



# MARGARET WATKINS

Life & Work

By Mary O'Connor

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# MARGARET WATKINS

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# BIOGRAPHY

**Margaret Watkins (1884–1969) was at the forefront of advertising photography in the 1920s, shaping a new generation of practitioners through her teaching, exhibitions, and publications. Born in Hamilton, Ontario, she eventually made New York City her home, producing internationally award-winning still-life studies of domestic objects from her flat in Greenwich Village. She went on to capture the urban and industrial landscapes of European cities in the 1930s, living in relative obscurity in Glasgow for her last decades. Though she fell out of the public eye in her final years, today, Watkins is recognized as a pioneering modernist photographer.**



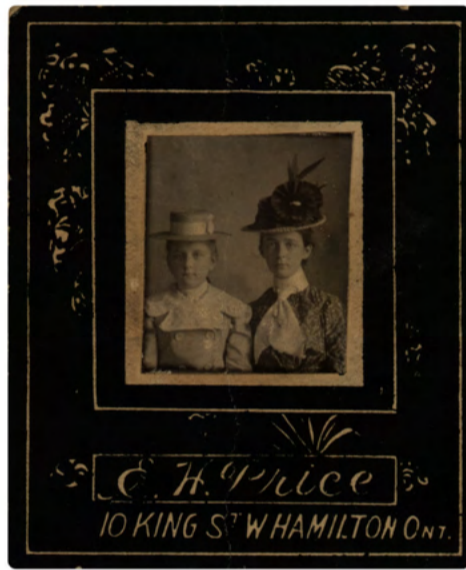
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## HAMILTON, ONTARIO, 1884–1908

In a 1923 letter to a publicity agent in New York, Margaret Watkins declared she had been “brought up on pictures and music.”<sup>1</sup> However, as a warning to any potential biographer, she also wrote: “Living is a most vital and untidy business... I don’t want it all slicked up and streamlined.”<sup>2</sup> In the spirit of her request, this biographical account will do justice to her creative achievements and also to the messiness of life.

Margaret Watkins was born in Hamilton, Ontario, on November 8, 1884, to Marion (Marie) Watt Anderson, from Glasgow, and Frederick William Watkins, Jr., a Hamiltonian of Scottish-Irish descent who owned a large department store. She grew up in a large house on King Street East, just outside the city’s boundary—her father named the house “Clydevia,” after the Scottish river that Frederick and Marie travelled as newlyweds on their way to Canada in 1877.<sup>3</sup> Christened Meta Gladys, she changed her name to Margaret when she left Hamilton in 1908 to live as an independent woman.



LEFT: Photograph of an unidentified person (left) and Meta G. Watkins (Margaret Watkins), date unknown, photograph by E.H. Price, gelatin silver print, 8.1 x 6.9 cm; with mount: 19.6 x 16 cm, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow. RIGHT: Pratt & Watkins store, Hamilton, 1893, photographer unknown, Baldwin Collection of Canadiana, Toronto Public Library.

Letters exchanged by family members in Hamilton and Glasgow describe evenings spent looking at art books and photographic albums, whether the *Masterpieces of Rembrandt* or photographs from Egypt.<sup>4</sup> The family also made trips to Europe and visited museums, so Watkins was fully educated in the art of the Renaissance and beyond. Watkins’s mother was one of the founding members of the Hamilton Branch of the Women’s Art Association of Canada, and her aunts living in Scotland created and sold painted boxes and bent-ironwork fire screens in Glasgow and Toronto.<sup>5</sup> Watkins’s father also had a keen interest in art. He was an examiner at the Hamilton Art School, besides being a very public figure in an ambitious city known for its heavy industry and manufacturing. He was an alderman, an elder in the Centenary Methodist Church, a Temperance advocate, and even a candidate for federal Parliament (although he was unsuccessful in his bid). For the grand opening of his new department store in 1899, Frederick showed a motion picture depicting Christ’s death and resurrection (*Passion Play of Ober-Ammergau*) for five days to a reported 20,000 people.<sup>6</sup> So, indeed, Watkins was brought up on pictures.

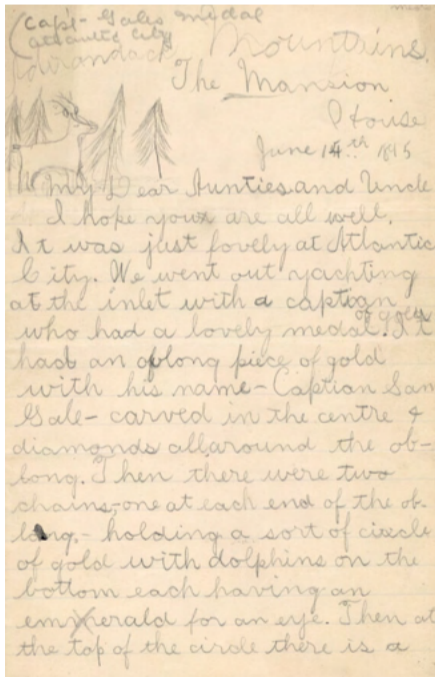


LEFT: Portrait of Frederick W. Watkins, 1896, photographer unknown, cabinet card, 15.3 x 10.1 cm, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow. RIGHT: Centenary Methodist Church Choir (front row, first on the left: Margaret Watkins), 1904, photographer unknown, gelatin silver print, 6.8 x 9.2 cm, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow.

And music also filled her early life. As a child, she practised piano for four hours a day. As a young adult in Hamilton, she was known for her music skills, as part of a duet club, and singing, sometimes as the soloist, with the Centenary Methodist Church choir. Her tastes were varied, playing Mozart and Schumann, as well as Palestrina and Wagner. Watkins had a deep knowledge of and life-long attachment to music, and later described the art of photography as “the varying pattern of a fugue.”<sup>7</sup>

Letters between her mother and aunts describe the women’s world of Watkins’s home.<sup>8</sup> The domestic art of making the house and its objects beautiful remained with Watkins. In her adult life, she would find a new visual language to represent domestic objects, while rejecting traditional constraints for women.

The young Watkins was trained to observe. At age ten, she wrote twenty-six lines in a letter to her aunts and uncle describing a gold medal she had seen and its shapes, gems, and figures.<sup>9</sup> The detail reveals her interest in beautiful things, her observational skills, and her ability and desire to document it all. Her best grades in school were for drawing, though only one drawing remains (a sketch of her cousin Lily Roper). By fifteen, she had published a poem in the local newspaper and would continue to work on her poetry. From childhood on, Watkins saw herself as an artist.



LEFT: Letter from Meta G. Watkins (Margaret Watkins) to Uncle Tom (Anderson), June 14, 1895, The William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton. RIGHT: Cover of *Traumerei* sheet music owned by Margaret Watkins, date unknown, 29.8 x 34.9 cm (Boston: Oliver Ditson Company), private collection.



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So Watkins enjoyed a privileged, bourgeois childhood; at least, until she was thirteen. That year, on a family trip to Europe, her father had a serious bicycle accident for which he was subsequently treated at the Battle Creek Sanitarium in Michigan, an institution headed by John Harvey Kellogg that featured “many appliances, apparatus, [and] modern improvements.”<sup>10</sup> Under the stress, Watkins’s mother had a serious nervous breakdown and was also sent to the Kellogg institution for a year. Margaret was left with her mother’s sister Louisa Anderson, one of the many fussy, strongly religious aunts who came to help. When Watkins’s father returned to Hamilton, he invested in the building of a 56,000 square foot department store and bought the most expensive residential property in Hamilton, as if overcompensating for the difficulty of the past year. Having converted to Kellogg’s Seventh-Day Adventism, he refused to open the store on Saturdays, and, within a year, Frederick Watkins was bankrupt.<sup>11</sup> Clydevia was lost, and Watkins moved out of her privileged class.



LEFT: Frederick Watkins’s 1899 store (later Robinson’s), James St. South, Hamilton, c.1910-19, photographer unknown, Hamilton Public Library. RIGHT: Group portrait of the Tarbox and Houghton families outdoors, in front of Eastlawn, their family home (later Watkins’s “Clydevia”), c.1878, photographer unknown, albumen print, 20.3 x 25.4 cm, Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge.

Her father’s newfound fanaticism and the trite moralism of her aunts drove Watkins away from organized religion for the rest of her life. The bankruptcy also pushed her into adulthood. At fifteen, she was taken out of school to learn the domestic chores of cooking, cleaning, and sewing, but she also took it upon herself to earn money for the family by making objects to sell, ironically at the very store her father had just lost. Granted, these objects were pen-wipers and pudding tidies, but the industriousness began and never left her. She would be an artist who worked for a living, and the craft of printing photographs would later appeal to her love of handmade objects. Furthermore, Watkins created her most original work by reshaping domestic objects in her photography. The trouble was she did not know what medium to choose. In a draft poem written in her early twenties, Watkins exclaimed: “Oh damn you, Versatility!... There are so many hills to climb; / There’s Music, Painting, Vagrant Rhyme.”<sup>12</sup> Her father’s uncle Thomas C. Watkins was an active member of the Hamilton Camera Club, but the families were not close, and there is no record of Watkins taking photographs until 1913. It would take six years of wandering to find her proper medium in photography.



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## WANDERING, 1908-15

In November 1908, at age twenty-four, Watkins left home "to build a life & make a living."<sup>13</sup> Escaping the religious fanaticism of her family and feeling "domesticated to death,"<sup>14</sup> she travelled across the border to the Buffalo area in New York, searching for an artist's life. She joined the Roycroft Arts and Crafts company in East Aurora, an enterprise founded in 1895 by Elbert Hubbard as a place where the new styles of art and design



Rosa Bonheur, *The Horse Fair*, 1852-55, oil on canvas, 244.5 x 506.7 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

from Europe were inspiring the creation of beautiful artistic and practical objects. Watkins entered through the back door as a chambermaid at \$5 a week, but soon moved into making art in this large organization that employed, in her time in 1909, over 900 women. In a mostly gendered workplace, run as much as a factory as a "community," Watkins noted meeting "many interesting girls."<sup>15</sup> New possibilities opened up as she imagined what a woman could do in the world. An unpublished essay on the French painter Rosa Bonheur (1822-1899), drafted by Watkins while at Roycroft, shows Watkins's growing feminist consciousness, particularly her understanding of what it meant to be an independent woman artist. (Bonheur was known for strong representations of large animals that she viewed in Paris abattoirs.) At Roycroft, Watkins illuminated books, did proofreading and guiding, and gave concerts in the hall. On leaving a year later, she took with her a love of beautifully designed books and household items. Her Roycroft copper plate found its way into many of her kitchen still-life photographs, such as *Still Life - Circles*, 1919.



LEFT: Margaret Watkins's pocket diary, 1915, The William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton. RIGHT: Margaret Watkins, *Still Life - Circles*, 1919, platinum print, 16.3 x 20.2 cm, various collections.

In 1910, Watkins moved to another Arts and Crafts community: the Lanier Camp, which operated in the winter and summer and was located in

Massachusetts and Maine, respectively. It was run by Sidney Lanier, Jr. (the son of the Southern romantic poet Sidney Lanier), whose attachment to nature and manual labour was informed by the philosophies of writers such as Ralph Waldo Emerson. The camp was known for the artistic work it offered both children and adults, notably various crafts and a series of Bible plays they put on in the surrounding pine forest. When Watkins arrived, according to her diary and personal writings, she “thought they were all mad,” but she built strong attachments to those who worked there.<sup>16</sup> She took on odd jobs from crafts and costume design to carpentry. “This summer,” she wrote in a note around 1912, being “‘artistic’... meant that I could take the crown of an old hat, a portiere, a mattress cover, a dyed remnant of cotton, a bit of velvet, & an East Indian mat[,] drape them over a suit of pyjamas & achieve a result (somewhat) like [a] Pharaoh.”<sup>17</sup> Although Watkins left Lanier Camp in the autumn of 1913 and took up a job that allowed her to learn photography in Boston, she returned for the subsequent four summers to apply her burgeoning photographic skills and creative abilities. She eventually became its official photographer, documenting their activity for promotional brochures and book-length publications, as well as portraits.



LEFT: Margaret Watkins, *Josephine in Sunlight*, c.1916, platinum print, 20.8 x 15.6 cm, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow.

RIGHT: Margaret Watkins, *Lanier Camp, Bible Play, Samuel and Eli*, 1916, gelatin silver print, 21.2 x 16.1 cm, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow.

Watkins took up photography as a profession for the first time in 1913. It was a year of changes. She had been helping Henry Wysham Lanier (Sidney's brother and author of many books, including *Photographing the Civil War*)<sup>18</sup> and his wife with photographing camp activities, but left camp in the spring to work in New York City for six weeks, helping a “Dr. H” with his practice and tending to



his patients, and visiting the Metropolitan Museum of Art. She then settled in Boston and took up an apprenticeship with Arthur L. Jamieson, a photographer who had studied with Léopold-Émile Reutlinger (1863–1937), a Parisian portrait photographer of celebrities such as Colette and Sarah Bernhardt. Jamieson was introduced in the pages of *Photo-Era Magazine* as “a conscientious, painstaking artist” whose forte was “charming vignetted portraits of women and children.”<sup>19</sup> Watkins helped both Jamieson and his wife with sittings, developing, printing, and mounting.

With minimal income, Watkins lived in the attic of a friend’s house in Boston and kept up her music and poetry. She joined a Reform synagogue choir at the Temple Israel, with concert performances as well as religious services. Her milieu of artists was for the most part socialist, feminist, and anti-war. Her unpublished poems of the time address workers’ troubles and the cost of war on the lives of women. Despite her constrained financial circumstances, these years were busy with social and cultural events—concerts, theatre, films, and restaurants. By 1915, she had made enough of an impression in her circle of acquaintances to be invited to debate “The Relations of Art to Democracy” in an essay for the *Boston Sunday Globe*. The

other debaters were the art critic Mason Green, and the well-known socialist Horace Traubel, friend of photographer Clarence H. White (1871–1925) and biographer of poet Walt Whitman. Watkins argued that art resides in the everyday and in everyone. For Watkins, the artistic spirit was everywhere: in poor shop girls who gave up a meal to sit in the top back row of the opera house, in the girl living in a garret writing essays (a reference perhaps to her own living conditions), and in the ironwork of your kitchen stove covered in splashes of soup. Her words look back to her childhood of arts and crafts, to her current penury living in an attic, and to her future brilliant photographs of kitchen objects, such as *Untitled [Kitchen, Still Life]*, 1921.

During the summer of 1914, Henry Wysham Lanier lent Watkins the money to attend Clarence H. White’s Seguinland School of Photography in Maine for six weeks. And there her life as an artistic photographer began. She had a technical base from Jamieson, but the summer school introduced her to major Pictorialist photographers of the time, such as F. Holland Day (1864–1933) and Gertrude Käsebier (1852–1934), who were invited to the summer school to give feedback and advice to students. Their Pictorialist photography employed the compositional and tonal strategies of paintings, sometimes even its traditional subject matter, as in Käsebier’s *The Manger*, 1899. On the other hand, a major



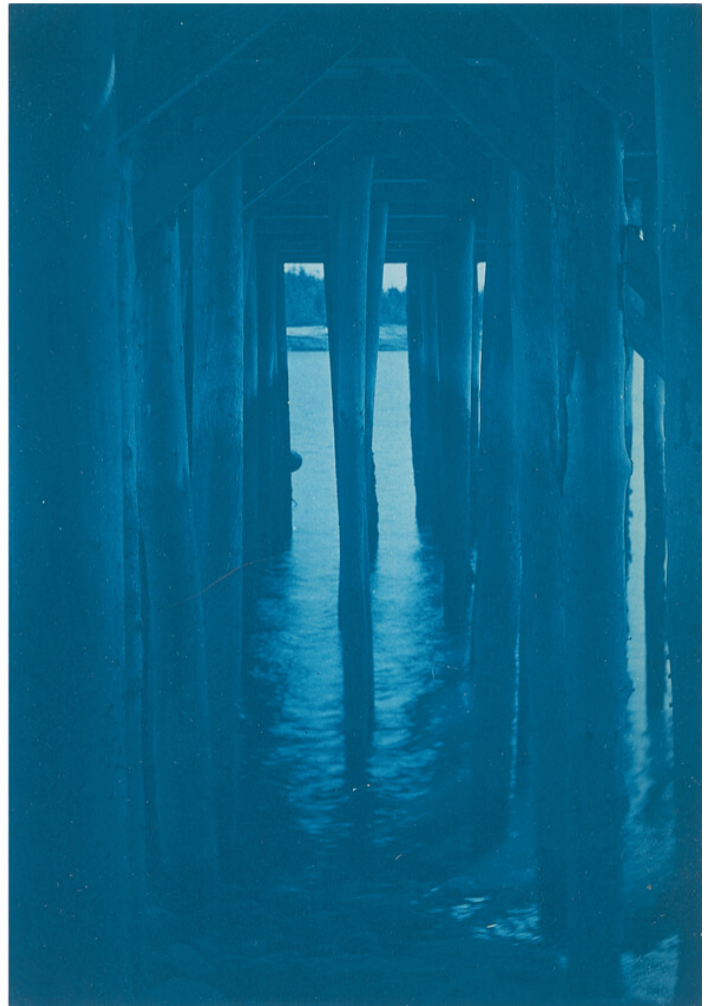
Margaret Watkins, *Untitled [Kitchen, Still Life]*, 1921, gelatin silver print, 15.2 x 18.4 cm, Marjorie and Leonard Vernon Collection, Los Angeles County Museum of Art.



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influence that summer was the Cubist painter Max Weber (1881–1961), who taught a course on composition for the school. While the art of the Old Masters had always inspired art photographers, many of whom, such as Käsebier and Edward Steichen (1879–1973), trained first as painters, Weber had studied painting in Paris and brought the modern techniques of Paul Cézanne (1839–1906), Henri Matisse (1869–1954), and Pablo Picasso (1881–1973) to New York. At the school, he translated the principles of painting into the making of photographs, emphasizing the two-dimensional character of both forms. So, as she was deepening her knowledge of Pictorialist printing processes, Watkins was also learning about modern abstract compositions. On the one hand, she could produce a soft-focus, ethereal Pictorialist image of sunlight in a girl's hair, as in her portrait of Henry Lanier's daughter, Josephine; and on the other, she could create a composition whose sole organizational principle was its multiple angles or its dark centre, as in *Untitled [Bridge posts in water, Maine]*, 1914.



LEFT: Gertrude Käsebier, *The Manger*, 1899, platinum print, 33.7 x 24.6 cm, Thomas Walther Collection, Art Institute of Chicago.

RIGHT: Margaret Watkins, *Untitled [Bridge posts in water, Maine]*, 1914, cyanotype print, 17 x 12 cm, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow.

With her new success at the White school and the connections she made there, Watkins was ready to dedicate herself to a career as a photographer. She would always need to earn an income through her photography, either with commissioned portraits, illustrations, or advertising photography, but she was committed to making works of art. A year later she moved to New York City, and her searching for the right medium, as well as her days of wandering, were over.



