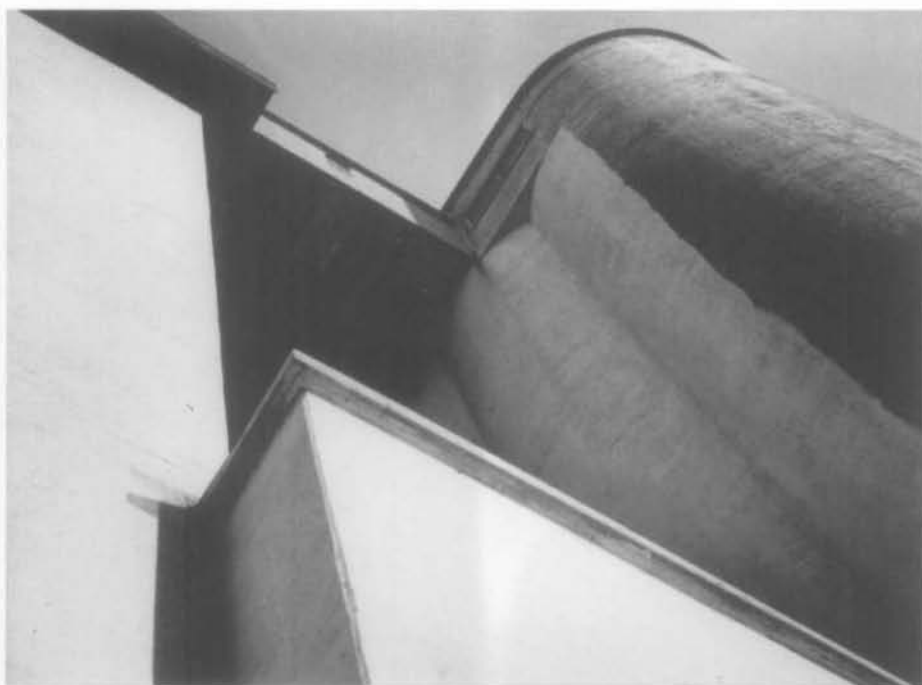


fig.9 John Vanderpant, *Creations of Man*, 1934,
glass lantern slide, 8 x 10 cm, National
Archives of Canada. (Photo: National
Archives of Canada, PA 179552)

of Modernist photography. The canon of Pictorialism was validated by the National Gallery of Canada through its annual hosting of the *Canadian International Salon of Photographic Art* from 1934 to 1939. Although the *Salon* did not include the word "Pictorialist" in its title, the work it promoted was either partly or fully Pictorialist in spirit, ranging from Europeans such as Pierre Dubreuil (act. c.1900) to Canadians Bruce Metcalfe, Johan Helders, John Vanderpant and Yousuf Karsh (b.1908). Absent from these annuals was the work of the European and American Modernist photographers.³⁴

Although there was a growing nationalist spirit in Canada and the period from the late nineteenth century through to the First World War saw the establishment of music and art schools, Canada was not propelled into the Modernist movement in photography the way that Mexico or Russia were. With neither Russia nor Mexico's post-revolutionary culture of experimentation, nor the presence of any indigenous, or even temporarily resident Modernist photographers,

