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Article: Moonlight and Midnight: The evolution of Edward Steichen's 'Moonrise' prints
(Abstract)

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Moonlight and Midnight: The evolution of Edward Steichen's 'Moonrise' prints

Kaslyne O'Connor, Sylvie Pénichon, and Ariel Pate

Presented at the PMG session of the 2017 AIC Annual Meeting in Chicago, Illinois.

Known as the quintessential painter-photographer, Edward Steichen combined artistically renowned compositions with an excellence in technique and experimentation. He often created multiple versions of a print in order to test out the subject matter using different combinations of color and effect. Two prints by Steichen, from his 1904 'Moonrise' series in the collection of the Art Institute of Chicago, illustrate his experimental attitude. Though they appear to have been printed from the same negative, each displays unique characteristics, color palettes, orientations, and titles. Historically, very little was known about the composition or creation of either of these two large-format photographs. To understand the individual elemental and material variations within these prints, and to compare known processes to those described by the artist in a correspondence, X-Ray Fluorescence and Fourier Transform Infrared Spectroscopy were performed. Characteristic signals for Prussian blue, platinum, chromium, iron, and lead were detected in both prints. One of the works also showed clear signs of an applied varnish, a finish traditionally applied to paintings. This article proposes a tentative timeline for the creation and alteration of the works, whose understanding has been expanded due to the combination of materials analysis and art historical research.

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