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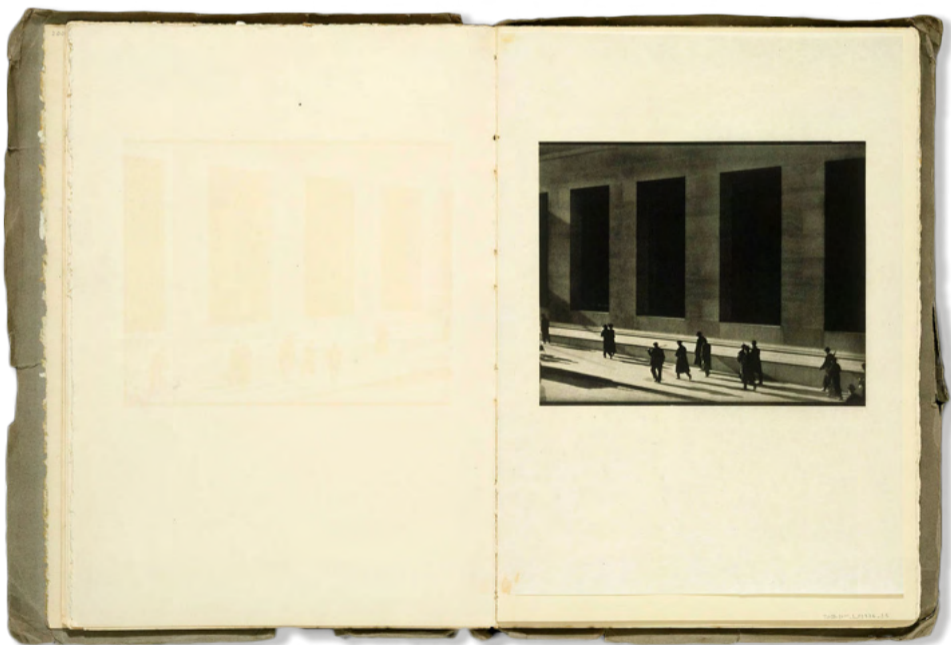
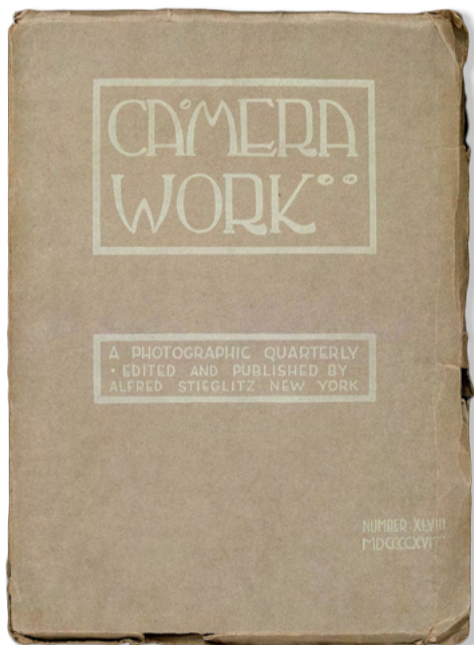
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## NEW YORK CITY, 1915–28

Watkins moved to New York City on October 15, 1915. Hired by Alice Boughton (1866–1943) at \$10 a week as an assistant in her portrait studio on East 23rd Street, Watkins entered an exciting world of art and photography, which she in turn began to shape. Alfred Stieglitz (1864–1946) had been fighting against the amateur and professional photography practised in camera clubs throughout America, which saw the medium primarily as a mechanical and scientific way to produce a document of the material world, with art photographs often limited to quaint depictions of landscapes and portraits. He and others struggled to have photography recognized as an art form on par with painting, sculpture, and traditional print-making. While Pictorialist photographers explored the artistic possibilities of photography by imitating the techniques of painting, Stieglitz founded the Photo-Secession, a break-away group that included Boughton, Clarence H. White, and Gertrude Käsebier, promising an art of original expression.



LEFT: Alice M. Boughton, *[Two women under a tree]*, c.1910, gelatin silver print, 19.8 x 15.5 cm, George Eastman Museum, Rochester. RIGHT: Advertisement for the Photo-Secession exhibitions at the Little Galleries, New York City, January 1906, designed by Edward Steichen, in *Camera Work: A Photographic Quarterly*, no. 13 (January 1906).



LEFT: Cover of *Camera Work: A Photographic Quarterly*, no. 48 (October 1916), published and edited by Alfred Stieglitz, Victoria & Albert Museum, London, U.K. RIGHT: Spread from *Camera Work: A Photographic Quarterly*, no. 48 (October 1916), featuring Paul Strand, New York, 1916, Victoria & Albert Museum, London, U.K.

Stieglitz's periodical, *Camera Work* (1903–1917), and the exhibitions he organized as early as 1902 and continued at his Little Galleries advanced the cause of a new photography. In 1915, White claimed the term "Old Masters" for photography, thus equating it with the acknowledged art form of painting. He mounted an exhibition that included photographic prints by Julia Margaret

Cameron (1815-1879), Lewis Carroll (1832-1898), and David Octavius Hill (1802-1870), now considered the pioneers of art photography.<sup>20</sup> Ultimately, the first museum to accept photography as art into its collection was the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1928, when it accepted Stieglitz's collection of Photo-Secession prints.

The networking out of the Clarence White school led to Watkins's first job in New York in 1914. White himself would eventually hire her to teach at his school, but he and other photographers connected with the school would have recommended Watkins to Alice Boughton. White, Käsebier, and Boughton were part of the 1910 break-off group from Stieglitz's Photo-Secession. A new group met regularly in Mitchell Kennerley's bookstore in New York City, and Max Weber conducted photo critiques to White's students there.<sup>21</sup> Watkins had stepped into an active photography milieu, and her original work meant that she would thrive within it.

Boughton's studio was known for photographing celebrities in the world of art, music, and literature, including Henry James and W.B. Yeats. Watkins's diary records helping with the sittings of Russian writer Maxim Gorky, British poet Laurence Housman, and French singer and dancer Yvette Guilbert, among others. Watkins also attended the Saturday get-togethers in the studio with other artists, including critic and poet Sadakichi Hartmann (1867-1944), and photographers Käsebier and Edward R. Dickson (1885-1975). Dickson and Watkins worked on their own images in Boughton's studio, paying for their supplies. Watkins brought to the studio her previously acquired technical expertise in developing, printing, and mounting photographs. She admitted to a fastidious approach that she referred to as her "fussing," but she learned from Boughton's portrait strategies, often imitating fifteenth- to eighteenth-century paintings using period costumes and chiaroscuro lighting, such as Petrus Christus's *Portrait of a Female Donor*, c.1455, as in her own *The Princess*, 1921.



LEFT: Petrus Christus, *Portrait of a Female Donor*, c.1455, oil on panel, 41.8 x 21.6 cm, Samuel H. Kress Collection, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. RIGHT: Margaret Watkins, *The Princess*, 1921, gelatin silver print, 18.8 x 9.3 cm, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow.

On first arriving in New York, Watkins boarded at The Shirley on West 21st Street, a woman's residence, but in 1916 her cousin Sarah Hutchinson died, leaving her an inheritance of \$3,000 (the equivalent of \$82,000 today). Finally, Watkins could afford to rent "a room of one's own" (what British modernist writer Virginia Woolf argued was necessary for a woman to produce art).<sup>22</sup> A garden

flat at 46 Jane Street in Greenwich Village became Watkins's home and studio. She described it in letters:

"Home sweet home" wasn't always that to me, and for the first ten years on my own I perched in rented hall bedrooms or odd corners of other people's houses. So that to have bedroom, bath and living room (with a discreet "kitchen corner"), to haunt junk shops and old furniture shops, and to pull the whole thing together—well I had the time of my life.<sup>23</sup>



LEFT: Margaret Watkins, *Untitled [Jane Street, New York City]*, 1919-25, platinum print, 21 x 16 cm, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow. RIGHT: Margaret Watkins, *The Bathroom Window [Sun Pattern]*, 1919, gelatin silver print, 21.5 x 16.4 cm, various collections.

In this apartment, Watkins found her distinct voice. That singular perspective is encapsulated by her description of a cabinet in her living room:

All old china in the top.... Desk part holds all chemicals and retouching materials; top drawer portfolios of prints all labelled and in shape to show people; middle drawer portfolios of pictures, engravings, colored prints and copies of Old Masters which we trot out and study every little while when we want amusement; and bottom drawer, (the largest) is jammed full of mending and sewing materials, to be handy when there is time to spare!<sup>24</sup>

This is a "making do" with what is at hand, an inventing out of the world she inhabited, a world in which she could be an artist on her own terms and in her own space. For instance, she could cherish the Chinese screens she had found in a local antique store, hang them on her wall as decoration, and then ingeniously deploy them as a structural framing device for a portrait, as in *Untitled [Portrait of a Man]*, 1924, as easily as one for a nude, as in *Tower of Ivory*, 1924.



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Margaret Watkins, *Untitled [Portrait of a Man]*, 1924, palladium print, 16 x 19.7 cm, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow.

The metropolis gave Watkins work, friends, art, and a bustling life filled with exhibitions, movies, concerts, plays, and restaurants. She might have lunch at the Cosmopolitan Club (a private woman's club) and attend a concert by African American singer and activist Paul Robeson in the evening. She worked too hard, suffered headaches, even fainted in the street on one occasion, but she was becoming a recognized photographic artist. Her cousin Arthur Watkins Crisp (1881-1974) had left Hamilton for the Art Students League and had a career as a notable muralist in New York. One of Watkins's early commissions in 1918 was to photograph at the Greenwich Settlement House where Crisp had painted murals.

Watkins produced perhaps her most iconic photographs in 1919: *The Kitchen Sink*, *Domestic Symphony*, *Still Life - Shower Hose*, *Design - Curves*, and *Still Life - Circles*. White asked his students to find their subjects in the everyday. Watkins took her camera into the intimate spaces in her Greenwich Village apartment, isolating everyday objects. While other photographers were pioneering from the top of skyscrapers or out of airplanes, Watkins was revolutionizing our way of seeing dirty dishes.

Her productivity during this year is due in large part to the fact that Watkins had left her job with Boughton and taken up employment at White's photography



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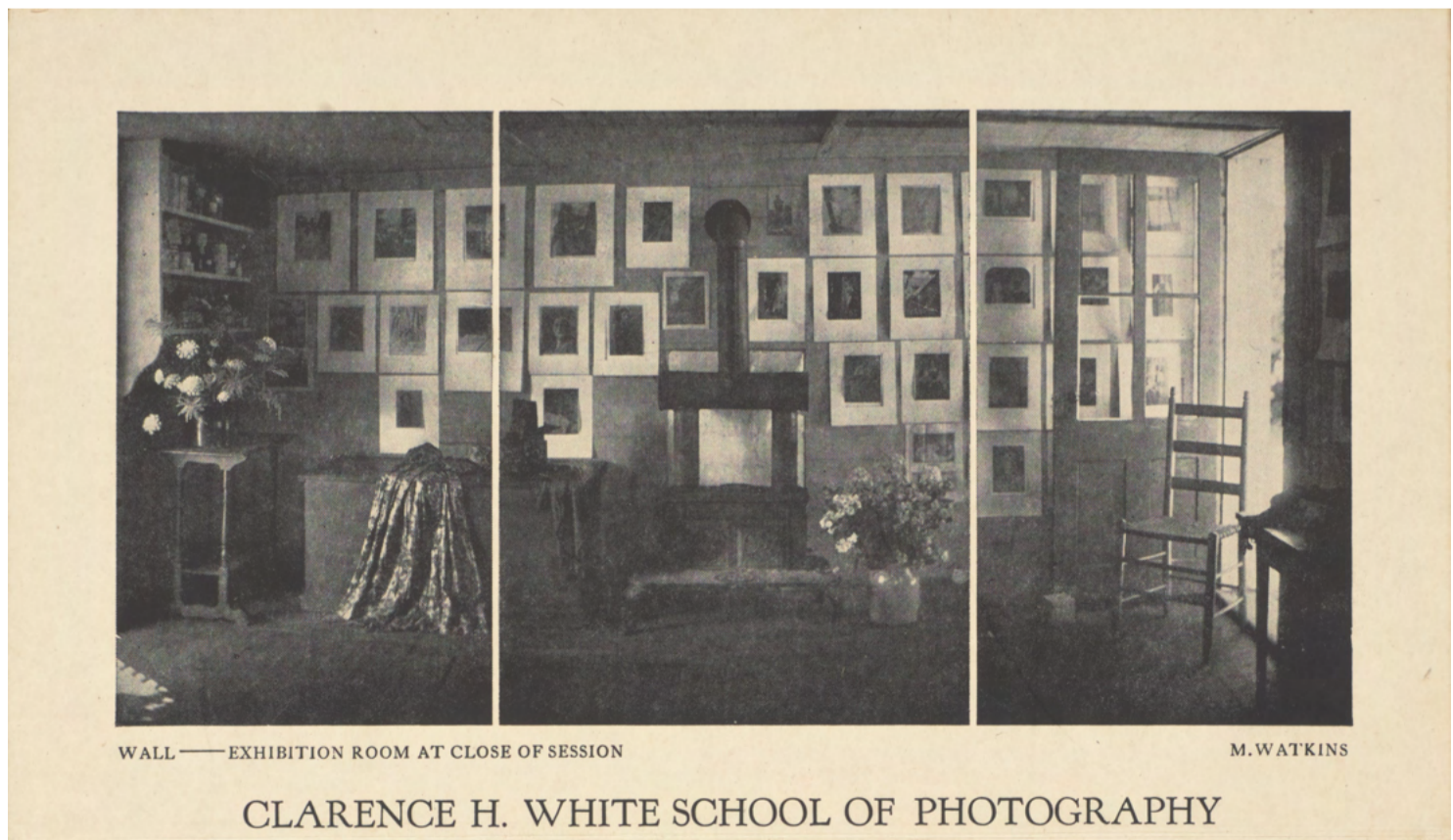
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school in New York City. While working at the school, she, at various times, taught photography, was registrar, co-ran the summer school, and eventually was White's personal assistant. She was known at the school as an exacting teacher with technical expertise—a "tough dame" who could sort out your developing or printing problems.<sup>25</sup> She also passed on her innovative modernist composition of domestic still-life photography, influencing a new generation of American photographers that included Ralph Steiner (1899-1986) and Paul Outerbridge, Jr. (1896-1958).



LEFT: Margaret Watkins, *Still Life - Shower Hose*, 1919, gelatin silver print, 21.2 x 15.9 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. RIGHT: Ralph Steiner, *Typewriter Keys*, 1921, printed 1945, gelatin silver print, 20.7 x 15.6 cm, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Watkins was an outgoing person who gave herself completely to the friends and organizations she was attached to. Her life in New York City encompassed a network of different communities, which in turn provided her with opportunities for photographic commissions and the circulation of her art. Her involvement with White's school saw her not only teaching, but also organizing exhibitions for his alumni. She herself exhibited first with the school in 1917. In 1920, she had her first international exposure in the Copenhagen Amateur Club in Denmark as part of a group selected by the Pictorial Photographers of America (PPA), on whose executive she also served along with White.<sup>26</sup>



Margaret Watkins, *Wall - Exhibition Room at Close of Session*, 1923, The Clarence H. White Collection, Princeton University Art Museum, New Jersey. This work is a triptych that was created for the Clarence H. White School of Photography's fourteenth summer session brochure, Canaan, Connecticut, 1923.



## AN ARTIST IN DEMAND, 1921-28

Watkins had a quick rise to prominence. In 1921, she was featured in a full-page spread in *Vanity Fair* (a trendsetter magazine of the twenties, publishing the latest in art and writing); her work was compared to the sculpture of Constantin Brâncuși (1876-1957) and the paintings of Pablo Picasso.<sup>27</sup> In the same year, Watkins won first prize for *Still Life - Circles*, 1919, at a PPA exhibition at the Art Center in New York. The Art Center brought together seven artists' associations, including illustrators, photographers, and art directors (for magazines and advertising agencies). As such, it provided an excellent venue for networking and commissions.

Publications and exhibitions increased her exposure. Watkins published her work in art or photography journals such as *Shadowland*, *Camera Pictures*, and *Ground-Glass*, as well as in the PPA annual photography book. She appeared three times in 1923, winning prizes for *A Study in Circles*, 1921; *The Bathroom Window [Sun Pattern]*, 1919; and *A Portrait [Bernard S. Horne]*, 1921. Between 1920 and 1925, Watkins appeared in twenty-one group shows in New York, British Columbia, California, Japan, and Java, winning seven prizes and selling *The Bathroom Window [Sun Pattern]*, 1919, at the International Kohakai Salon of Photography in Kobe. She also followed White onto the executive of the Art Center. As a culmination of her success, the Art Center offered Watkins a solo show in 1923.<sup>28</sup>

After this show and her exposure in *Shadowland* and *Camera Pictures*, Watkins's work was in demand: art directors from the high-end department store Macy's, advertising firms such as J.W. Thompson, and other ad agencies began to request still-life studies for their products. The Art Center housed not only the PPA, but also the Art Directors' Club, presided over by Heyworth Campbell, a friend of White who also served as a creative director at media empire Condé Nast. Watkins's connections with the Art Directors' Club helped her own career. She had discovered a way to isolate domestic objects not in a stark or mechanical way but by using elements of design and mystery to entice viewers, as in *Domestic Symphony*, 1919.

The shift from art illustration to photographic representation in advertising imagery was just beginning. The first advertising work by photographer Edward Steichen, considered a pioneer in this field as well as a prominent art



Margaret Watkins's *A Portrait [Bernard S. Horne]*, 1921, palladium print, 21.2 x 16.5 cm, published in *Shadowland*, no. 8.5 (July 1923). This portrait was featured as the first-prize winner of the Camera Contest at the International Salon, Art Center, New York City, May 1923.





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photographer, was published in September 1923; Watkins's first advertising images appeared in February 1924. She understood that the principles of abstract art would sell products by enhancing them with "fine tone-spacing and the beauty of contrasted textures,"<sup>29</sup> as shown in her glittering circles and light of glass, Art Deco lines of perfume bottles, and triangles of black and white on Modess boxes. In fact, Watkins, along with Steichen, was transforming Pictorialism into modernism.



LEFT: Margaret Watkins, *Ellipse & Triangle*, 1924-28, gelatin silver print, 21 x 16.1 cm, various collections. This work is a glassware study for a Macy's advertisement. RIGHT: Edward Steichen, printed by George Tice, *Douglass Lighters*, 1928, gelatin silver print, 25.4 x 20.3 cm, various collections. This photograph was created for an advertisement printed in *Harper's Bazaar*, November 1928, 128.

Watkins also served in two women's organizations at this time. In 1923, she became the official photographer for the New York Zonta Club, a networking group for professional and business women. She was also a member of the Canadian Business and Professional Women's Club, which provided her a solo show in New York in 1924. Her Zonta Club connections brought her portrait commissions for notable figures in the art world, such as Katherine Dreier (1877-1952), a suffragette, painter, patron of the arts, and co-founder of the Society of Independent Artists, which built the first institutional collection of modern art in New York. With her friend Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968), the Dadaist and innovator of Conceptual art, Dreier also founded the avant-garde association Société Anonyme. Their modernist influence can be found in Watkins's portrait of another Zonta Club member, Nina B. Price, who was a successful publicist of the time.