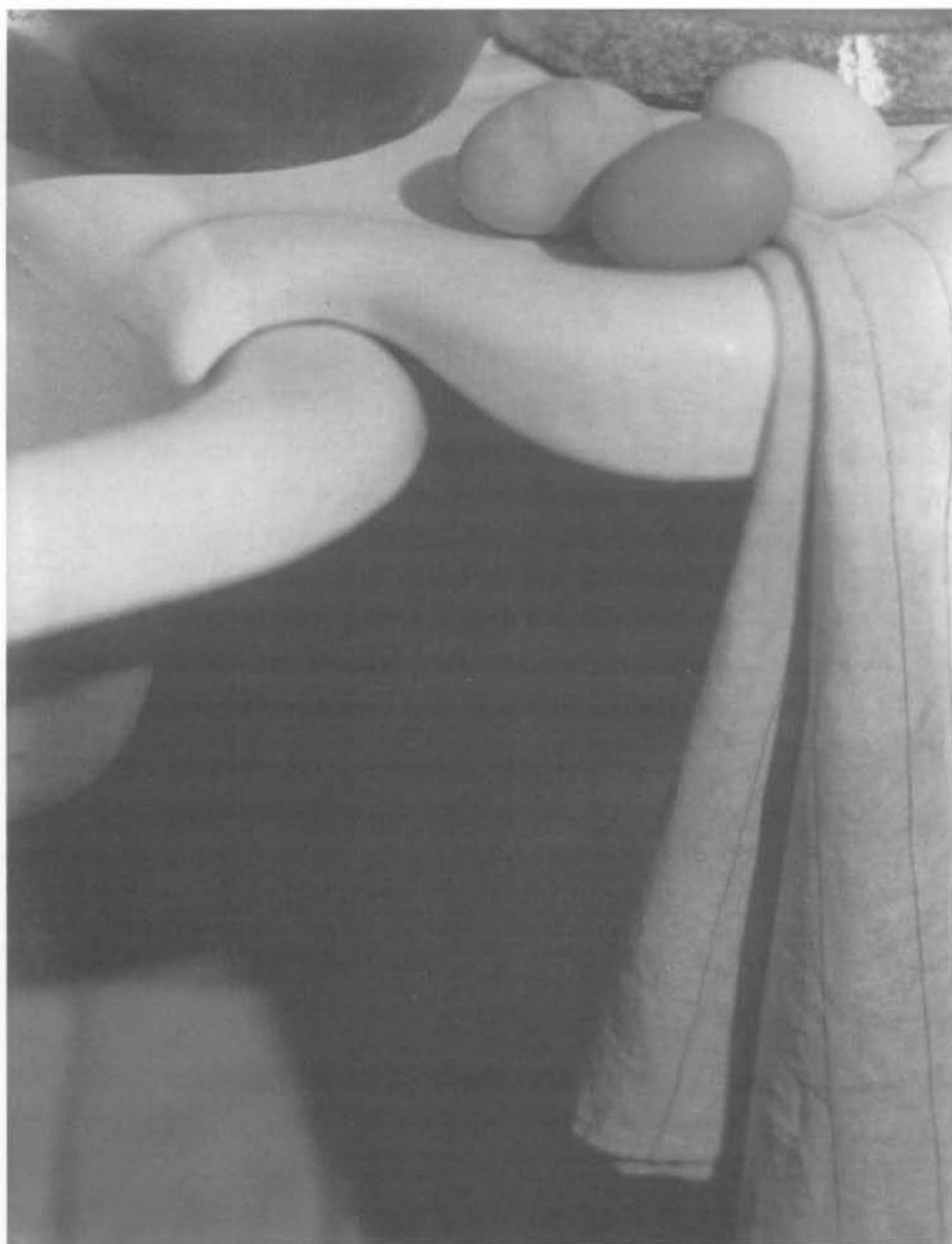


fig. 10 Margaret Watkins, *Domestic Symphony*, 1919, palladium print, 21 x 16 cm, National Gallery of Canada. (Photo: National Gallery of Canada, 20,627)

Canadians drew from what had already been institutionalized through the camera club and international salon circuits. Even if there were Canadian photographers who wanted to dissociate their aims from the nationalist agenda, no one here advanced the distinction between "contributions to art and contributions to national identity" as had the artist David Milne.³⁵

Canadian painters whose expertise was called upon in annual *Camera Club* and *International Salon* juries were artists who favoured naturalism in their own work.³⁶ One of the invited jurors for the *Second Canadian International Salon of Photographic Art* in 1935 was the conservative critic and photographer Frank Roy Fraprie, who had criticized Stieglitz for showing "more aggressive forms of modern art" at '291.³⁷ Modernist photography was given a more respectful reception by Mexico's nationalist painters; "los tres grandes," were sufficiently impressed by the photographs of Edward Weston and later Manuel Álvarez Bravo to take the medium seriously as a way of furthering their own visions (as in the case of David Alfaro Siqueiros), or participating in photography juries as did Diego Rivera. In contrast, Canadian photography went virtually unnoticed by the Group of Seven.³⁸ The result was that Canadian photographers remained marginalized and had a negligible impact on the art community as a whole.

