**PRESS RELEASE**

**EDWARD STEICHEN**

**the Condé Nast Years**

curated by Todd Brandow, William A. Ewing and Nathalie Herschdorfer

**Opening Saturday 19th November 2011**

from **3.00** pm to **8.00** pm

**On show from 20th November 2011 to 12th February 2012**

Tuesday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, 10.30 am – 7.30 pm

Wednesday, Thursday 10.30 am – 9.00 pm

Monday, 3.30 pm – 7.30 pm

This exhibition is produced by the Foundation for the Exhibition of Photography

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**EDWARD STEICHEN**

**the Condé Nast years**

Edward Steichen is one of the most prolific, influential and controversial figures in the history of photography. He was already a famous painter and photographer on both sides of the Atlantic when, in early 1923, he was offered one of the most prestigious and certainly the most lucrative position in photography’s commercial domain – that of chief photographer for Condé Nast’s glamorous and influential magazines *Vogue* and *Vanity Fair.* Though it meant a break with the high-minded art-for-art’s-sake ethos espoused by his mentor Alfred Stieglitz, he leapt at the chance, having concluded that photography’s natural — and therefore true — function was to be useful: “I wanted to work with business, like an engineer,” he explained. For the next fifteen years, Steichen would take full advantage of the resources and prestige conferred by the Condé Nast empire to produce an oeuvre of unequalled brilliance, putting his exceptional talents and prodigious energies to work dramatizing and glamorizing contemporary culture and its high achievers — in politics, literature, government, journalism, dance, theatre, music, fashion, the opera and cinema. No other portrait photographer could rival Steichen for the number of bold, engaging studies he made for *Vanity Fair* and *Vogue.* Who else could boast of having photographed so many of the world’s best filmmakers, actors, actresses, painters, athletes, playwrights, producers, poets, journalists, dancers, singers, writers?

In the 1920s and 30s, Steichen created a new style of fashion photography, which had previously been a fussy, fuzzy pictorialist affair, out of step with the modernist ethos championed by the couturiers themselves, busily absorbing avant-garde currents of the time. Steichen’s first-hand exposure to progressive art on both sides of the Atlantic, and his own naturally eclectic bent, made him the ideal translator of couture into photography. His crisp, detailed, high-key style revolutionized fashion photography, and is a strong wind felt in the field to this day -- George Hoyningen-Huene, Horst P. Horst, Richard Avedon, Robert Mapplethorpe and Bruce Weber are only his most illustrious descendants.

The full list of Steichen’s portraits is astounding for its range. Among the more than one thousand subjects were the filmmakers **Cecil B. De Mille**, Ernst Lubitsch, Irving Thalberg, Josef von Sternberg and **Walt Disney**; among the actors, **Gary Cooper**, **Maurice** Chevalier, Harold Lloyd, W.C. Fields and **Rudolph Valentino**; among the actresses, **Greta Garbo**, **Shirley Temple**, **Gloria Swanson**, Claudette Colbert, **Marlene Dietrich** and Fay Wray; among the painters, **Henri Matisse** and Georges Rouault; among the writers, **Thomas Mann, George Bernard Shaw, W.B. Yeats**, e.e. cummings, **Luigi Pirandello** and **Colette**; among the dancers, **Martha Graham**, Ruth St. Denis and **Fred Astaire**; among the musicians, **Igor Stravinsky**, Leopold Stokowsky, **Vladimir Horowitz** and **George Gershwin**; among the statesmen **Winston Churchill**, Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Herbert Hoover; among the athletes, **Jack Dempsey** and **Suzanne Lenglen**; among the journalists **Clare Booth Luce**, Walter Winchell and Walter Lippmann. Often the portraits of women artists and actresses double as fashion statements; Colette in Chanel; Hepburn in Schiaparelli, Swanson in Chanel. What strikes us today, some seventy-five years later, is the versatility of his approach. Steichen never fell back on formula, and constantly found new ways to show his sitters and their clothes to advantage. One admiring critic claimed that to be photographed by the master was to be “Steichenized”.

**EDWARD STEICHEN**

Edward Steichen was born in Luxembourg on March 27, 1879, three years after his birth, the family emigrated to the United States. At the age of fifteen Steichen began a lithography apprenticeship with the American Fine Art Company in Milwaukee. He also attended lectures by Richard Lorenz and Robert Schode at Milwaukee's [Arts Students League](http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USAartsleague.htm). Steichen took up photography in 1895 but continued to paint for the next twenty years.

In 1899 some of Steichen's photographs were exhibited at the Second Philadelphia Salon, three of these prints were purchased by the photographer [Alfred Stieglitz](http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USAstieglitz.htm).

They became close friends. Steichen was confounder with Stieglitz of the Photo-Secession, an organization dedicated to photography as a fine art, and its exhibition gallery, called "291." The gallery exhibited photographs and introduced to America paintings, drawings, and sculpture by such modern artists as Paul Cézanne, Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, and Constantin Brancusi.

During World War I, Steichen is responsible for the photographic Division of the American Expeditionary Forces. Upon returning home, he worked for the J. Walter Thompson Advertising Agency and in 1923 became chief photographer for Conde Nast Publications and his work appeared regularly in *Vogue* and *Vanity Fair*. In 1947, he was appointed Director of the Department of photography of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, a post specially created for him. In 1955, he is the curator of of what became the most popular exhibition in the history of photography, [*The Family of Man*](http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USAPfamily.htm).