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Margaret Watkins, *Katherine at Home*, c.1925, gelatin silver print, 21 x 15 cm, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow.

In her portrait work, Watkins mainly photographed people from the arts world: dancers, artists, and musicians, perhaps the most famous being Russian composer and piano virtuoso Sergei Rachmaninov. Through friends working or studying at the Art Students League, she received commissions from painter Kenneth Hayes Miller (1876-1952) and muralist Ezra Winter (1886-1949), exhibiting the resulting works in her own solo show. Her friends and teachers at the White School offered themselves as models, including White himself and Bernard Shea Horne (1867-1933), with whom she co-ran the summer school. Her Canadian friends were also glad to model for her work, with Verna Skelton from Walkerton, Ontario, depicted as if in a Julia Margaret Cameron photograph of the Victorian era, or posed holding a tea cup for a Cutex nail polish advertisement.

In her own self-portrait, Watkins raises her head to look down on the viewer. This is not a meek woman. As she reportedly said of her photographs, "They are unusually interesting, sometimes beautiful—but never, I hope, 'pretty.'"<sup>30</sup> So when her self-portrait was published framed in an oval and touched up to suggest lipstick and mascara, she railed against being made to look like a "snake-eyed vamp." She was an independent woman, not interested in using female charms or fitting into the stereotypes of demure maiden or seductive femme fatale. Rather, she was a "New Woman," along with other empowered women of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, determined to challenge gender norms, live independently, and have a role in public life. Watkins joined others "making revolutionary changes in life and art."<sup>31</sup>



LEFT: Margaret Watkins, *Self-Portrait*, 1923, 21.4 x 16 cm, gelatin silver print, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow. RIGHT: Newspaper clipping from *Sun and Globe* (New York), October 24, 1923, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow.



With the death of Clarence White in 1925, Margaret Watkins's life significantly changed. Not only had she lost her friend, co-worker, and mentor, she lost her community at the school. White had set aside ten (sometimes identified as eight or twelve) of his prints for Watkins in lieu of payment for some of her work. After his death, Mrs. White sold those prints to the Library of Congress. When they were hung with the Clarence H. White Memorial Exhibition at the Art Center, Watkins had a bailiff confiscate them, and a court case ensued, where, through innuendo, it was implied that Watkins and White had been having an affair. She had been cast in the role of the snake-eyed vamp she had repudiated. Watkins lost the case. She was paid for the prints, but they remained with the Library of Congress.<sup>32</sup>

For the next two years, Watkins continued working hard with the PPA and with commissions for advertising photographs. She received requests to show work in the United States and elsewhere and was invited to present her work and thoughts on design to the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences, which in 1889



had started one of the first departments of photography in the country. But she was exhausted. Watkins planned a three-month holiday in Europe, and never returned. Home had been Jane Street and New York City, and she had lost it.



Margaret Watkins, *Untitled [Bridge and Eiffel Tower]*, 1931, gelatin silver print, 7.8 x 10.3 cm, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow.

## GLASGOW AND EUROPE, 1928–38

At the start of her European holiday in late August 1928, Watkins stopped in Glasgow to visit her aging maternal aunts at 41 Westbourne Gardens, only to be faced with the death of one within the week. The other three who still lived in the family home were in various states of debility. She wrote to friends: “The youngest(!) is 77 and has been in bed for five or six years; the next, 80, valiant but very tottery and subject to the most shocking insurrections in the interior; the eldest 86, a human dynamo, loves the movies, tries to manage the whole solar system and is furiously indignant if I suggest that she is perhaps not quite so strong as she was in the good old days.”<sup>33</sup> (That “human dynamo” was Louisa, Watkins’s main childhood caregiver. Each unmarried aunt had spent time in Hamilton helping Watkins’s mother). They were hoarders with “stockings enough for a centipede.” Watkins raged: “If I see one more black beaded bodice I shall be carried out screaming!”<sup>34</sup> This was the domestic trap Watkins fell into, as the only single woman in the family available to look after her elderly relatives, despite the fact that she was “not just exactly suited by temperament, or temper, to be the honorary curator of an old Ladies’ home! But there you are—needs must!”<sup>35</sup> She moved in, reluctantly, to return the care she had received from them as a child.

She escaped the aunts three times. In September 1928, she booked a Cook's tour to Europe along the Rhine, taking in the World Press Exhibition (Pressa) in Cologne, which highlighted the latest in printing, photojournalism, and advertising. This alone was worth the trip, with brilliant displays in the U.S.S.R. pavilion designed by the influential graphic designer El Lissitzky (1890-1941). Watkins loved its "palpitating chaos" and "restless chaotic energy."<sup>36</sup> Thus began her exposure to the "New Vision" of Europe, where photographers were experimenting with radical

perspectives, fragmentation, and other formal methods to find equivalents to the modern machine and the city. She began her own experiments with urban photography. She illegally took photographs inside of Pressa pavilions, and went on to photograph in London for two months.

Despite being tied to the "aunt-hill," as she called it, Watkins continued to develop her career. In 1928, she exhibited in the London Salon of Photography at the Galleries of the Royal Society of Painters in Water-Colours. In 1929, she pursued her interest in colour photography and enrolled in a course on three-colour printing in Ealing, London. Although she was asked to return, she did not have enough money to do so. Also in 1929, she was elected to the Royal Photographic Society of Great Britain and became the first woman member of the Glasgow and West of Scotland Photographic Association. She exhibited with this group in 1936 and 1937, winning three prizes—including its highest award, for her work *The Princess*, 1921.



LEFT: Poster for Pressa (World Press Exhibition), Cologne, 1928. RIGHT: Margaret Watkins, *Untitled [Pressa Fair]*, 1928, gelatin silver print, 8.7 x 6.1 cm, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow.



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Margaret Watkins, *London* [*Daily Express*], c.1928, gelatin silver print, 10.3 x 7.8 cm, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow.

In Glasgow, Watkins continued to explore the city—its shops, signs, architecture, and workers. Many of her photographs from this time echo the Russian, French, and German photographers of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity) movement, which re-embraced realistic representation as a means of social criticism. Her image of two men standing on girders—*Untitled [Construction, Glasgow]*, 1928–38—combines geometric form with the worker in this new industrial world. With the 1932 completion of the Finnieston crane, used for unloading cargo in Glasgow's Clyde Harbour, Watkins found a sustained subject area: "I almost made a pet of that crane," she mused in a letter; it looked like "a prehistoric creature."<sup>37</sup> The giant cantilevered crane haunted Watkins's Clyde Harbour scenes and also offered her a vantage point—when she dared climb to the top of it—of the city and life below. She did not hesitate to trespass in order to get her shots.



LEFT: Margaret Watkins, *Untitled [Construction, Glasgow]*, 1928-38, gelatin silver print in photo book, 7.9 x 10.6 cm, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow. RIGHT: Margaret Watkins, *From the Finnieston crane, looking down*, 1932-38, gelatin silver print, 7.8 x 10.3 cm, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow.

In August 1931, Watkins signed up for the International Congress of Scientific and Applied Photography in Dresden. She had always been interested in how photography could be applied in the commercial world, and not just valued as a pure art form. After the congress, she stayed in Paris for two months photographing street scenes as well as the controversial Colonial Exposition that featured pavilions representing the people, culture, and resources of French colonies around the world.

Watkins's last escape was to the U.S.S.R. in August 1933. Perhaps inspired by the success of her student Margaret Bourke-White (1904-1971), who photographed the industry of the U.S.S.R., Watkins joined a group organized by filmmaker Peter Le Neve Foster<sup>38</sup> of the Royal Photographic Society and travelled to Moscow and Leningrad. Although not a communist sympathizer, Watkins, along with Bourke-White and others, was curious to see the advances in modernization that the Soviet first Five-Year Plan had made. In New York, Watkins had already developed an interest in Soviet art, and while in Moscow she "assiduously prowled for two half days [and] appreciated to the limit" the *Artists of the Russian Federation over Fifteen Years* exhibition.<sup>39</sup>



LEFT: El Lissitzky, *Design for the flag of the Soviet pavilion*, Pressa exhibition, Cologne, 1928, gouache, collage, and ink on coloured paper, 70.8 x 52.8 cm. RIGHT: Margaret Watkins, *Untitled [Octobrist camp]*, 1933, gelatin silver print, 10.3 x 7.8 cm, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow.

Le Neve Foster gave an account of the trip in the society's *Photographic Journal*.<sup>40</sup> The group of five left from London on the Russian ship *Cooperatzia*. Their schedule was limited by the official travel agency to specific areas—numerable nurseries, maternity hospitals, a workers' rest home, a communist youth organization (Octobrist) camp, the Park of Culture and Rest, and other

parts of Moscow and Leningrad. On one occasion, what Watkins took for workers' flats turned out to be a barracks and she was escorted off to the police station, where no one spoke English, until the situation was sorted out. They also visited film studios: Soyuzkino, the Soviet Hollywood, and the Red Front, where they met Vsevolod Pudovkin (1893-1953) when Watkins tripped over some bells in the corridor and he came out to see what was happening.

Watkins worked on different photographic series during the trip, one of which she titled *Reconstruction, Moscow, 1933*, in reference to the Soviet period of establishing new structures (physical, economic, legal, and social) after the revolution and the First World War. She photographed newer buildings, inside and out, but also workers in the act of digging or repairing—often, she noted, with inadequate materials.



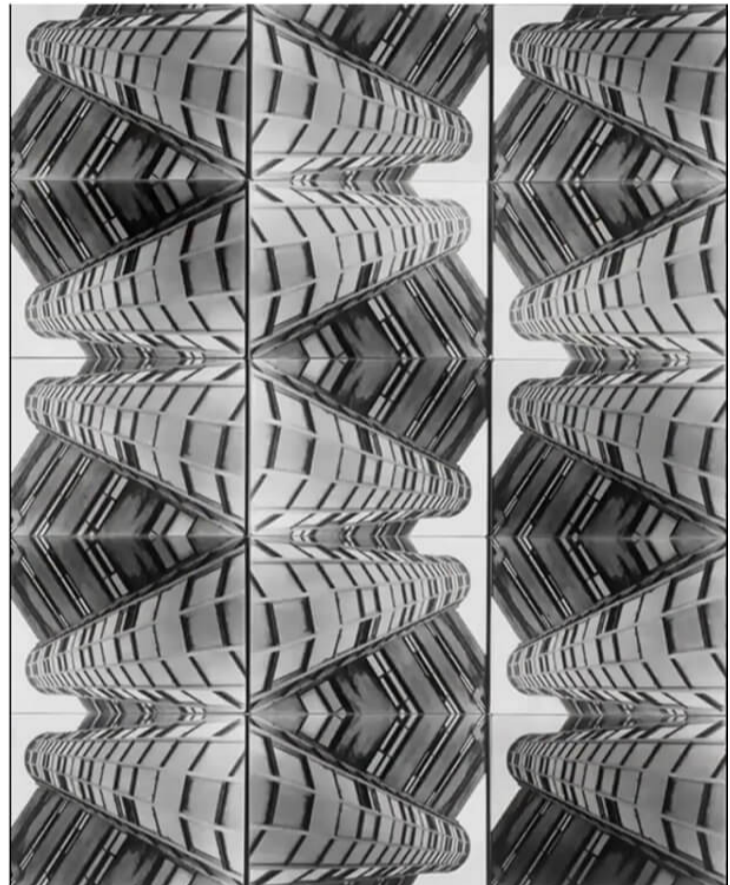
Margaret Watkins, *Reconstruction, Moscow, 1933*, gelatin silver print, 7.8 x 10.3 cm, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow.

She captured the new propaganda as the city was transformed into a talking book. Gigantic posters reoriented their world toward the struggle to create a new utopia. She was torn between the energy these showed and the obvious struggle of those under its weight. Poverty, hunger, and death were visible. Funeral processions passed day in, day out: "It must be bitter aggravation to see foreigners consuming luscious platefuls & know that—unequal relationship between guests and hosts."<sup>41</sup>

To return to the "aunt-hill" after this trip was especially hard, but Watkins tried for the next four years to keep up her work and hopes. She had an idea of



marketing her photographs as designs for textiles, carpets, or tiles. She set to work with kaleidoscopic multiples of her more abstract urban images—of steps in a Glasgow street (Blythswood), the glass and iron roof of London's Covent Garden Market, the modern façade of the Glasgow *Daily Express* building, or a detail of a Moscow apartment building. It was like falling into a perfect design, an ordered world of lines and mirroring shapes—pure music in image. Unfortunately, she was not successful in selling them.



LEFT: Margaret Watkins, *Moscow*, 1933, gelatin silver print, 10 x 7.9 cm, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow. RIGHT: Margaret Watkins, *Moscow*, c.1935, gelatin silver prints, 37.9 x 31.2 cm, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow.

#### FROM ARTIST TO ARCHIVIST, 1939–69

Some artists have short lives and brilliant, but brief, careers. Some have long lives and paint until the end. But the necessary conditions for making art are complex and these two scenarios for creative production are in fact misleading. Watkins did have more than a room of her own, but the house was an albatross. She did not have the 500 pounds a year that Virginia Woolf called for. She was unable to buy photographic supplies and her health declined with recurring pneumonia. Nor did she have the network of like-minded artists and productive institutions as she had had in New York City. She could no longer promote and circulate her work.



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LEFT: Postcard of 41 Westbourne Gardens, date unknown, photographer unknown, 14 x 8.8 cm, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow.  
RIGHT: Margaret Watkins, *Untitled [Watkins's Graflex Camera]*, c.1920-22, gelatin silver print, 21.1 x 16.1 cm, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow.

Watkins last exhibited her photographs in 1937. The last aunt died in January 1939 and Watkins inherited the Westbourne Gardens home, with its bursting pipes, leaking gas, and a century's accumulated objects. She had tried an export business sending antiques from the markets in Glasgow to Toronto, where her lifelong friend from Hamilton, Bertha Merriman Henson, would sell them. However, the war intervened and the business failed. By this time her inheritance from Sarah Hutchinson had run out and the house was not sellable. It needed too much work, and nothing could sell during or after the war. She started to take tenants, often people of colour and musicians who would not be accepted elsewhere. One guest was Walter Süsskind, who would later serve as the Toronto Symphony Orchestra's conductor from 1956 to 1965; he left her his baton.<sup>42</sup> Later, a fire in the house made it uninhabitable for tenants.

In the years leading up to her death, Watkins increasingly retreated from society and eventually became a recluse, though her neighbours Joseph and Claire Mulholland who befriended her and welcomed her for Christmas dinner were astounded at her bright mind, her conversation, and her energy. Watkins gave Joe Mulholland a sealed box, asking him not to open it until after her death. When he did, it was filled with her photographs, which had been hidden for thirty years.<sup>43</sup> On November 10, 1969, two days after Watkins's 85th birthday, she was found dead at home. Reversing the stipulation curtailing her own inheritance from Hutchinson—that the money could be spent on any education except music, a codicil she had obeyed—Watkins left the house to “be put to some musical use, for example, as common rooms, practicing rooms and living



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accommodation" for musicians.<sup>44</sup> Instead, the old house was sold, and a trust fund was set up to award grants to musicians for continuing studies or specific projects. Even so, it is endearing to picture Watkins herself imagining the future of the space she inhabited for forty years, filled with the music she loved.

In the last phase of her life, Watkins had shifted from being an artist to being an archivist. She continued to read voraciously and listen to classical music, but she also went through all the objects in the house, including her own collection of photographs and documents, ordering and labelling everything. She annotated letters the aunts and her mother had written, correcting information about her life. It is as if she was always waiting for others to find the artist in her once again, to pass on her legacy. And indeed, decades later, Watkins's work would be rediscovered by a new generation of curators, academics, and photography lovers. Watkins, with her avant-garde way of capturing everyday life, is now recognized as a "revolutionary" modernist photographer and a pioneer in advertising photography. Artists show us new ways of seeing and being in our world. Watkins took her kitchen sink, and later the structures of our cities, and made their mundane everyday-ness, even messiness, come alive with a new sense of balance and harmony.



Alice Boughton, *Margaret Watkins*, c.1919, platinum print, 16 x 10.5 cm, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow.



# KEY WORKS

Margaret Watkins produced *Opus 1*, arguably her first art photograph, in 1914 while a student at the Clarence H. White summer school, but even at that early stage, her fundamental project was evident: to find new forms and a new way of seeing in the angles and curves of everyday life. Over her twenty-three-year career, the pioneering photographer moved from soft-focus Pictorialism to the radical presentation of domestic still-life studies—notably her dirty dishes, and the seductive folds of her enamel sink. She went on to a successful career in advertising photography, and post-1928, in step with the New Vision in Europe, she produced avant-garde urban photographs of Glasgow's harbour and street scenes in Paris, London, and Moscow.



## OPUS 1 1914



**Margaret Watkins, *Opus 1*, 1914**  
Bromide print, 30 x 23.3 cm  
The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow

In the summer of 1914, Margaret Watkins took the photograph *Opus 1* at the Clarence H. White Seguinland School of Photography in Maine. One of her earliest works, it can be argued that it holds the essential foundation of the style she developed over her entire photographic career: finding geometric form—angles, curves, repetitions—in her everyday world.

Watkins had begun to learn photography in Boston the year before, working as an assistant with the American photographer Arthur L. Jamieson at his portrait studio. However, the six-week summer course with Clarence H. White (1871–1925) shaped her art practice. White was an advocate for the recognition of photography as art and had been teaching Pictorial photography in the art department of Columbia University's Teachers College and the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences. By choosing the title *Opus 1*, Watkins signalled her intention to present this as her first work of art. The title also suggests she



saw links between her photographic work and music, having trained as a pianist and a singer.

*Opus 1* is a brilliant patterning of angles made out of the rounded sides of fishing boats. There are triangles everywhere: in the bows of the boats, in the shape formed by an outstretched arm and the shadow it projects, and, significantly, in the centre of the composition. Watkins moves the objects to the edges of the photograph, leaving the various tones of the rippling water in the centre—tones that include a dark curve that mirrors and echoes the rowboat's edge on the right.

But a note on the back of the photograph also speaks about more than triangles. She writes that she was standing on the half deck of a boat watching the netting of small fish used for baiting larger fish like hake or halibut. *Opus 1* might be considered a landscape photograph, but it does not give us a horizon. We are thrown into the thick of it—the water, the labour (the arm stretching), and the messiness of it all with the fish and the baskets. Despite her later insistence that, in modern art, *what you depict* has no relevance, it is the form that counts, Watkins was always, also, interested in what she saw. It is the interplay between form and the seemingly insignificant, often domestic, objects that gives us her original vision. Here, in her first photograph, she wanted us to know what the workers are doing, where she is standing, and what fish are in the boat.

Eight years later, Watkins took another photograph of boat and water that is closer to her stated ideal of pure form. In *The Wharf*, 1922, the photograph's subject consists of two objects that meet near the top. Again, the compositional centre is a void. The almost imperceptible horizontal dock at the bottom of the work completes the off-centre triangle of the water. The paring down of objects and focus (again, no distracting horizon) and mirror-calm water create a silent, meditative world. Watkins was interested in something beyond the soft-focus lens of Pictorialism. *The Wharf* shows her ultimate mastery of dark and light space, the fragmented geometric shapes of Cubism, and the evocation of mood.