ANN THOMAS

Curator

Photographs Collection

National Gallery of Canada

Notes

1 Frederick R. KARL, *Modern and Modernism: The Sovereignty of the Artist 1885-1925* (New York: Atheneum, 1988), xi.

2 For a discussion of the issues, see Dona Beth SCHWARTZ, "Camera Clubs and Fine Art Photography: Distinguishing between Art and Amateur Activity" (Doctoral dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1983).

3 The difference between the camera club practitioners and the Pictorialist photographers is frequently a question of nuances of treatment. Many of the same subjects were adopted by photographers of the Photo-Secession and the Pictorialist movement but rendered in a more generalized style.

4 Lilly A. KOLTUN, "Art Ascendant, 1900-1914," in *Private Realms of Light: Amateur Photography in Canada 1839-1940*, ed. L.A.Koltun (Markham, Ont.: Fitzhenry & Whiteside/Public Archives of Canada, 1984), 38.

5 These activities, their impact and the role of Canadian photographer Sidney Carter (1880-1956) have been well chronicled by David Calvin STRONG in both his 1994 Master's Thesis,

Concordia University, "Sidney Carter (1880-1956) and the Politics of Pictorialism" and in "Photography into Art: Sidney Carter's Contribution to Pictorialism," *The Journal of Canadian Art History* XV11, no.2 (1996): 6-27.

6 KOLTUN, "Art Ascendant, 1900-1914," 44.

7 Harold MORTIMER-LAMB, "Pictorial Photography in Canada," *Photograms of the Year*, 1912, 7.

8 David Calvin STRONG, "Sidney Carter (1880-1956) and the Politics of Pictorialism," 119.

9 KOLTUN, "Art Ascendant, 1900-1914," 48.

10 *Ibid.*, 46.

11 John PULTZ and Catherine B. SCALLEN, *Cubism and American Photography, 1910-1930* (Williamstown: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1981), 1.

12 David Milne living in New York at the time, described his experience of '291': "In those little rooms, under the skylights, we met Cézanne, Van Gogh, Gauguin, Matisse, Picasso, Brancusi. For the first time we saw courage and imagination bare, not sweetened by sentiment and smothered in technical skill. We were fortunate in seeing it unfolded slowly, in unpretentious surroundings..." in John O'BRIAN, *David Milne and the Modern Tradition of Painting* (Toronto: The Coach House Press, 1983), 15.

13 Alvin Langdon COBURN, "The Future of Pictorial Photography," *Photograms of the Year*, 1916, 24.

14 I would like to acknowledge Bruce Russell for furnishing the date of this work.

15 Several monographic studies have been published over the course of the past twenty years on Canadian photographers working during the Pictorialist period. Those who have not been mentioned here are: Maia-Mari SUTNIK, *E. Haanel Cassidy* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1981); Michael BELL, *Pictorial Incidents: The Photography of William Gordon Shields* (Kingston, Ont.: Agnes Etherington Gallery/Queen's University, 1989); and Maia-Mari SUTNIK, *Photographs by Charles Macnamara and M.O. Hammond: Pictorial Expressions in Landscape and Portrait* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1989).

16 MORTIMER-LAMB, *Photograms of the Year*, 1914, 23.

17 *Ibid.*

18 *Ibid.*, 5.

19 MORTIMER-LAMB, *Photograms of the Year*, 1913, 34.

20 Arthur S. GOSS, "Pictorial Photography in Canada," *Photograms of the Year*, 1920, cited in Andrew C. RODGER "So Few Earnest Workers: 1914-1930," *Private Realms of Light*, ed. L.A. Koltun, 16.

21 MORTIMER-LAMB, *Photograms of the Year*, 1900, 20.

22 Stanley HARROD, "Canadian Letter," *The Gallery*, 15 Sept. 1938, cited in Joan SCHWARTZ, "Salon Crescendo," *Private Realms of Light*, ed. L.A. Koltun, 121.

23 RODGER, "So Few Earnest Workers," 81. "This very fact makes all the difference, because in England there is a great wealth of what one might term 'pretty bits'; just, in fact, the circumscribed and complete bits of landscape which make most satisfactory pictorial compositions. In Canada, on the other hand, there is a great lack of the 'pretty bits'; there are grandeur, vastness, and expansive views which are entrancing to the eye, but which do not make effective compositions when reduced to the confines of a print of any reasonable size."

