

1 February 1946

Mr. Beaumont Newhall
Curator of Photography
The Museum of Modern Art
11 West 53rd Street
New York 19, N. Y.

Dear Beaumont:

Nancy's most disturbing letter arrived this morning. I am replying to you because of your official position and in the hope that my opinion may add a small weight to the tide of objection which must be raised to prevent any such disaster, as she describes, befalling the Museum.

I only wish I could state my feelings as convincingly to you and others as they are real to me. It is difficult to imagine a worse fate for the Department of Photography, or the Museum of Modern Art as a whole, for that matter, than to give it over lock, stock and barrel to Maloney, Steichen & Co. It would even be a tragedy if they became connected with the Museum to a much lesser degree than is being advocated. I have had some, though not extensive, dealings with Mr. Maloney and always have been impressed by his lack of interest in quality. His contributions to photographic art though widely disseminated are distinctly second rate. To say no more is being charitable to U. S. Camera Magazine. He might counter that it was never intended to be art; but then he has not produced a thing in a different category. Mr. Maloney's primary prejudice, as any advertising agent's inevitably would be, is a promotional one. I do not know Mr. Steichen, but from all I have heard about him and seen of his recent work I am convinced he is also at heart a promoter. Maloney's first interest, in a last analysis, is money making, whereas Steichen's is renown. Thus they complement one another admirably.

If the major purpose of the Museum of Modern Art is to buy a place for photography in the consciousness of the American people I have no quarrel with this choice of method or personnel for its accomplishment. But I believe it is impossible to raise the standing or to advance the acceptance of an art by purchase. Art is not a commodity that can be put over by publicity like a new gadget. Should the Museum's photographic department receive the backing, through Maloney, of powerful manufacturing interests, who put up large sums of money for its expansion, it then becomes subject to their will and is no longer a free agent through which the best and most sincere efforts in self-expression by photographic means may find a place for exhibition.

By seeking a position as director at a \$25,000 salary with full powers to put on shows that will cost thousands, Steichen makes suspect his own sincerity. One cannot help wondering if he is indeed interested in advancing photographic art or whether his

Mr. Bearmont Newhall

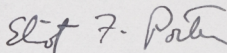
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motive is not rather personal gratification. The Trustees, if indeed they be trustees at all of the spirit and purposes heretofore proclaimed for the Museum, should eschew forever any such deadly scheme as this proposed by T. J. Maloney and Edward Steichen. To do otherwise is seriously to undermine the position of respect and high moral standing that this organization now enjoys.

I feel so sure of my correct evaluation of this proposal, as leading to a loss of integrity and ultimate degradation of art, that should it be adopted I shall ask for the immediate return of the photographs I have loaned to the Museum, and either a return or destruction of the photographs which I have given to the Museum. My small contribution to art shall never be used, if I can prevent it, in aiding or abetting any such improper purpose. In this I am in complete agreement with Alfred Stieglitz and Ansel Adams.

If there is anything I can do to help win this fight please don't hesitate to call on me.

Yours always sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Eliot F. Porter". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Eliot" being more prominent.

Eliot F. Porter