Margaret Watkins, *The Wharf*, 1922, palladium print, 20.2 x 15.1 cm, various collections.



**EVENING 1923**



Margaret Watkins, *Evening*, 1923  
Palladium print, 16.3 x 21.2 cm  
The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow

With its blurred focus and subtle range of tones, *Evening* would be considered a perfect Pictorialist image. Margaret Watkins attended the Clarence H. White summer school in 1914 in Maine and again in 1917 when it moved to Canaan, Connecticut. Many of the exercises given to the students at the school involved photographing the coast and surrounding landscape. The vertical lines of Watkins's trees in *Evening* direct the eyes, while the horizontal masses of the land—the shoreline beneath the trees and the far shore and hills—ground the scene. And as the eye takes in more detail, finding the more subtle range of tones that the palladium print allows for, the viewer feels the movement of the water's waves, the lighter distant hills, and the play of grasses below and leaves at the top of the frame. The latter, with their lacy effect, offer a lightness to the photograph balanced by the grounding darker tones.

The work also follows the composition rules of American artist Arthur Wesley Dow (1857–1922): finding vertical and horizontal lines to structure the image and creating patterns of light and dark. Besides being an artist, Dow was a specialist in Asian art, basing much of his theory on Japanese prints. He taught art and photography at Columbia University's Teachers College and influenced both Clarence H. White (1871–1925) and Max Weber (1881–1961), who in turn taught these principles to Watkins.

Watkins would have considered this photograph one of her most successful, since it showed in multiple exhibitions internationally. There are three extant prints of this photograph, variously dated 1920, 1922, and 1923. Its Pictorialist strategies of composition and subtle tone value were recognized by many of the burgeoning photographic exhibition sites for art photography of the time. The 1922 print showed that year in San Francisco at their Second Annual International Exhibition of Pictorial Photography. From there, it travelled in 1923 to the Second International Kohakai Salon of Photography, appearing in Kobe, Tokyo, Osaka, and Kyoto. Watkins sent the 1923 print to the San Francisco and Oakland International Salon of Photography, then to the Frederick & Nelson Fifth Annual Salon of Pictorial Photography in Seattle in 1924, and, following that, to the Internationale Foto-Tentoonstelling in Bandoeng, Java. It was perhaps the 1920 print that she included in her 1923 solo show at the Art Center in New York City.



Margaret Watkins, *Bridge, Canaan, Connecticut*, 1919, gelatin silver print, 15.9 x 21 cm, various collections.

We can see how Watkins eventually moves through Pictorialism into modernism by comparing this perfect Pictorialist image—an atmospheric tone-poem—with another landscape, *Bridge, Canaan, Connecticut*, 1919. In it, Watkins achieves Dow's *notan*, the patterning of light and dark, particularly in the receding,





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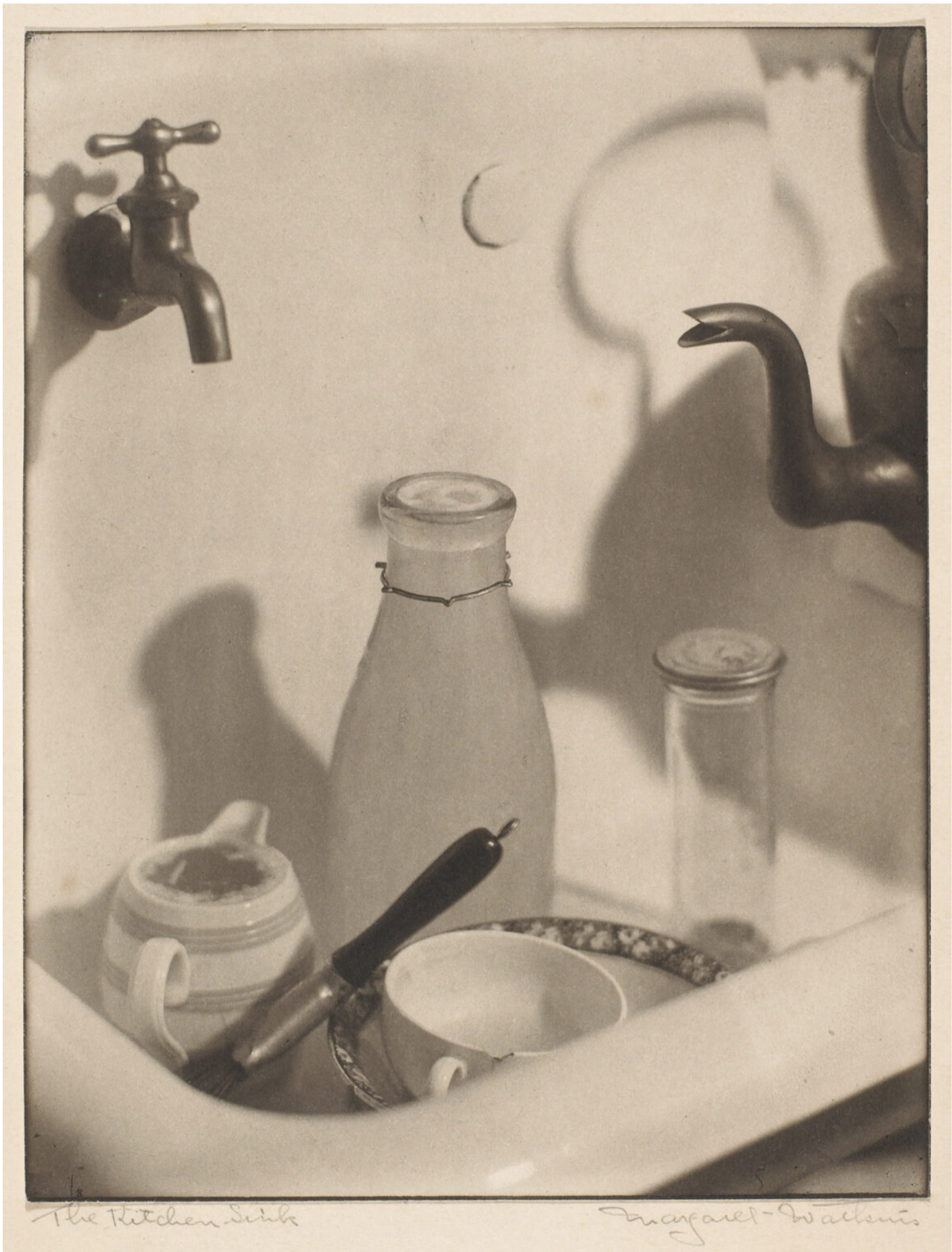
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curving river, but she also includes modernist experimentation. The photograph frames the landscape and women walking with the geometric form of the bridge. However, this form does not offer simple horizontal and vertical lines. The engineering of this bridge is hard to read, and we are thrown off-kilter into some confusion. The women taking a pastoral summer's walk toward the river are thus seen through a modern disturbance, a making strange of our everyday world—a strategy Watkins would use to create her most successful domestic images.



THE KITCHEN SINK 1919



Margaret Watkins, *The Kitchen Sink*, 1919  
Palladium print, 21.3 x 16.4 cm  
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa

Margaret Watkins's *The Kitchen Sink* is a photograph of dirty dishes sitting in a sink—with scum on the milk bottle at its centre, surrounded by mismatched and chipped crockery. The sink's curved edge, cropped at an angle, gives the photograph a diagonal plane. The eye takes in the shiny metal objects—the faucet, the spout of the kettle, and the cleaning brush—all carefully situated to form a centring triangle that contains and frames the objects. The shadow of the kettle's handle on the porcelain sink and a recessed backsplash produces a floating, disorienting line reminiscent of abstract paintings by the Russian Expressionist artist Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944), while the milk bottle's shadow looks as if it would receive the water if the tap were turned on. The palladium print produces a range of rich tones, from dark, through multiple greys, to almost white.

This, Watkins's most renowned (and infamous) photograph, was exhibited from 1921 to 1924 in New York, San Francisco, Japan, and London. In 1922, it won second prize at the Emporium Second Annual Photographic Exhibition in San Francisco and was praised for its technique and "pleasing combination of pattern founded on a geometrical base."<sup>1</sup> The prize brought with it much public criticism and even parody. The photograph is an excellent example not only of her focus on design, but also of her daring—National Gallery of Canada photography curator James Borcoman called it "revolutionary"—use of seemingly unaesthetic, domestic materials.<sup>2</sup>



Wassily Kandinsky, *Cossacks (Cosaques)*, 1910, oil on canvas, 94.6 x 130.2 cm, Tate Modern, London, U.K.

*The Kitchen Sink* controversy was over gender and representation in art, particularly in relation to what constitutes a suitable subject. Whereas sexually exploitative and often violent representations of women had long been considered noble subjects of Western art, dirty dishes were not. In London, one reviewer pointed out that the photo was "not one that 'anyone would beg to contemplate in his dying moments.'"<sup>3</sup> To another reviewer, *The Kitchen Sink* was "a record of slovenly housekeeping," even as it was "an exemplar of splendid technique... the depiction of some misplaced crockery and clever composition of triangles."<sup>4</sup> A parodic poem appeared in *Camera Craft*: "The Old Kitchen Sink: With Apologies to Margaret Watkins," where, stanza after stanza, women were expected to stick to the kitchen and let men do the real work of photography.<sup>5</sup> In response to a critic who complained that the photograph suffered from "containing too many objects of equal interest," Watkins noted, "Evidently the poor duffer knows nothing of Modern art—abstractions, pattern rhythm etc. The 'objects' are not supposed to have any interest in themselves—merely contributing to the design."<sup>6</sup> Here is Watkins arguing that *The Kitchen*



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*Sink* is pure abstraction. Nevertheless, it is precisely the shocking combination of “essential form” and material reality that is her gift. At times in her life, Watkins felt “domesticated to death,”<sup>7</sup> but working in and through her domestic spaces, she was able to develop a woman’s photographic language of the everyday.



DOMESTIC SYMPHONY 1919



Margaret Watkins, *Domestic Symphony*, 1919  
Palladium print, 21.2 x 16.4 cm  
Various collections



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Described by *Vanity Fair* in 1921 as “strongly reminiscent of the sculptures of [Constantin] Brâncuși,” Margaret Watkins’s *Domestic Symphony* is arguably her most successful photograph. Out of the objects in her kitchen, she constructed an image of repetitive forms and dark interior. It is a sensuous masterpiece. Here she combined her kitchen still-life genre with the sensuousness of a nude study, in a scene reminiscent of musical form.

Sometimes titled *Eggs on Porcelain*, the photograph depicts the rim of her white porcelain sink, three eggs of varying tones settled on the attached draining unit, the bottom of a kettle and an enamel bowl, and a towel hanging down the right side. The curves of the white porcelain fold into each other, visually reminiscent of one limb folding into another, or of a wave forming at its peak. And once the viewer has focused on that central shape, it becomes apparent again and again in the work, multiplied as each egg meets another, as the teakettle and bowl touch, and, in an elongated form, in the crease of the towel. To accentuate both the sensuality and the mystery of this photograph, Watkins leaves the centre dark, pushing the objects to the edge of the composition. The towel on the right does not hang at a straight right angle to the ledge. It moves slightly out toward the darkness, drawing the eye inward and upward to the crest in the white porcelain.

This photograph was exhibited at the First International Kohakai Salon of Photography, in Kobe, Japan, in the summer of 1922. It received an honourable mention at the Third International Exhibition of Pictorial Photography, under the auspices of the Royal Agricultural and Industrial Society, in New Westminster, B.C., in September 1923, and also at the Frederick & Nelson Fourth Annual Salon of Pictorial Photography, Seattle, Washington, in November 1923.

With the title *Domestic Symphony* in mind, we might rewrite the scene entirely in terms of musical form. One of Watkins’s most convincing descriptions of her art is in terms of music: “Simple + inconsequent subject may provide a motive for beautiful & rhythmic patterns which stir emotion quite unrelated to original subject—the austere abstract beauty of a Bach fugue, theme answering theme, phrase offsetting phrase.”<sup>1</sup> In *Domestic Symphony*, one can see the rhythmic pattern of curve meeting curve, with diminution and variation. This is photography that moves its viewer through form and tones. Another way of understanding Watkins’s integration of music and image is to see it as synesthesia, an experience of one sense, in this case visual, triggering the experience of another, here sound. As Andrea Nelson writes, “Watkins draws together domestic labor, the artistic process, and the phenomenon of synesthesia, in which the pathways of the senses cross.”<sup>2</sup>



Margaret Watkins, *Design - Angles*, 1919, gaslight silver chloride print, 20.7 x 15.5 cm, various collections.



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A comparable musical composition is *The Bread Knife*, 1919, exhibited as *Design - Angles* in San Francisco and in Kobe, Japan, in 1922, and featured along with *Domestic Symphony* in the 1921 *Vanity Fair* article on Watkins, where it was compared to the Cubist art of Pablo Picasso (1881-1973). If *Domestic Symphony* works with the meeting of curves, *Design - Angles* is all in the meeting of straight lines. The angles proliferate—at varied intervals on the edge of the knife (short), in the wallpaper trim (slightly longer), in the meeting of knife, board, and book, each of these with their shadows, and finally, climactically, in the dark triangle at the centre of the photograph.



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## SELF-PORTRAIT 1923



Margaret Watkins, *Self-Portrait*, 1923  
Gelatin silver print, 21.4 x 16 cm  
Various collections



Watkins offered this striking self-portrait, with head held high, to accompany a newspaper article on her work. The photograph is important both as an original portrait and as a biographical document. Here, she looks down at the viewer, a confident subject. There is no makeup, no feminine coy charms or enticements, no eyes downcast. She takes control of her interaction with the viewer. The long neck is reminiscent of the portrait by Julia Margaret Cameron (1815–1879) of Julia Stevens (Virginia Woolf's mother, also known as Julia Jackson), and indeed Watkins did produce a beautiful portrait of her friend, Verna Skelton, in this vein.<sup>1</sup> However, her own self-portrait does not include the turned head in an act of silent contemplation. Instead, it actively invites a conversation. She called the photograph "soulful," but insisted she had figured out an "an Ingeniously Devised Mechanism" (one she never divulged) to take the picture.<sup>2</sup> Here is a modern woman who is inventing technology to create her art. The work is complemented by the last line of the autobiographical letter in which this photograph was enclosed: "and as a flippant finale, I love cheese and I do my own carpentering."<sup>3</sup>

When this self-portrait appeared in the *New York Sun and Globe* to signal her upcoming solo show at the Art Center, mascara, eyeliner, and lipstick had been added and it was placed in an oval frame. Infuriated, Watkins wrote on the back of the photograph: "To ye engraver / Don't clip, prune / or place this in an oval / Neither retouch & paint / To the semblance of a / Snake-eyed vamp!"<sup>4</sup> The editors of the newspaper had changed the meaning of the portrait. Watkins's original portrait and her response to the newspaper insist on her identity as an artist and a professional, not a femme fatale.



LEFT: Julia Margaret Cameron, *Mrs. Herbert Duckworth as Julia Jackson*, 1867, albumen silver print, 32.8 x 23.7 cm, Gilman Collection, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. RIGHT: Margaret Watkins, *Verna Skelton*, 1923, palladium print, 21.2 x 16.3 cm, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow.



Although Watkins could write in moments of self-reflection, "Funny isn't it how we are all absolutely alone inside of ourselves! Just a skein of wool—all tangled up never been properly wound,"<sup>5</sup> this "soulful" self-portrait offers strength and directness. This is the professional woman who has been written up in *Vanity Fair* and is about to have her own first solo show in New York City. This is the woman photographer who is fully conscious of what it means to gaze through her viewfinder, to see the world in her own way and see it anew. She is one of several women who were taking up the art of photography to earn a living. While the old amateur camera clubs often only welcomed male members, schools such as the Clarence H. White School of Photography encouraged women to learn the art as a profession in their own portrait studios, in photojournalism, or in advertising.



# MARGARET WATKINS

Life & Work by Mary O'Connor

On another occasion, in line with other avant-garde artists of the time such as Man Ray (1890-1976) and later André Kertész (1894-1985), Watkins represented herself through objects in *Untitled [Jane Street, New York City]*, 1919-25: her hat, gloves, and purse on her sofa, art reproductions on the wall, and the wall itself. In an interview at the time, she said she was "studying this wall. It is very beautiful when the light plays on it in certain ways."<sup>6</sup> This was a portrait of an artist *at home*.



LEFT: André Kertész, *Mondrian's Glasses and Pipe*, 1926, gelatin silver print, 15.7 x 18.2 cm, various collections. RIGHT: Margaret Watkins, *Untitled [Jane Street, New York City]*, 1919-25, platinum print, 21 x 16 cm, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow.



TOWER OF IVORY 1924



Margaret Watkins, *Tower of Ivory*, 1924  
Palladium print, 21 x 15.8 cm  
Various collections



# MARGARET WATKINS

Life & Work by Mary O'Connor

Margaret Watkins's *Tower of Ivory* is structurally original both in arrangement of tonal values and repeating curves of the body. It sits within the tradition of Western art's representation of the female nude. Yet its publication as an image of a healthy body asks us to look again to find not the passive recipient of the male gaze, but the strength and supple movement of a professional dancer.

She exhibited *Tower of Ivory* in 1924 at the Frederick & Nelson Annual Salon of Pictorial Photography in Seattle and at the International Foto-Tentoonstelling in Java. The upright nude figure, turned three-quarters away from the camera, forms an s-curve from her raised right arm over her head to her left foot extended behind her. The lines of her neck, arms, spine, buttocks, and legs form gentle repetitions of this curve. The standing nude is framed by two Chinese screens, structurally moving the viewer's eyes to the curving lines of the body. Their blocking is shaded in tonal gradation forming the base of a triangle of light that moves from the top of the screens, narrowing down to the feet at the bottom, slightly broken by the diaphanous tulle on the woman's calves. The weight, entirely on her right leg, conveys stability and strength, even while the body is curved and supple.

The model, Marguerite Agniel, was a dancer and health advocate who chose a number of Watkins's photographs of her for her book *The Art of the Body* (1931). As a "tower of ivory," the image suggests strength. Agniel chose it to illustrate correct posture and "the Graceful Suppleness of the Back."<sup>1</sup> Once again, one sees Watkins's photographs circulating in different spheres with different meanings. As an image in a Pictorialist exhibition, it shows the subtlety of tonal gradation and the traditional beauty of the female nude. In a health book, it suggests the work that must be done to achieve an ideal, healthy shape.

Watkins's *Head and Hand*, c.1925, offers a sensuous appeal comparable to *Tower of Ivory*: in this case, with a sense of playful if not surreal irony, seeing that it is Agniel's hand holding a sculpture of her own head. Another of Watkins's nudes also turns her figure into a geometric form, this time undoing any soft s-curve, with its arms and legs as parallelograms, and resisting an idealized female body. Watkins exhibited *Reclining Nude* in her 1923 solo show at the Art Center in New York, anticipating the 1926 *Satiric Dancer* by André Kertész (1894-1985), a seminal photographer of the twentieth century known for original angles and points of view.



Margaret Watkins, *Head and Hand*, c.1925, palladium print, 20.7 x 15.7 cm, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow. This work was shown at the London Salon of Photography in 1928.