- 24 SCHWARTZ, "Salon Crescendo," 103.
- 25 F.J. MORTIMER, "The Year's Work," *Photograms of the Year*, 1922, 3.
- 26 RODGER, "So Few Earnest Workers," 87.
- 27 In 1926 Vanderpant established a photography studio and an art gallery in Vancouver. See Sandra SHAUL, *The Modern Image: Cubism and the Realist Tradition* (Edmonton: The Edmonton Art Gallery, 1981), 37.
- 28 *Ibid.*, 38.
- 29 Vanderpant enjoyed a friendship with influential American photographer Edward Weston. In September 1931, he exhibited photographs by Weston and Imogen Cunningham. Included in the works by Weston were examples of his seminal early Modernist photographs from 1922 showing industrial subject matter. See Charles C. HILL, *John Vanderpant: Photographs* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1976), 23 as well as for further discussion of the correspondence between the two photographers. For an indepth discussion on Vanderpant and Modernism, see Melissa K. ROMBOUT, "John Vanderpant: A Modernist Vision of Canada," *History of Photography* 20, no. 2 (Summer 1996): 129-37.
- 30 Joseph MULHOLLAND, "A Life in Photographs," *The Life & Photographic Work of Margaret Watkins* (Glasgow: Street Level Gallery & Workshop, 1994), n.p.
- 31 Lori PAULI, "A Few Hellers: Women at the Clarence H. White School of Photography," *The Life & Photographic Work of Margaret Watkins* (Glasgow: Street Level Gallery & Workshop, 1994), n.p.
- 32 *Ibid.*
- 33 See L.R. PFAFF, "Lawren Harris and the International Exhibition of Modern Art: Rectification to the Toronto Catalogue (1927) and Some Critical Comments," Art Gallery of Ontario, in "Appendix B: Catalogue section of printed Toronto Catalogue of Exhibition, with annotations," *Racar* X1, nos.1-2 (1984): 85-90, for a discussion of the work displayed at the Art Gallery of Toronto.
- 34 Not that any of the European or American Modernist photographers would have been expected to participate in *Salons* which were outdated by about two decades by this time, but it is informative that they did not include any photographs by Man Ray, Moholy-Nagy, or Heartfield, nor did they include any work by Stieglitz, Steichen, Weston or Strand. Possibly the jurors shared Weston's and Stieglitz's negative opinion of Man Ray and Moholy-Nagy.
- 35 O'BRIAN, *David Milne and the Modern Tradition of Painting*, 15.
- 36 Among the Canadian painters who participated in camera club juries were: Charles MacDonald Manley, George Agnew Reid and J.C. Forbes. Leonard Hutchison helped select the prints for the 6th Canadian International Salon of Photographic Arts in 1939. J.W. Beatty, was an honorary member of the Toronto Camera Club from the teens. Among the artists who gave talks to Camera Clubs were George Reid, Frederick S. Challener, Owen Staples, F.S. Haines, and Charles Goldhamer. See Peter ROBINSON, "The New Amateur 1885-1900," in *Private Realms of Light*, ed. L.A. Koltun, 29; and Joan SCHWARTZ, *Private Realms of Light*, 112, note 56.
- 37 Frank Roy FRAPRIE, "Pictorial Photography in the United States," *Photograms of the Year*, 1912, 34.
- 38 For more information on the Group of Seven's use of photography see Dennis REID, *Photographs by Tom Thomson* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada Gallery Bulletin, no.16, 1970).

ENTRE L'ANGLE ET LA COURBE

Le modernisme dans la photographie canadienne

Comme le pictorialisme, la photographie moderniste était un mouvement. Même si des similitudes d'expression suggèrent un vocabulaire international, les racines de l'art de la photographie moderniste, dans tous les pays où il s'est développé, diffèrent cependant considérablement. En Europe, aux États-Unis, en Russie et au Mexique, le modernisme en photographie a résulté de circonstances culturelles diverses et spécifiques et n'a pas suivi une tracé évolutionniste régulier.