LEFT: Margaret Watkins, *Reclining Nude*, 1923, palladium print, 16.5 x 21 cm, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow. RIGHT: André Kertész, *Satiric Dancer*, 1926, gelatin silver print, 24.8 x 19.7 cm, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

*The Back of A.Z.W.*, c.1914-23, a Pictorial, slightly soft-focus photograph, might be compared to *Tower of Ivory*. The silhouette of the woman's face and neck have the quality of the rounded forms of traditional nudes. Yet she is clothed in a working smock and leather boots. This is a working woman—she is cooking something on the campfire—but the viewer is shown a pause in that labour, a moment of thoughtfulness and interiority. There is both a heft and a lightness to her body. She is present, embodied, a possibly complex being that the viewer is invited to follow into imagining her thoughts, worries, and dreams. Rather than looking at a sublime landscape vista, the viewer looks with this woman, who has a moment to stop, look, and think, despite or along with the daily labour that is visually present as the pan in the fire. Here is an alternative everyday for women, and an alternative to the traditional representation of a female nude.



## STUDY FOR AN ADVERTISEMENT [WOODBURY'S SOAP] 1924



Margaret Watkins, *Study for an advertisement [Woodbury's Soap]*, 1924

Palladium print, 15.4 x 20.3 cm

Various collections

It was Margaret Watkins's ability to portray domestic objects in seductive ways that prepared her to become a successful advertising photographer in the second half of the 1920s in New York City. She was one of the earliest to develop a photographic language for advertising. Here, in a study for an ad for Woodbury's Soap, commissioned by J. Walter Thompson in 1924 and also accepted at the juried exhibition at the San Francisco International Salon of 1925, Watkins intersects her rectangular shapes of soap and pamphlet and lets them hover over the circle of the marble sink's edge. The palladium printing process allows for a long scale of grey tones between the dark chiaroscuro background and the light of the edge of the pamphlet. The running tap water also catches a range of tones, with a flash of white from window light neatly situated between the water and its dark shadow line. The objective is to sell a bar of soap, but it is the hint of mystery with the scene's fading into darkness and the imagined pleasure of the feel of the water, all *formed* into a set of triangles (the line of the water meeting the edge of the pamphlet, the corners

of the soap and the pamphlet) and circles (the sink's doubled edge, the circle in the centre of the soap). Again, Watkins has achieved a brilliant reshaping of domestic objects into a sensuous realm.

Watkins's solo show at the Art Center in New York in November 1923 included the category "Still Life & Design." One of those images was *Soap Dish*, 1919, sometimes exhibited as *Still Life - Bath Tub*. This photograph of soap kept a sense of the everydayness of cleaning, or the need for cleaning (in the scratches on the unnamed bar of soap and the worn scrub brush), even while it worked with geometric form, texture, and a range of tones. In comparison, Watkins's 1924 Woodbury's Soap image simplified the composition and eliminated the scratches, allowing the sensuousness of form and tone to take over. The idealized object was ready to carry the hope of a life fulfilled if you bought the product.



LEFT: Margaret Watkins, *Still Life - Bath Tub*, 1919, platinum print, 16.5 x 20.5 cm, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow. RIGHT: Advertisement for Woodbury's Soap, "The first time you use it," in the *New York Times*, April 13, 1924, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow.



Watkins provided at least three images for the ad campaign. Two vintage print versions remain (one in the Library of Congress), while another appeared in the *New York Times* in 1924. The modern form of the image echoed the pamphlet's text, which offered a scientifically researched regime of cleanliness that would result in "perfect skin."<sup>1</sup> And the sensuousness of Watkins's image repeated the meaning of their slogan "A Skin You Love to Touch" (reinforced by the pamphlet's image of a heterosexual couple). But Watkins's photograph embodied the equivalent of a broader (essential?) notion of pleasure. She had found the ideal advertising image.

Two years later, a J. Walter Thompson art director obviously remembered her success with this photograph when he requested: "the inner line of the wash bowl... or... the fat, round lines of the porcelain base of a faucet... a smart touch of modern bathroom."<sup>2</sup>

In Watkins's own essay on "Advertising and Photography" in the 1926 Pictorial Photographers of America annual, she wrote, "stark mechanical objects" and "commonplace articles show[ing] curves and angles" proved to be a foundation for effective marketing: "the purchaser, however indifferent to circular rhythms, unconsciously responds to the clarity of statement achieved by stressing the essential form of the article."<sup>3</sup>



UNTITLED [GLASGOW, FINNIESTON CRANE] 1932-38



Margaret Watkins, *Untitled [Glasgow, Finnieston Crane]*, 1932-38  
Gelatin silver print, 10.3 x 7.8 cm  
The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow



Here in a photograph of the midsection of Finnieston Crane in the Clyde Harbour, Watkins works with her industrial surroundings in Glasgow, showing the influence of Europe's New Vision photography that experimented with innovative angles of vision, radical perspectives, and fragmentation to find equivalents to the modern machine and the city. This photograph offers a skeletal formation of black criss-crossing beams and girders against a curving pattern of white and grey clouds. The crane is cropped, removing any sense of its edges, the ground, or the horizon. Instead, what is left is a 1930s version of Watkins's design-angles: in this case, not created with a bread knife on her sink, but by the massive crane that she explored from all sides. Comparable to the Eiffel Tower photographed by Germaine Krull (1897-1985), with its interest in geometric form, this midsection photograph of Finnieston Crane is one in a series Watkins took of the cranes by the River Clyde. The series allowed Watkins to explore different viewpoints of the crane in the city—from afar, from its top, and from underneath.

Watkins visited her aging aunts in Glasgow on her way to a European holiday in 1928. Finding they needed care, and being the only unmarried relative, she stayed to help and never returned to North America. She adopted the new industrial landscape of this ship-building city and "almost made a pet" of the Finnieston Crane: "I've seen the ship-yard cranes looming in the dusk like a herd of prehistoric monsters—and been shooed away by the watchman—and to see man in his true perspective, as a very

small creature creeping and scurrying about the earth."<sup>1</sup> This is Watkins's Glasgow: where industry offers her geometric designs, but where she also is captivated by the human in relation to those structures, such as in her image of a man reading by the Clyde, framed beautifully by steel beams and visually in conversation with the haunting crane at the centre of the photograph. Or her view from the top of the crane looking down to trucks and workers below: "There's a shot from the giant at Finnieston (hanging over the rail in a stiff breeze), looking straight down on the squat dome of the tunnel entrance, with little trucks and figures making a quick beetle pattern of light and dark."<sup>2</sup>



LEFT: Germaine Krull, *Eiffel Tower*, Collotype, c.1927, 23.6 x 17.1 cm, from the portfolio MÉTAL, edited by A. Calavas (Paris: Librairie des Arts décoratifs, 1928). RIGHT: Margaret Watkins, *Untitled [Finnieston crane from the opposite shore]*, 1932-38, gelatin silver print, 7.8 x 10.3 cm, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow.



# MARGARET WATKINS

Life & Work by Mary O'Connor

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These photographs of cranes are also comparable to a series of photographs that Watkins did from 1932 to 1938 of workers on a Glasgow construction site. At times she silhouetted one or two men on a criss-cross of girders isolated against the sky. In another, we have a worker amid the confusion of scaffolding beams and shadows. The effect is of a montage highlighting the worker in his environment. These photographs are reminiscent of Russian photographers of the period, such as Boris Ignatovich (1899-1976), Vladimir Gruntal (1898-1963), and Alexandr Rodchenko (1891-1956). Watkins's own student Margaret Bourke-White (1904-1971) was also making a name for herself with photographs of monumental industrial sites, for instance in her Otis Steel series and massive dams in the U.S.S.R. If Watkins's photographs do not always have the monumental thrust of Bourke-White's images, they have perhaps a more interesting Cubist effect: disorienting but always looking for unexpected symmetries, repetitions, and pregnant unfilled spaces.

## MOSCOW [YOUTH FESTIVAL] 1933



Margaret Watkins, *Moscow [Youth Festival]*, 1933

Gelatin silver print, 15.6 x 21 cm

The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow

Margaret Watkins travelled to Moscow and Leningrad in 1933 with a small group organized by the Royal Photographic Society of London. Drawn to Soviet art and film, she, like her student Margaret Bourke-White (1904-1971), wanted to be one of the first to witness the Soviet attempt to “industrialize almost overnight.”<sup>1</sup> This Moscow image of Youth Festival posters is one of twenty-five prints Watkins prepared from this expedition.<sup>2</sup>

This streetscape is a busy photograph, with much to sort through and organize visually. Watkins’s eye isolated the horizontal rows of light and dark—the base of the street, the lower level of windows mixing with the tables in the lower part of the three posters, an upper level of dark windows and flags, and, finally, a dark-toned roof. All the while, there are verticals of people, posters, windows, and flags. But within this patterning (essential to her aesthetic) are two important

narrative elements: first, the three gigantic posters depicting three designers (notably, one a woman) at their drafting tables; and second, at the lower left of the photograph, the group of women waiting for a tram. They in turn stand in for the half-hidden pedestrians passing between the building and the posters.

Reading the three posters, it is at first unclear if they are hanging from the building, or, as is the case, standing in the street towering over the scene. This is the world of Soviet montage propaganda. The posters are inspiring in their own beautiful design of repetitions with variations: in what is drawn on the table, in the drawings at the designers' backs, in their smocks, in the position of their heads, in the blocking of light and dark, paralleling the tonal pattern in Watkins's own photograph, and in their use of the photograph within illustrations.<sup>3</sup> Always alert to the role of images in our world, Watkins acknowledged the Soviets were masters of propaganda, documenting numerous Moscow and Leningrad instructive posters, promoting working together and pulling your weight, the dangers of inebriation, or keeping healthy.



LEFT: Margaret Watkins, *The Model Contest, Youth Festival*, 1933, gelatin silver print, 15.8 x 21.2 cm, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow. RIGHT: Margaret Watkins, *The Builder, "Peter the Great,"* 1933, gelatin silver print, 15.8 x 21.3 cm, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow.



The women waiting for the bus, seemingly minor but essential figures in this photograph, remind the viewer of the relation between the posters and the real workers. Seen through one lens, these women are the heroes of the story, while the posters celebrate idealized versions of their labour. Seen through another lens, these women with their tell-tale white and dark babushkas are the embodiment of real labour and struggle against the aspirational posters that do not speak of the pain and poverty that Watkins witnessed during her visit.

Another photograph, *The Builder, "Peter the Great,"* 1933, captures the relation between public imaging and the people in the street. Watkins situates the monument to Peter the Great in relation to two boys in shallow water below. The photograph is patterned in three horizontal tonal bands, but a triangle unites the three figures with their shadows, even their legs echoing each other. It is a stopping of time, a "decisive moment," much as the photographs of Henri Cartier-Bresson (1908-2004) would do later in the 1940s and 1950s. But this photograph brings the monumental figure down to the level of the everyday.



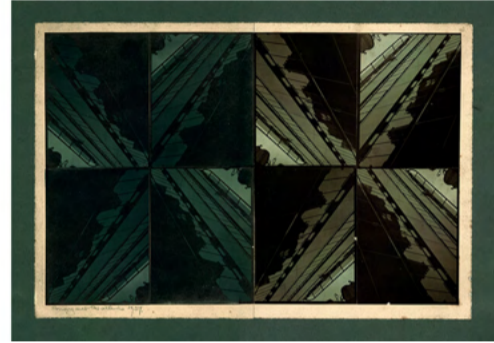
DESIGN FOR CARPET, "BLYTHSWOOD," FRONT STEPS, CENTERED C.1937



Margaret Watkins, *Design for Carpet, "Blythswood," front steps, centered c.1937*  
Gelatin silver prints, 20.5 x 15.6 cm  
The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow

One of Watkins's last experiments was a set of multiple photographs, turning her European streetscape images into abstract design. Long gone is any Pictorialist soft-focus scene of faces in sunlight or trees by a river. Instead, we have the angles, latent in her *Opus 1* fishing boats, turn into absolute geometric symmetry. The original photograph *The Blythswood Multiple [Steps 1]*, c.1937, is already an abstract design of diagonal lines made from the shadows of an iron railing on a set of concrete steps with an inlaid pattern. Although there is still some range of tones, this gelatin silver print is closer to the high-contrast photographs of later photographers.

The multiple *Design for Carpet* is an Art Deco design, with a black centre superimposed by two white diamond lines, then, moving out to the edges, a series of diagonal shafts scored by black angles. The image is very much alive with movement, coming out from or into the centre. Watkins tried various multiples with this photograph, in one case using sixteen. Nevertheless, this four-image pattern achieves the most success with a balance between stasis and vibrating energy.



LEFT: Margaret Watkins, *The Blythswood Multiple [Steps 1]*, c.1937, gelatin silver print, 7.8 x 10.3 cm, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow. RIGHT: Margaret Watkins, *Design for Lino, "Daily Express," [Jazzed Repeat]*, c.1937, gelatin silver prints, 20.6 x 31.4 cm, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow.

Under pressure to earn money from her photography, Watkins hoped that these multiples would sell as "Abstract Designs for Textiles."<sup>1</sup> She insisted this was all "Direct Photography, no manipulation or faking of any kind whatsoever!"<sup>2</sup> suggesting the delight in the photographic engineering of her creation. Watkins tried other designs, working with images such as the glass ceiling of the Covent Garden Market dome and a section of a Moscow apartment shot from below, a multiple of fifteen identical photographs. Her *Design for Lino, "Daily Express,"* is subtitled *[Jazzed Repeat]*, suggesting the syncopation of her lines and dark masses meeting slightly off-centre.

Although Watkins was not able to sell these multiples as commercial designs, she did exhibit four at the Glasgow and West of Scotland Photographic Association's annual exhibition in 1937. She was the only woman in the exhibition, and it was Watkins's last public showing in her lifetime. These carpet designs might well be her most modernist achievements.



# SIGNIFICANCE & CRITICAL ISSUES

Watkins's life and work are significant in different ways. She was trained in a school that emphasized the *uses of art* as well as teaching photography *as art*. It also explicitly promoted women in the profession of photography, providing space for a New Woman to become independent and contribute to public life. As a student and a teacher in that school, influencing a new generation of American photographers, Watkins was instrumental in the development of American modern photography. In the new world of commodities and magazine advertising, she was at the vanguard of advertising photography. Her success was built on her original way of seeing and photographing everyday life in the home. Although she was lost to

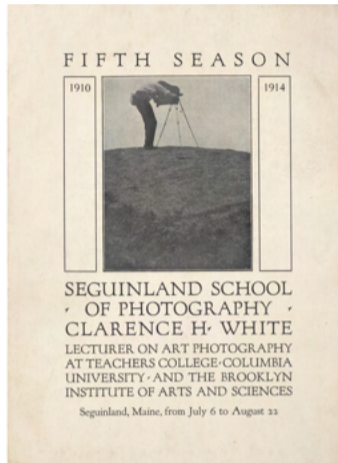
history for almost fifty years, Watkins is now recognized in Canada and internationally as a pioneering modernist photographer.

#### CLARENCE H. WHITE SCHOOL OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Although Margaret Watkins began working as an assistant to Arthur L. Jamieson in Boston in 1913, it was her summer course with Clarence H. White (1871-1925) in Maine the following year that shaped her art and began her career. She noted in her agenda, "wonderful time & much inspiration."<sup>1</sup>

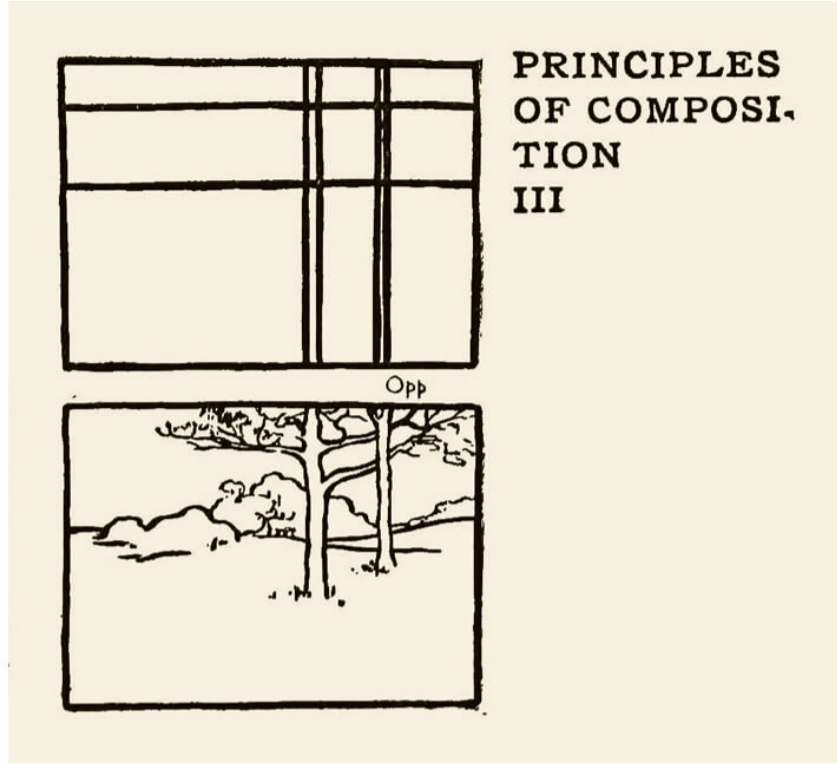
The Clarence H. White school, the first in America to teach photography as an art form, announced itself as an institution that taught the uses, or "vocation," of the medium. It offered guidance in the production of artful photographs, but it also advised on professions in photography, whether studio portraiture or, eventually, advertising. In 1919, White hired Frederic Goudy (1865-1947) to teach a course that focused on the photograph in print and advertising photography. White's socialist inclinations, his desire to use art to help the world, and his visionary teaching were an important gift to those who, without family wealth, wanted to combine their love of art with an income. The Arts and Crafts ethos of the school found no conflict between art and commercial work: practitioners believed in the value of beautiful objects and that the commercial world and artistic one should work together. The school also welcomed and respected women, for whom photography had become a possible profession. Watkins was one student who benefited from this ethos and education.<sup>2</sup>

White was known as a notable Pictorialist photographer, and in 1902 he had co-founded, with Alfred Stieglitz (1864-1946), the Photo-Secession movement, which promoted photography as a fine art. As an educator, White was influenced by the teaching methods he learned from Arthur Wesley Dow (1857-1922), whose book *Composition* discussed the design elements of line, mass, and space that applied to all forms. White also adopted a teaching approach proposed by philosopher and educational reformer John Dewey. His "project method" encouraged students to develop critical thinking and problem solving through experimentation. White would set problems of design, exploring curves, angles, line, or tone, but to be solved in the students' own environment—the students thus discovering their own expression.



LEFT: Brochure for the Seguinland School of Photography, Clarence H. White, Fifth Season, 1914, Clarence H. White Collection, Princeton University Art Museum, New Jersey. RIGHT: Clarence H. White (seated centre) and Gertrude Käsebier (seated right), with students, Summer School of Photography, Five Islands, Maine, c.1913, photograph by Gertrude L. Brown, platinum print, 13.5 x 18.9 cm, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.





LEFT: Clarence H. White, *Morning*, 1905, platinum print, 24.1 x 19.1 cm, Museum of Modern Art, New York. RIGHT: Detail from *Composition: A Series of Exercises in Art Structure for the Use of Students and Teachers* by Arthur Wesley Dow (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1913).

Even though White's own art practice was Pictorialist and soft-focus—he produced numerous ethereal photographs of family members at home or in nature—his school introduced students to modernist art and graphic design. In 1914, Watkins was taught by the painter Max Weber (1881-1961). For Weber, a photograph was primarily an abstract design, a filling up of two-dimensional space. Watkins penned a poem in gratitude for his teaching and guidance, entitled "A Cubist Ode." And indeed, her first public notice—a full-page tribute to her photography in *Vanity Fair*—likened her *Design - Angles*, 1919, to Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) and Cubist art.



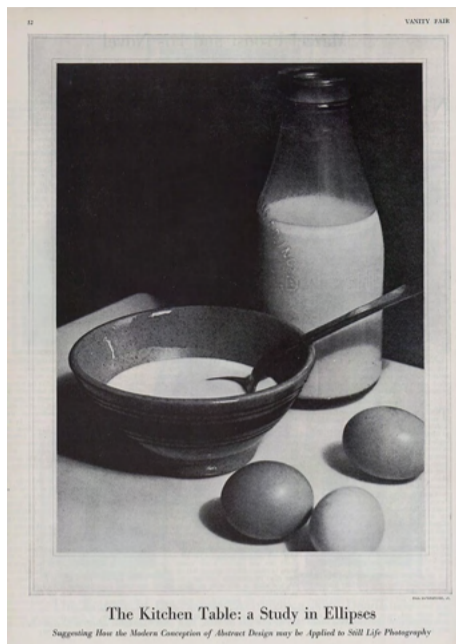
LEFT: "Photography Comes into the Kitchen," *Vanity Fair* 17, no. 2, October 1921, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow. Margaret Watkins, *A Study in Circles*, 1921 (top centre); Margaret Watkins, *Untitled [Kitchen, Still Life]*, 1921 (centre); Margaret Watkins, *Design - Angles*, 1919 (bottom left); Margaret Watkins, *Domestic Symphony*, 1919 (bottom right). RIGHT: Juan Gris, *Breakfast*, 1914, cut-and-pasted printed wallpaper, newspaper, transparentized paper, white laid paper, gouache, oil, and wax crayon on canvas, 80.9 × 59.7 cm, Museum of Modern Art, New York.

## AN INFLUENTIAL TEACHER

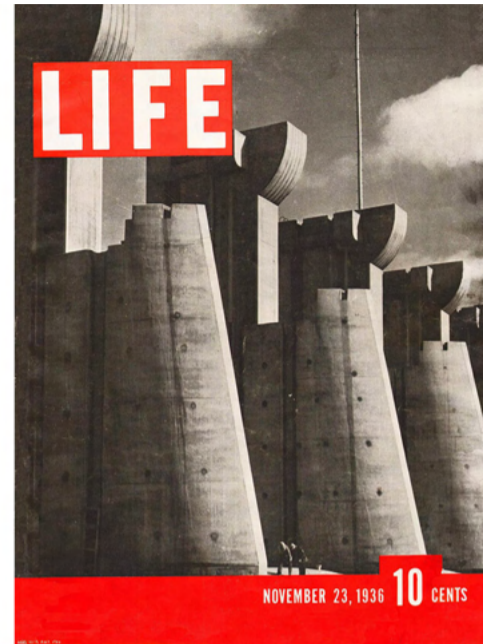
Clarence H. White and others recognized Margaret Watkins's strength and originality as a photographer. She was the only woman who had been a student who was hired to teach at the Clarence H. White School of Photography. Between 1919 and 1925, she served at various times as an instructor, an administrator, and a personal assistant to White.<sup>3</sup> She had opened up a new way of photographing everyday life and domestic objects, and she passed that knowledge on to her students. She is now recognized for her instrumental role in the development of American photography. Harold Greenberg, one of the world's foremost photography dealers, who holds a collection of more than 40,000 prints, has written, "For a long time I have believed Margaret Watkins, along with Max Weber, to be to a very great extent responsible for the emergence of the great American Modern photographers of the 1920's and 1930's."<sup>4</sup>

Watkins added the category “Domestic Still Life” to the school’s list of students’ projects and, seeing what their teacher had accomplished with works such as *Domestic Symphony*, 1919, or *The Kitchen Sink*, 1919, student Paul Outerbridge, Jr. (1896–1958) later produced his own variation on eggs and milk bottles titled *The Kitchen Table*, 1921. Her student Ralph Steiner (1899–1986), whose letters to her are affectionally addressed “Dear Watty,” described in a 1980s interview Watkins as an exacting teacher (unlike White, who came in once a week and just “told everybody that they were doing very nicely”). Watkins was “always there”: “a tough dame... a real person to whom you said ‘is this negative over-developed or under-developed’ and ‘my gum prints<sup>5</sup> didn’t come out well, what’s wrong?’”<sup>6</sup> Margaret Bourke-White (1904–1971), perhaps Watkins’s most renowned student, wrote to Watkins in the midst of her Otis Steel Mills work and from the height of her office in the Terminal Tower in Cleveland, saying, “I should love having a chance to show you my beautiful Tower, and have you give the old-time, much-appreciated onceover of my work.”<sup>7</sup>

Watkins’s technical expertise was evidently valued and remembered. Having learned from her, both Steiner and Outerbridge, Jr. were able to translate their domestic still-life work into lucrative advertising careers, and Bourke-White was able to translate modernist forms into epic industrial photography, both in the United States and the U.S.S.R. James Borcoman, former curator of photography at the National Gallery of Canada, called Watkins’s work “revolutionary,”<sup>8</sup> and claimed she would “prove to be an important missing link in North American photography.... As a teacher, she bridges the gap between the modernist movement of Europe headed by [Alfred] Stieglitz and [Edward] Steichen and the later American photographers such as Outerbridge and Steiner.”<sup>9</sup>



LEFT: Paul Outerbridge, Jr., *The Kitchen Table: a Study in Ellipses*, 1921, featured in *Vanity Fair* 18, no. 5, July 1922, 52. RIGHT: Margaret Bourke-White, *Peck Dam in Montana*, 1936, featured on the first cover of *LIFE* 1, no. 1, November 23, 1936. *Peck Dam in Montana* is one example of Bourke-White’s architectural photography.





# MARGARET WATKINS

Life & Work by Mary O'Connor



Margaret Watkins, *Untitled [Construction, Glasgow]*, 1928-38, gelatin silver print, 10.3 x 7.8 cm, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow.

Teaching does not simply involve passing on one's knowledge. Watkins also helped create a welcome space for learning. In the early twenties, she ran the White summer school with Bernard Shea Horne (1867-1933) in Canaan, Connecticut. She offered a collection of her own domestic objects, her treasures found in junk shops, and even clothes inherited from her mother to be housed

at the school for students to use. She was singled out by White for her extraordinary contribution to resettling the school in its new location at 144th Street, and even did some carpentering for the school. As an indication of her acknowledged value, Watkins was put in charge of choosing the photographs for the 1925 exhibition by students and alumni of the White school, held at the Art Center in New York.

### AMERICAN ADVERTISING PHOTOGRAPHY

The 1920s were a time when art and commerce worked easily together. The Arts and Crafts movement had aimed to bring beauty to everyday life and its products and, in that vein, the Clarence White school and the Art Center in New York aimed to make art “useful.” Alfred Stieglitz, with White, had led the fight to promote photography as an art form and not just a documentary medium. But Stieglitz never espoused a link between art and commerce. As Watkins noted, “In the days of the Photo-Secession. . . no devout pictorialist would have deigned to descend to advertising. In their desire to establish photography as an art they became a bit precious; crudeness was distressing, materialism shunned.”<sup>10</sup>

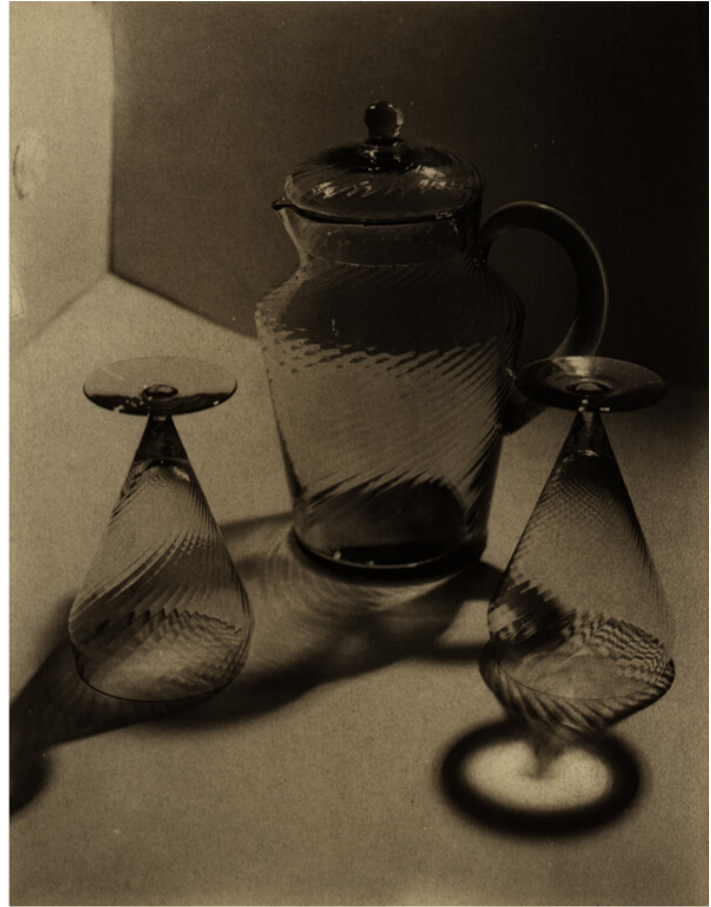
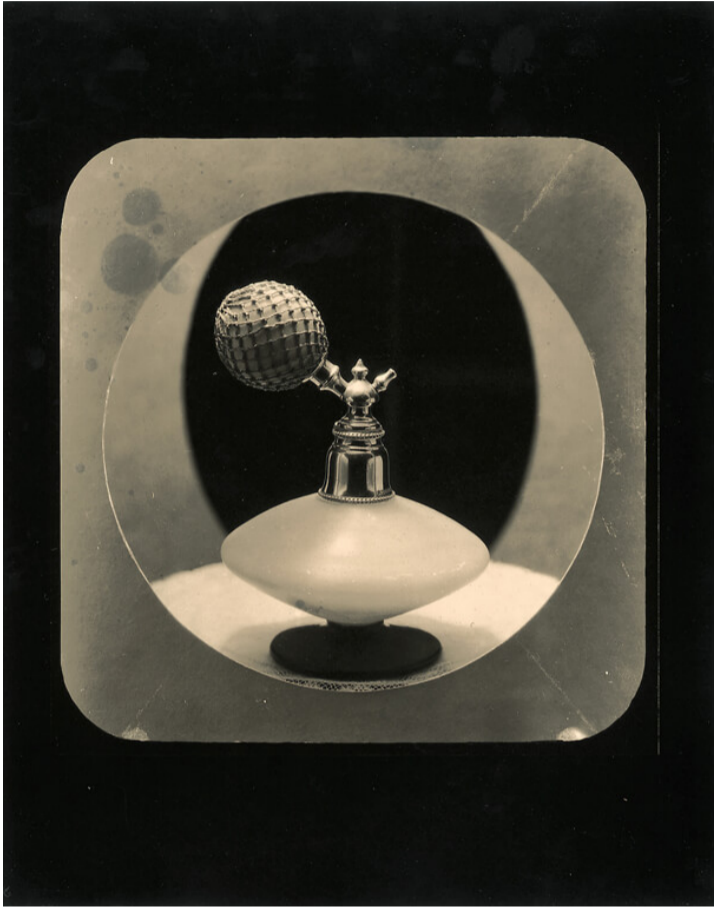


Margaret Watkins, *Untitled [Still Life with Mirrors and Windows, NYC]*, 1927, gelatin silver print, 15.1 x 20.2 cm, Museum of Modern Art, New York.

On the other hand, Watkins, along with Edward Steichen (1879-1973) and Watkins’s own students, Ralph Steiner (1899-1986) and Paul Outerbridge, Jr. (1896-1958), were the avant-garde of the new field of American advertising photography. It was at this time that advertising illustration shifted from drawing to photography.<sup>11</sup> The seductive image of, say, eggs on a porcelain sink in *Domestic Symphony*, 1919, offered a model of how a domestic object might be framed to arrest the viewer. As Watkins wrote in her introductory essay on “Advertising and Photography” for the 1926 Pictorial Photographers of America annual: “Even the plain business man, suspicious of ‘art stuff,’ perceives that his product is enhanced by fine tone-spacing and the beauty of contrasted textures.”<sup>12</sup>

With her domestic still-life images showcased in *Vanity Fair*, *Shadowland*, *Camera Pictures*, the *Art Center Bulletin*, and *Pictorial Photography in America*, Watkins’s reputation spread. Art directors and agencies contacted her, asking for examples of her images of glassware or pots and pans. One art director from J. Walter Thompson wrote, “Please take your time on this and bring us the kind of work of yours we all like so well.” He also noted they had tried Steichen but he hadn’t achieved an adequate closeup.<sup>13</sup> Later, Watkins wrote: “I’ve had subjects turned over to me by Art Directors who were not satisfied with fine technique

resulting only in a flawless map of the product. It took hours and infinite patience to create a rhythmic whole in line and tone values."<sup>14</sup>



LEFT: Margaret Watkins, *Untitled [Perfume atomizer advertisement]*, 1924–28, gelatin silver print, 16.3 x 15.7 cm. The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow. RIGHT: Margaret Watkins, *Glassware*, 1924–28, platinum print, 20.4 x 15.7 cm, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow.

Between 1924 and 1928, Watkins's advertising photographs appeared in a range of publications from the *Economist* to *Vogue*, featuring objects that ranged from mirrors to Modess sanitary pads.<sup>15</sup> Yet, it is clear that Watkins considered her commercial photographs art. She exhibited them at juried art shows internationally. Her glassware photographs for Macy's were seen not just in the ads in *Ladies Home Journal*, but also on the cover of the *Art Center Bulletin*. This in turn led to an agency in Dayton, Ohio, that represented a glassware manufacturer inviting Watkins to send examples of her still-life studies of glass—a prime example of the Art Center's usefulness in linking the art world and industry.<sup>16</sup> Heyworth Campbell, an art director with Condé Nast, and on the executive of both the Art Directors Club and the Art Center, praised her work and recommended her for advertising commissions.



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Margaret Watkins, *Still-Life with Mirror and Flowers*, c.1926, gelatin silver print, 20.3 x 15.2 cm, various collections.

While editing the 1926 volume of *Pictorial Photography in America*, Watkins included advertising photographs: "Though purely commercial," she wrote, "we feel that they have a distinction and beauty which enable them, to hold their place beside anything in the so-called pictorial section."<sup>17</sup> This moment of

collaboration between art photographers and commercial interests would shift by the end of the decade. White's original aim to link art to society with the making of beautiful objects, and Watkins's desire to make everyday life richer through beautiful advertising images, had passed.

### A NEW WOMAN'S PHOTOGRAPHIC LANGUAGE

Watkins's particular contribution to the history of photography—her creation of a modernist still-life way of representing domestic objects—arose in a specific cultural context. The late nineteenth century saw a shift in women's lives, offering new employment opportunities and independence. At the same time, with an increase in the immigrant population, new educational methods that encouraged problem solving and creativity aimed to develop independent individuals for a democracy.<sup>18</sup> Urban living and new technologies, such as cars and factory production, coupled with mass production of domestic objects, from nail polish to vacuum cleaners, led to a very new everyday life. Modernist art sought to embody the experience of the machine age and the metropolis using fragmented, disorienting forms. It was a time of inventing the *new*.

Watkins, with her modernist approach to the camera, was one of a rising number of women photographers around the world creating a New Woman and a new everyday.<sup>19</sup> The Kodak portable camera had been marketed for women ("Kodak Girls"), capitalizing on women's new independence. Photographic studios provided women with employment, with many women owning and managing their own studios. With developments in printing processes, there were professional opportunities in photojournalism and advertising.<sup>20</sup>



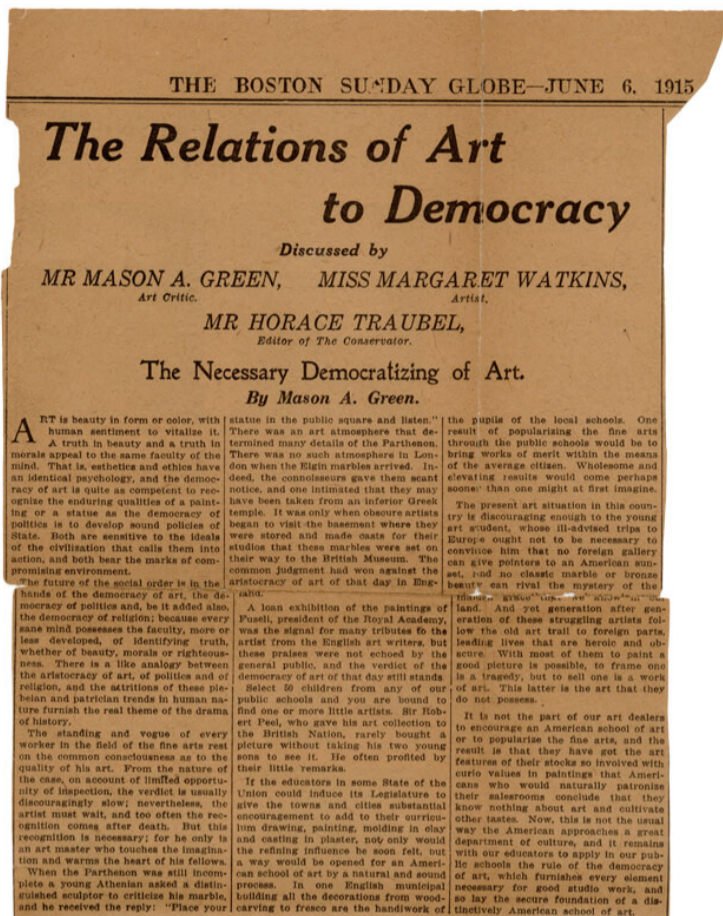
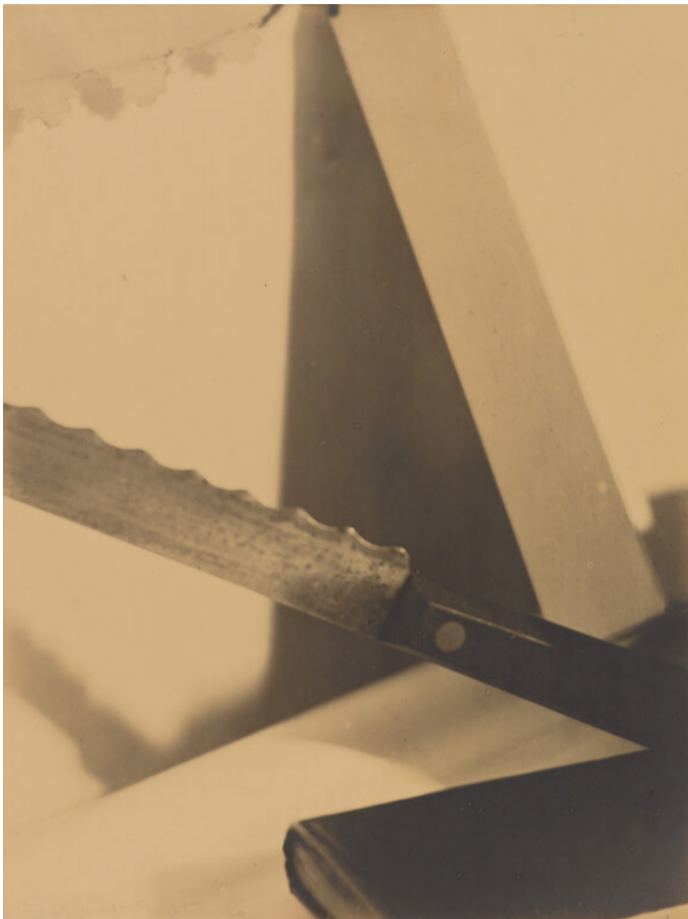
LEFT: Margaret Watkins, *Untitled [Clarence H. White Summer School woman with camera]*, c.1915, palladium print, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow. RIGHT: Eastman Kodak Company, "Take a Kodak with you," date unknown, poster advertisement, 69 x 50.8 cm, George Eastman Museum, Rochester.