Même si elle provenait de différentes origines culturelles, la photographie moderniste aux États-Unis et en Europe était également influencée par le désir de montrer la synchronicité avec le présent en explorant de nouvelles idées, de nouveaux sujets et de nouvelles techniques de photographie et de se définir par opposition à l'esthétique romantique et floue du pictorialisme qui, dans les années vingt, avait dégénéré en maniérisme. Au Mexique et en Russie, cet élan pour se libérer des chaînes du passé était intensifié par l'expérience de la révolution politique.

L'article soulève la question des rapports entre la photographie canadienne des années vingt et trente et les autres techniques photographiques modernistes. La photographie canadienne se rapprochait-elle davantage d'un modèle américain plus classique ou du modèle européen plus expérimental? Montrait-elle quelque caractéristique particulière? Et y a-t-il réellement eu des photographes canadiens dont l'œuvre pourrait être qualifiée de moderniste et qui auraient été principalement intéressés à «reformuler le langage de leur art»?

Les trois influences qui ont marqué la direction que la photographie canadienne devait prendre dans les années vingt et trente ont été le pictorialisme, le nationalisme et la peinture canadienne. Le pictorialisme, même dans la vigueur de ses débuts, était un mouvement conservateur qui imitait le pittoresque de la peinture de plein air du XIX^e siècle et les aspects gestuels des techniques traditionnelles de gravure, la lithographie et l'eau-forte. Il a toutefois réussi à faire reconnaître la photographie comme un art. Au Canada, ses liens avec le mouvement pictorialiste américain et européen ont été forgés par Sidney Carter (1880-1956) qui désirait créer un environnement favorable à l'exposition et à la critique réfléchie d'œuvres photographiques, selon le modèle développé par Alfred Stieglitz aux États-Unis. Carter a organisé deux grandes expositions afin d'intégrer la photographie canadienne au mouvement pictorialiste international: le premier *Salon* du Toronto Camera Club de 1903, où trente épreuves de la collection de prêts de la Photo-Secession de New York étaient exposées à côté d'œuvres des membres, et l'exposition pictorialiste internationale de novembre 1907

à la Art Association of Montreal. Bien que les deux expositions aient été accueillies avec une certaine résistance par divers secteurs de la communauté, le pictorialisme allait devenir de plus en plus courant au Canada. Grâce à l'omniprésence de camera clubs, aux États-Unis et au Canada, le pictorialisme avait évolué, dans les années vingt, en deux courants principaux: l'un, hybride plus intéressant de sujets pictorialistes et de formes modernistes anguleuses et l'autre, relevant d'un maniérisme qui embrassait des sujets exotiques et sentimentaux et employait un vocabulaire de contours flous et d'effets d'atmosphère. Tout comme, à l'intérieur du mouvement pictorialiste américain, certains éléments résistaient au modernisme, au Canada, ces mêmes éléments conservateurs tendaient à repousser toute tentative de revitaliser le vocabulaire de l'expression. L'absence, au Canada, de lieu d'exposition et de débats sur la photographie, en dehors du réseau des camera clubs plus intéressés à établir et observer des règles qu'à jeter un regard neuf sur le monde et sa représentation visuelle, restreignait davantage la possibilité de changement à l'intérieur du mouvement pictorialiste lui-même et le développement d'un mouvement moderniste. C'est principalement par les écrits du photographe et peintre canadien Harold Mortimer-Lamb (1872-1970), correspondant auprès de la publication britannique annuelle *Photograms of the Year*, que l'on est renseigné sur l'état de la photographie au Canada depuis le début du siècle jusqu'au milieu des années vingt.