Photograph of women with cameras at Lanier Camp, date unknown, photographer unknown, gelatin silver print, 9.8 x 14 cm, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow.

The Clarence H. White School of Photography in New York City was a significant training site for women photographers. Students were asked to complete projects that involved photographing angles or circles by moving out into the world around them to “see” things differently. Watkins walked home through the streets, experiencing the incoherent juxtapositions that the metropolis offers—the screech of the elevated railway, the slush on the ground, the happenstance of a church concert—to her Greenwich Village apartment and photographed the angles and curves of dirty dishes in her sink. Having moved away to escape being “domesticated to death”<sup>21</sup> in the bourgeois home of her childhood, she became an independent working woman and, ironically, returned to her kitchen to rethink and reimagine that space. Using modernist, Cubist strategies, Watkins brought “photography into the kitchen.”<sup>22</sup> With works like *The Bread Knife (Design - Angles)*, 1919, she was able to reinvent an urban at-homeness that accessed the power of the metropolis, framed objects and spaces in a new way, and offered a female modernism that speaks from within—and against—a gendered domestic world.<sup>23</sup>



LEFT: Margaret Watkins, *Design - Angles*, 1919, gaslight silver chloride print, 20.7 x 15.5 cm, various collections. RIGHT: Margaret Watkins, "The Relations of Art to Democracy," *Boston Sunday Globe*, 1915, The William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton.

Watkins herself published three significant articles on art and photography that emphasized the confluence of art and everyday life. In 1915, in the *Boston Sunday Globe*, she joined two prominent figures in the art world, Horace Traubel and Mason Green, to debate "The Relations of Art to Democracy." In Watkins's contribution, she argued: "Nothing is ever too commonplace or too useful to escape the sweet embellishing of art." And thinking of gender and class, she located artistic creativity, production, and appreciation in the lives of people like shopgirls or those living on the "top floor, without heat" who were capable of writing the "inspired essay."<sup>24</sup>

Eleven years later, at the height of her professional career, she was asked to speak about how her art enriched life. Besides admitting her love of the challenge of engaging with her portrait subjects and capturing their characters in her photographs, as well as the pleasure of receiving awards (and cheques) from distant exhibitions, Watkins essentially saw art and the everyday enhancing each other—both the creation of art and the viewing of art to train the eye to perceive beautiful forms. It is as if the everyday is reshaped into ideal forms: "the simplest things take on



LEFT: Margaret Watkins, *Portrait of Ezra Winter*, 1924, platinum print, 21 x 16.2 cm, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow. RIGHT: Margaret Watkins, *Untitled [Portrait of Nina B. Price]*, 1925, platinum print, 21.4 x 16.5 cm, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow.



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a new significance, you note the contrasts of light and shade, the subtleties of tone value, feel the interest of related forms and everywhere respond to the rhythm of line, singing as clear as a phrase of music."<sup>25</sup> So here is not simply the photograph as a document—a mechanical reproduction of an everyday object—but rather a heightened sense of the world, the music that is already there, even in an arrangement of dirty dishes.

In her 1926 essay "Advertising and Photography," again she connected art and the everyday: "Commonplace articles showed curves and angles which could be repeated with the varying pattern of a fugue."<sup>26</sup> Elsewhere, she called for photographs of "common little streets or low-brow vegetables."<sup>27</sup> And, counteracting a long tradition of portrait photography, she asked for "not pretty girls or character stuff or celebrities but portraits of 'plain citizens' good enough to have an impersonal appeal."<sup>28</sup> Watkins moved into the street in her later European photographs and captured either the surreal contradictions of urban spaces, or the at-times overwhelming sublimity of industrial structures. But in her work of the twenties, she offered the gendered space of the kitchen, its familiar objects and food, in a newly visioned vibrancy, through cropping and blocking of shades of light and dark. As a woman photographer, Watkins developed an original photographic language to represent the modern everyday.



LEFT: Margaret Watkins, *Untitled [Still-life, cabbage]*, 1923, platinum print, Amon Carter Museum of American Art, Fort Worth.

RIGHT: Margaret Watkins, *Untitled [Marion Rous]*, c.1923, gelatin silver print, 15.1 x 18.7 cm, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow.

## POSTHUMOUS LEGACY

Often the "business" of making art is left out of art history, but it is the very structures of education, networking, and circulation that determine whether an artist ends up in history at all. A charting of Watkins's professional relations illuminates how a woman artist was able to have a successful career in the 1920s in New York, and how the lack of networking and institutional support meant that, even though she won first prizes in her new home of Glasgow, she could not make a go of her profession in the U.K. in the 1930s. Watkins's work was lost to photographic history for almost fifty years. Yet today she is recognized as "a pioneering modernist photographer with a Renaissance flair"<sup>29</sup> and at the vanguard of advertising photography.



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Margaret Watkins, *The Negative*, 1919, palladium print, 16.5 x 21.5 cm, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow.

At the end of her life in Glasgow, she befriended her neighbours Claire and Joseph Mulholland. She gave Joe Mulholland a large box and made him promise not to open it until after her death in 1969. Her full archive of photographs, contact prints, and negatives were in that trunk. Joe has tirelessly promoted her work since then—in exhibitions and in articles. Light Gallery in New York gave her a solo show in 1986, from which institutions such as the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa and the Amon Carter Museum in Fort Worth, Texas, purchased works for their collections.

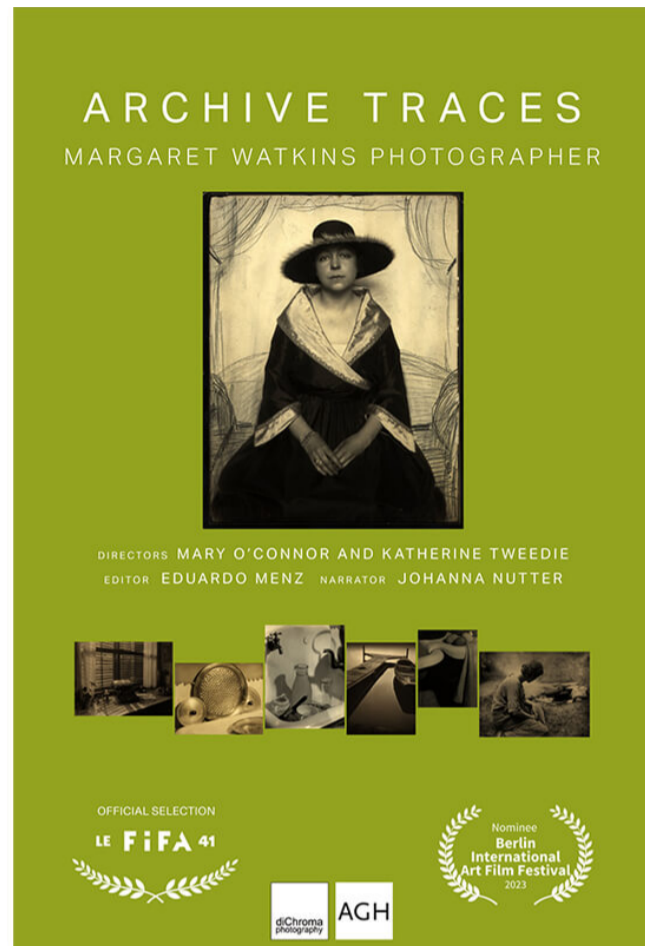
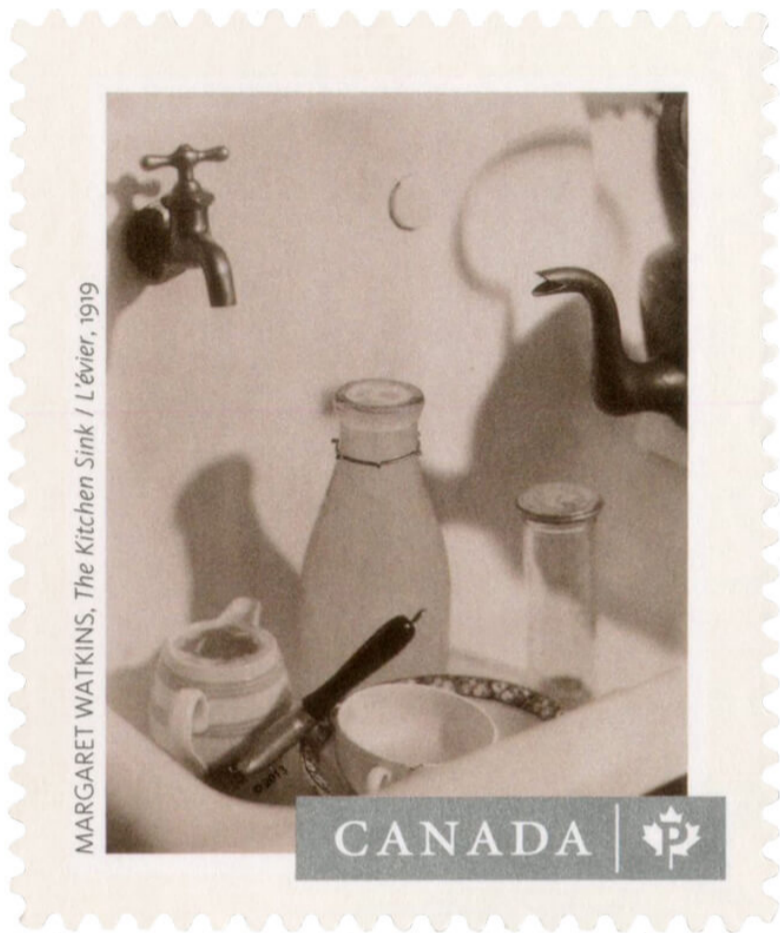
In 1996, the work of Clarence H. White and his students was showcased in a significant exhibition at the Detroit Institute of Arts and in the accompanying catalogue, *Pictorialism into Modernism*. Watkins's work, including her textile designs, was highlighted, and noted in reviews as an important discovery for photographic history. That same year, the Robert Mann Gallery, New York City, mounted a solo show, and at the New York Public Library, Naomi Rosenblum's exhibition, based on her 1994 book *A History of Women Photographers*, included

Watkins. Since then, there has been a detailed monograph on her life and work by Mary O'Connor and Katherine Tweedie (2007), and two important retrospective exhibitions and catalogues: *Margaret Watkins: Domestic Symphonies*, 2012, from the National Gallery of Canada and *Margaret Watkins: Black Light*, 2021, from diChroma Photography in Madrid. The latter exhibition and the laudatory press it received have now given Watkins European fame. The recent significant exhibitions (and catalogues) *Clarence H. White and His World*, 2017-18, and *The New Woman Behind the Camera*, 2021-22, have included Watkins, highlighting her importance as an advertising photographer, a teacher, and an agent in the move from Pictorialist to modernist photography. Watkins has fully regained recognition in photographic history.

In Canada, Watkins's importance was marked in 2013 with a postage stamp of her work *The Kitchen Sink*, 1919. Considered one of seven "ground-breaking Canadian photographers over the past 150 years," she was noted for her still-life and advertising work.<sup>30</sup> Watkins's posthumous solo shows have been shown in multiple cities in Canada, and she has been included in major group shows, such as *Uninvited: Canadian Women Artists in the Modern Moment*, 2021-22. The short documentary *Archive Traces: Margaret Watkins Photographer* (2022), made for the Art Gallery of Hamilton, has shown at the Festival International du film sur l'art in Montreal (FIFA), as well as other international festivals, and was streamed on FIFA's website in 2023.



Installation view of *Margaret Watkins: Black Light*, curated by Anne Morin, produced by diChroma Photography, Kutxa Kultur Artegunea, San Sebastian, Spain, 2021.



LEFT: Postage stamp from the Great Canadian Photographers series, featuring Margaret Watkins, *The Kitchen Sink*, 1919, Canada Post, © 2013. RIGHT: Poster for the film *Archive Traces: Margaret Watkins Photographer*, poster design by Sarah Dinnick, film directed by Mary O'Connor and Katherine Tweedie, 2022, 14 min, funded by the Art Gallery of Hamilton and diChroma Photography, Madrid.

Margaret Watkins continues to be remembered for her contributions to the genres of domestic still-life and advertising photography, and her discoveries of new ways of seeing everyday life—both its objects and, in her European photographs, its street scenes. She also pushed the constraining social boundaries of class and gender, both in her life and in her art. Her photographs are recognized as key works in the history of modernist photography and early advertising photography, and still speak to cultural and social concerns today.



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Margaret Watkins, *At the Baby Clinic [Greenwich Settlement House]*, 1918, platinum print, 15.2 x 19.7 cm, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow. It was while living in New York that Watkins's rise as a photographic artist began to take place. One of her earliest commissions was to photograph the Greenwich Settlement House, as seen here.



# STYLE & TECHNIQUE

Margaret Watkins is known for her modernist still-life photographs of domestic objects. Her technique was based on a graphic sense of composition, often playing with repeating angles or curves. In the Pictorialist tradition, she preferred low contrast and a long tonal range, especially using platinum or palladium prints. Her modernist, even Cubist, sense of design created a new way of seeing our everyday world as well as a new photographic language for advertising. Under European influence, Watkins later found geometric patterns in industrial subjects and ironic juxtapositions in street scenes.



## PICTORIALISM

Although Margaret Watkins was above all a modernist photographer, the historical context for her earliest work is Pictorialism: the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century photographic practice that aimed to imitate and emulate fine art using painterly techniques with light rather than oil. Watkins began work as an assistant photographer in Boston in 1913; nevertheless, her introduction to photography *as art* came in July 1914 as a student at the Clarence H. White Seguinland School of Photography in Maine. Her first commission came the next month, when she photographed an outdoor play at the Arts and Crafts community of the Lanier Camp where she had worked at odd jobs since 1911.

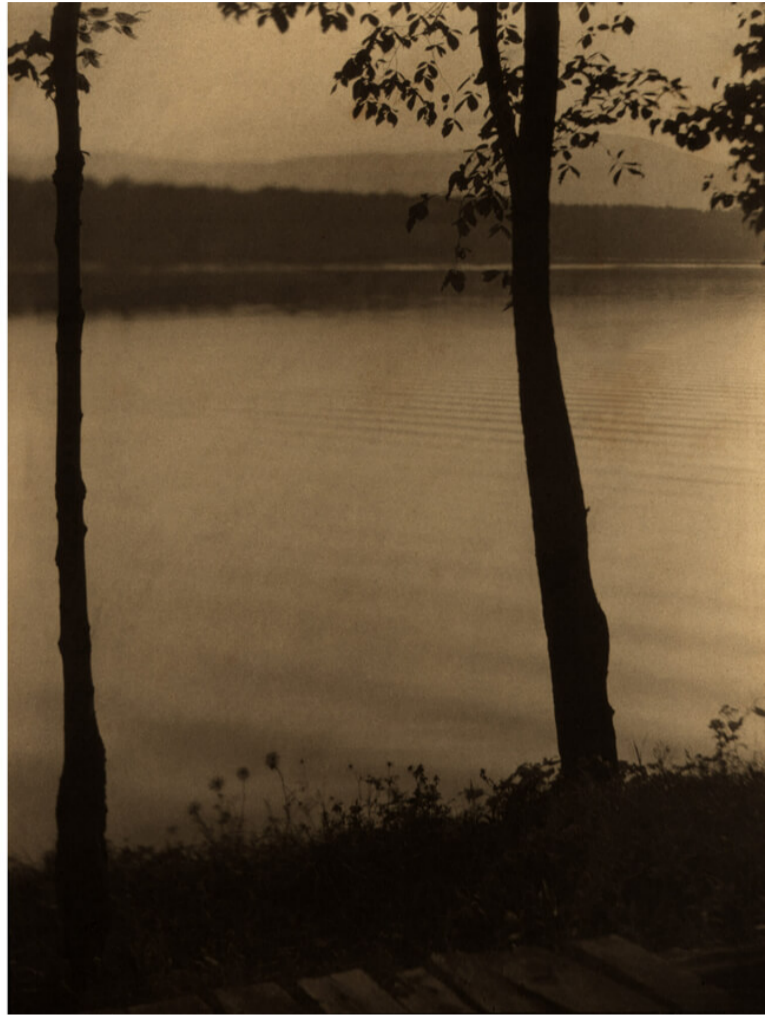
The Lanier Camp promised an antidote to modern industrial and urban life with a simpler, spiritual life, and a return to nature and art. The camp's series of Bible plays performed in the surrounding pine trees, as depicted in *Hannah*, 1916, called out for "pictorial" representation. Watkins was already involved as the costume designer for these productions, but once she became camp photographer, her photographs completed for a camp publication became prime examples of Pictorialist techniques—in this case, the Biblical tableau, soft-focus lens, natural setting, and play of light.



LEFT: Margaret Watkins, *Hannah*, 1916, gelatin silver print, 19.9 x 14.7 cm, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow. RIGHT: Margaret Watkins, *Untitled [Poppies]*, c.1920, gelatin silver print, 21.3 x 15 cm, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow.

Clarence H. White (1871–1925), with Alfred Stieglitz (1864–1946), had been a co-founder of the 1902 Photo-Secession, a group turning away from the usual amateur camera clubs, insisting on photography as expressive art rather than a technical way of documenting an object or scene. White was known for his tender, soft-focus depictions of domestic scenes and subjects in nature. And some of Watkins's early work used a soft-focus lens that captured an ethereal quality in domestic portraits, such as *Josephine in Sunlight*, c.1916, or in natural scenes, such as her study of poppies in *Untitled [Poppies]*, c.1920.