La relation entre peintres et photographes a toujours été un sujet fécond. Dès 1907, à l'occasion de l'exposition de photographie pictorialiste à Montréal, les artistes canadiens ont influencé la manière dont la photographie devait être reçue en tant que forme d'art. Prenant ombrage de ce que Maurice Maeterlinck parlait de la photographie comme d'une forme d'art, dans l'essai qui accompagnait le catalogue, ils persuadèrent le secrétaire de l'Association, John Bethune Abbott, de cacher à la vue du public les pages qui contenaient cette déclaration. Suivant une pratique en vigueur dans nombre d'autres pays, les peintres canadiens, entre autres Charles MacDonald Manley, George Agnew Reid et J.C. Forbes, étaient souvent sollicités pour faire partie de jurys de clubs de photographie ou pour conseiller la sélection d'épreuves pour les salons internationaux de photographie. Cela a permis aux artistes d'exercer une influence considérable sur la direction que devait prendre le médium et il s'agissait souvent de peintres qui ne favorisaient pas le naturalisme dans leurs propres œuvres. De même, un des membres du *Second Canadian International Salon of Photographic Art*, en 1935, était le critique et photographe traditionaliste Frank Roy Fraprie, qui avait reproché à Stieglitz de montrer «des formes plus agressives d'art moderne» à sa galerie 291.

Ainsi, alors que des pays comme le Mexique, la Russie, les États-Unis et l'Allemagne développaient une école moderniste de photographie, les photographes canadiens soumettaient leur art à l'autorité d'artistes travaillant dans un autre médium et subissaient aussi l'emprise de l'esthétique du Camera Club. De plus, une présence nouvelle et influente, le Groupe des Sept, dictait à l'opinion canadienne ce

que l'art devait ou ne devait pas être, aussi bien au plan formel qu'au plan intellectuel. En liant la recherche d'une identité nationale à la représentation du paysage canadien, exécuté dans un style fortement gestuel et pictural, le Groupe des Sept fixa de nouvelles normes auxquelles les photographes canadiens se référaient continuellement et qu'ils s'efforçaient d'émuler, à partir de 1917 environ. Comme il fallait s'y attendre, les photographes étaient plutôt frustrés que satisfaits dans leurs efforts pour atteindre le même degré d'individualisme original et robuste que l'on retrouvait dans les tableaux de leurs compatriotes. Cela n'a rien d'étonnant, vu que les tendances délibérément universalistes du mouvement pictorialiste, aussi bien d'ailleurs que du mouvement moderniste, s'opposaient à toute recherche de spécificité. L'influence exercée sur les photographes par les camera clubs et la promotion d'un style nationaliste de photographie est démontrée par le fait que les deux *Rayogrammes* de Man Ray, exposés avec son tableau *Arc de Triomphe* lors de l'*Exposition internationale d'art moderne* organisée par la Société Anonyme et montrés à la Art Gallery of Toronto en avril 1927, ont été complètement ignorés, sauf pour une mention au catalogue.

Les photographes canadiens qui introduisirent dans leurs photographies un vocabulaire formel nouveau et typiquement moderniste comportant des perspectives aux angles prononcés, des vues de dos des sujets, des formes et motifs géométriques ainsi que de nets contrastes d'ombre et de lumière, modifièrent la radicalité potentielle de leurs œuvres en continuant d'utiliser des éléments anecdotiques et pittoresques de l'esthétique des camera clubs. Cela se manifestait ou bien par l'inclusion d'un titre narratif ou bien par l'adoucissement ou l'atténuation de l'esthétique moderniste pour la faire paraître moins radicale. Des photographies comme *Idle Moments* de John Kirkland Hodges, 1926, *Pool No. 1*, de Johan Helders, vers 1925, *Gas Tanks* de Brodie Whitelaw, vers 1928, *Collars* de Bruce Metcalfe, 1927, *Strength* de John Vanderpant, n.d., démontrent qu'il y avait chez les photographes canadiens d'importants praticiens du style hybride de photographie pictorialiste et moderniste. L'ambiguïté d'intention que nous voyons dans leurs œuvres n'était pas confinée aux photographes canadiens travaillant exclusivement en milieu canadien, mais elle marquait également l'œuvre d'autres photographes qui demeuraient affiliés au mouvement pictorialiste à l'extérieur de Canada, y compris la Canadienne Margaret Watkins (1884-1969), originaire d'Hamilton, qui combinait les vocabulaires pictorialiste et moderniste avec une remarquable élégance, comme en témoigne *Domestic Symphony*, 1919. Il y avait, dans les années vingt et trente, des photographes canadiens qui cherchaient à «reformuler le langage de leur art», mais qui n'étaient prêts à le faire que dans la mesure où ils pouvaient demeurer à l'intérieur des traditions conceptuelles et formelles du pictorialisme.

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