Nevertheless, as art historian Anne McCauley has pointed out, White's own aesthetic experiments included some modernist techniques, such as the use of empty space, as in his *Drops of Rain*, 1902.<sup>1</sup> He also passed on to his students the principles of composition developed by Arthur Wesley Dow (1857–1922), his colleague at Columbia College. Dow's influential book *Composition* (1899) was based on his study of Japanese painting and prints. He argued for the quality of *notan* in a picture, the patterning of light and dark masses and the finding of vertical and horizontal lines in nature. Watkins's *Evening*, 1923, has that Japanese quality, with its vertical trees and horizontal bands of variously toned land, water, and sky.



LEFT: Utagawa Hiroshige, *Oumayagashi*, from the series *One Hundred Famous Views of Edo* (*Meisho Edo hyakkei*), 1857, colour woodblock print, ôban, 35.5 x 23.4 cm, various collections. RIGHT: Margaret Watkins, *Evening*, 1923, palladium print, 16.3 x 21.2 cm, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow.

Pictorialists went as far as imitating specific paintings in their composition, representations, and tonality. Both White and Alice Boughton (1866–1943), for whom Watkins worked from 1915 to 1919, used costumes in their genre photographs. Watkins's photograph *Dutch Girl Reading*, 1918, imitates seventeenth-century paintings with the girl in her devotions, dressed in period clothes, and chiaroscuro light playing on her face. Watkins's 1923 portrait of her friend Verna Skelton is comparable to the portrait by Julia Margaret Cameron (1815–1879) of modernist author Virginia Woolf's mother, Julia Stevens, with its isolated face in a dark background.



LEFT: Joseph Wright of Derby, *Untitled (Anna Romana Wright reading by candlelight)*, c.1795, oil on canvas, 75.2 x 62.2 cm, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. RIGHT: Margaret Watkins, *Dutch Girl Reading [Olivette Falls]*, 1918, palladium print, 20.8 x 16 cm, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow.

### CAMERAS AND PRINTING PROCESSES

Kodak's invention and marketing of the small hand-held camera in the early twentieth century caused the burgeoning of photography as a leisure pastime, particularly for women. However, art photographers preferred larger-view cameras where you could see the image that would be captured. At the beginning of her career, Watkins used a borrowed 4-by-5-inch view camera, but in 1916 she bought herself a 6½-by-8½-inch view camera, comparable to the one her teacher Clarence H. White used.<sup>2</sup>

By the time she moved to Europe in 1928, Watkins had acquired two cameras: her Graflex and "a new little German hand camera."<sup>3</sup> Expressing some self-deprecation at not keeping up her photography, she wrote to friends that there was "dust on the Voightlander [sic] and rust on the Graflex."<sup>4</sup> She also notes the serial number of her "Bausch and Lomb 'Tessar'" lens in her address book.<sup>5</sup> In a 1933 silent film, taken by Peter Le Neve Foster during the Royal Photographic Society trip to Moscow, we see Watkins with a large, top-view, hand-held camera. Although the make of the device is not at all clear, her 1931 Paris photograph of a motorcar's lamp, *Untitled [Self-Portrait]*, throws back at us a self-portrait reflecting herself with camera.



LEFT: Margaret Watkins, *Untitled [Self-Portrait]*, 1931, gelatin silver print, 7.8 x 10.3 cm, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow. RIGHT: Graflex Series B view camera, 1907-27, wood, glass, paper, leather, and metal case: 24.1 x 19.8 x 21.2 cm; camera: 19 x 17.5 x 19.5 cm, Queensland Museum, South Brisbane.



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In 1925, Watkins reminded her fellow Zonta Club members, in a talk entitled “How My Art Enriches Life,” about the labour (and danger) of practising photography: “There is the mean, messy, technical side calling for patience, perseverance, and precision. You roll up your sleeves, play about in poison—keeping the cyanide out of the soup—and work in icy water till the hand hangs dead on the wrist.”<sup>6</sup> Vintage photographs are valued for the quality of their hand-made printing. And there were many chemical processes for developing and printing with light-sensitive precious metals. Through her work as an assistant in portrait studios in Boston and New York, and through her own education at the Clarence H. White school, Watkins mastered, and then taught, most of the processes with which Pictorial photographers were experimenting.<sup>7</sup>



Margaret Watkins, *Woolies*, c.1920, palladium print, 16 x 19.3 cm, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow.

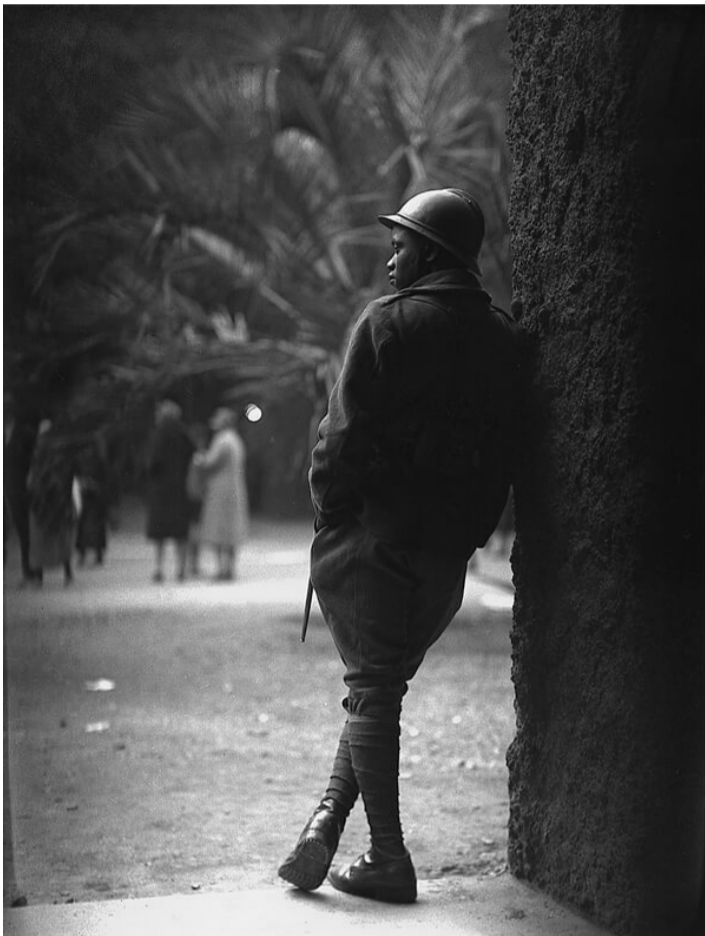
Her extant oeuvre includes prints using various processes such as bromide, chloride, platinum, and gelatin silver. However, like Clarence H. White, she preferred the processes that allowed for a broad scale of greys rather than strong contrasts.<sup>8</sup> *Sunset, Canaan*, which she exhibited in her solo show at the Art Center in 1923, is a large-scale Kallitype that illustrates how the process’s light-sensitive ferric oxalate provided more definition for shadows. But Watkins is known for the quality of her prints made with the rare precious metals platinum and palladium. In her 1923 exhibition, 38 of the 54 photographs were



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permanent palladium prints, including *The Negative*, 1919, and *Woolies*, c.1920. The vintage process of coating platinum onto the photographic paper was taught at the White school. Needed for industry and armaments, platinum was no longer available for an affordable price by the end of the First World War. There was a shift to palladium, which serendipitously produced a warmer tone. Eventually, even palladium became too expensive. Once Watkins moved to Glasgow in 1928, she developed exclusively in gelatin silver, but still aimed for a range of tones, as in *International Colonial Exhibition, Paris, 1931*, and *Reconstruction, Dining Hall & Workers' Flats Opposite Kremlin, 1933*.



LEFT: Margaret Watkins, *International Colonial Exhibition, Paris, 1931*, gelatin silver print, 10.3 x 7.8 cm, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow. RIGHT: Margaret Watkins, *Reconstruction, Dining Hall & Workers' Flats Opposite Kremlin, 1933*, gelatin silver print, 21 x 15.8 cm, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow.

## MODERNIST COMPOSITION

During that first summer at the Clarence H. White school, Watkins also worked with the modernist painter Max Weber (1881-1961), whose teaching of composition and art history was based in Cubist principles. He argued the photograph was a two-dimensional art and must be constructed on the basis of lines, curves, and angles. Weber had lived in France, where he had been influenced by the compositions of Paul Cézanne (1839-1906), particularly Cézanne's understanding that all forms derive from three geometric shapes: the cylinder, sphere, and cone.



LEFT: Arthur D. Chapman, *Max Weber*, 1914, platinum print, 20.3 x 15.4 cm, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. RIGHT: Paul Cézanne, *The Quarry at Bibémus (La carrière de Bibémus)*, 1895, oil on canvas, 65 x 81 cm, Museum Folkwang, Essen.

The 1914 photograph that Watkins titled *Opus 1* is a local harbour scene of fishing boats, but the absence of horizon, the triangular arrangement of the boats and dock, and the empty space at the centre of the photograph turn the scene into a study in design. And this became Watkins's forte as an artist. By 1921, she was featured in *Vanity Fair* for "Showing Modernist, or Cubist, Patterns in Composition." Compared to Constantin Brâncuși (1876–1957) and Pablo Picasso (1881–1973), her photographs were described as "successful attempts to impose a modernist pattern on prints made with the camera."<sup>9</sup>

*Design - Curves*, 1919, is exemplary of how Watkins based her aesthetic on formal interests: a photograph of objects reaching toward abstraction. To the formalist, it is an image of shapes and shadows, lines and curves, all asymmetrically balanced. At the centre of the photograph is a dark, curved, triangular shadow, which slides over the rounded porcelain draining board. The curves are repeated in the round board, echoed in its shadow, and the plate's edge and black border. The diagonal lines of draining rack are echoed in the line of the wallpaper.



LEFT: Constantin Brâncuși, *Bird in Space*, 1928, bronze, 137.2 x 21.6 x 16.5 cm, Museum of Modern Art, New York. RIGHT: Margaret Watkins, *Design - Curves*, 1919, gelatin silver print, 20.7 x 16 cm, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow.

Even Watkins's later portraits are constructed on geometric terms. Her *Portrait of Nina B. Price - Abstraction*, 1925, shown at the Pictorial Photographers of America International Salon at the Art Center in New York City in May 1925, was described as "a purely geometric design... reminiscent of the idealless prose of Gertrude Stein of 'Tender



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Buttons' fame."<sup>10</sup> (Such as this: "A feather is trimmed, it is trimmed by the light and the bug and the post, it is trimmed by little leaning and by all sorts of mounted reserves and loud volumes. It is surely cohesive."<sup>11</sup>) Watkins's photograph sets the objects on publicist Nina Price's desk against the backdrop of Art Deco wallpaper to evoke the characteristic modernity of her sitter. Lampshade and hat, triangles and curves, stand in for face and torso of this avant-garde figure.



Margaret Watkins, *Portrait of Nina B. Price - [Abstraction]*, 1925, platinum/palladium print, 21.5 x 16.3 cm, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow.

### KITCHEN STILL-LIFE PHOTOGRAPHY

Taking her Cubist strategies into the home, Watkins is credited with inventing a new genre of photographs: kitchen still-life images. Her experiments were taken to the spaces of her everyday life, placing kettle, pot lids, and milk bottles in her kitchen sink and arranging them into patterns of repeating circles or angles. These were the photographs that would make her name.

Watkins's compositions are based on Cubist principles, employing disorienting perspectives and fragmented objects. Her 1919 *Domestic Symphony* offers a glimpse into the dark space underneath a sink, revealing only segments of a white enamel sink and its adjoining draining section and the cropped rounded bases of a kettle and pan on top. The result is a sensation of waving curves. Watkins's ability to find significant form in repeated patterns of line and tone transformed the domestic world into sensual pleasure.



LEFT: Margaret Watkins, *Domestic Symphony*, 1919, palladium print, 21.2 x 16.4 cm, various collections. RIGHT: Margaret Watkins, *Still Life - Shower Hose*, 1919, gelatin silver print, 21.2 x 15.9 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

*Still Life - Shower Hose*, 1919, again focuses on daily menial tasks of self-care, but this time through the arranging of repeating forms. Light and dark are balanced, moving from the light on the hose and the white towel to the darker wainscoting that recedes to an almost black corner. The positioning of the hose, with its multiple circles balanced against the strong, but not rigid, verticals of pipe, towel, and pendant hose, gives this object a new presence, even as we forget the thing itself. The great achievement of Watkins's domestic still-life photography is the simultaneity of the mundane object and significant form.

What is extraordinary about *The Kitchen Sink*, 1919, is this combination of fine form and the messiness of everyday life. The framing triangle created by three



dark metal objects is echoed in the bottom edge of the sink photographed from a unique angle. In turn, this off-centred sink with its rounded edge begins a proliferation of seemingly random and incoherent curves of the sink and the cracked, mismatched, and dirty dishes. Watkins's *Design - Curves*, 1919, perhaps cleans up the mess into a more abstract image, but she had broken the taboo of photographing in the kitchen, of photographing women's menial labour, and of making it beautiful. Her play with these objects was varied, startling, new. We talk of innovations in photography as finding a new vantage point—whether it was from the height of skyscrapers, or from an airplane, or underwater. Watkins had found a new perspective—a new space for photography—in her kitchen.



Margaret Watkins, *Still Life - Bath Tub*, 1919, platinum print, 16.5 x 20.5 cm, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow.

### THE ADVERTISING IMAGE

Watkins was instrumental in developing a photographic language for advertising. Commercial photographers aimed to make a clear reproduction of the object for sale, what Watkins referred to as a "map." Instead, Watkins chose modernist techniques of cropping and the formation of abstract design through repeated patterns. The beauty of form would sell the product.

In her 1926 published essay on "Advertising and Photography," Watkins called attention to developments in art that prepared the way for the new advertising image, stating: "beauty of subject was superseded by beauty of design, and the relation of ideas gave place to the relation of forms. . . . And the purchaser, however indifferent to circular rhythms, unconsciously responds to the clarity of statement achieved by stressing the essential form of the article."<sup>12</sup>



LEFT: Magazine advertisement for Edison Mazda Lamps (light bulbs), 1920s. RIGHT: Margaret Watkins, *Untitled [Lamp, study for Macy's advertisement]*, 1925-27, gelatin silver print, 24.6 x 19.6 cm, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow.





# MARGARET WATKINS

Life & Work by Mary O'Connor

"Beauty of design" and "the relation of forms," more than the product itself, makes the picture. So, when Watkins prepared her first commission for Cutex nail treatment in February 1924, many of her photographs omitted the bottle of polish. Extending her kitchen still-life techniques of cropping, of building patterns out of repeating circles, curves, or angles, and of blocking gradations of light and dark, she created geometric designs.

In *The Tea Cup*, 1924, the delicate ringed (and painted) fingers hold cup and saucer, which form the centre vertical axis of the photograph and are balanced by the diagonal of hands emanating from puffed, rounded, lacy sleeves. In fact we again have a design of curves and angles, with the hands and neck forming one triangle, sleeves and dress neckline another (not to mention the edges of the doily or the embroidered designs in the sleeves and neckline).



Margaret Watkins, *The Tea Cup* [advertisement for Cutex], 1924, palladium print, 10.3 x 15.3 cm, various collections.

The truncated body or body part became a standard trope for modernist advertising—the hidden evoked through the detail. The fragment becomes a trace, a hint, a tease. In another Cutex image, Watkins pared her image down to a V-shaped curved line peaking at the centre of her photograph, formed by fingers holding a set of pearls that swing down, presumably from the woman's neck. The distinct complementary textures of hand, pearls, and furry cuff add to the beauty of the image. Yet beyond pure form, the cuff, pearls, and delicate hand are sensuous. In this case, the trace is not just of a sexual woman's body but also of money. The ring, the pearls, and the cuff clothe the figure in wealth and worth.



LEFT: Margaret Watkins, *Untitled [Study for advertisement for Cutex nail polish]*, 1924, palladium print, 21.5 x 16.5 cm, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow. RIGHT: Cutex advertisement "The Well Groomed Woman's Manicure," in *Ladies' Home Journal* 42, issue 2, February 1925, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow.

February, 1925

The Ladies' HOME JOURNAL

## The Well Groomed Woman's Manicure

It includes shaping and smoothing the nail tips, the proper care of the cuticle and . . . for the finish . . . an exquisite lustre

THE perfectly groomed woman uses her hands naturally and dextrously with a grace that is unconscious. The correct care she gives them enables her to move with the assurance of one who does not have to apologize for their appearance. Have you been envying her? You don't have to!

You can have exquisitely groomed, lovely nails—no matter how crowded your day, no matter how exacting your household, social or business duties may be.

Learn the famous Cutex manicure that the most fastidious women of elegance use to keep their finger tips charming.

It is so quick and simple, so scientifically worked out that five minutes will transform the most neglected looking cuticle. Used regularly once or twice a week the finger tips will proudly bear comparison with the most perfectly groomed hands you know.

Cutex actually removes the dead skin which clings around the base of the nails in ugly shreds, spoiling the appearance of the finger tips. It is just as necessary to get rid of this dead skin as it is to get rid of the nail itself as it grows out.

women know that such care of the cuticle is the basis of correctly groomed nails.

First wash the hands. Then shape the nail tips becomingly with a file, and smooth them with a Cutex emery board. Now moisten a Cutex orange stick in Cutex. Wrap a bit of the sterile cotton about the end and dip it again in the bottle. Work this gently around each nail base and under the cuticle edges. Instantly the cuticle is loosened and softened. Rinse the

finger tips in water and wipe them. All the little edges of superfluous skin are wiped away and the rim of cuticle shrinks back, curved, thin and smooth as it ought to be.

To make the nails spotless and give transparent tips, pass the orange stick still moist beneath each nail and rub over any stains. Cutex bleaches and cleans them immediately.

**Then instantly a lovely lustre**

The last step of the manicure is giving the nails a polished surface, pink and gleaming. For this Cutex has four wonderful finishes—Liquid, Powder, Cake and Paste Polishes.

Cutex Liquid Polish keeps the nails polished as long as the manicure lasts. It is tinted just the rose color the smartest Parisiennes are using for their nails. The rosy liquid is so thin it spreads smooth and evenly without leaving brush marks or ridges. It dries almost instantly, giving the nails a high smooth brilliance that lasts a whole week.

This simple manicure is the choice of well groomed women everywhere. It gives the nails and cuticle the correct care they need and makes the finger tips look beautifully fresh and graceful.

Cutex Cuticle Remover and Liquid Polish are 15c each, as well as all the other splendid Cutex preparations. Or you can get complete manicure sets with a choice of polishes and emery boards and nail file for 50c, 75c, 85c and \$1.00. At drug and department stores in the United States and Canada and chemist shops in England.

**6 complete manicures only 10c**

THIS convenient Introductory Set for your dressing table contains enough Cutex for 6 complete manicures. The famous Cutex Remover for smooth, even cuticle, Liquid and Powder Polishes for the finishing touch, Cutex Cream, an orange stick, and emery board to smooth the nail tips. Send this coupon with 50c for the Introductory Set and the booklet "How to have lovely nails," today. Address: Northam Warren, 114 W. 17th St., New York City. Or if you live in Canada, 300 Mountain St., Montreal, Canada.

Mail this coupon with 10c today

NORTHAM WARREN, Dept. J-3  
114 West 17th St., New York

I enclose 50c in stamps or coin for new Introductory Set that includes a trial size of the Cutex Liquid Polish.

Name .....

Street (or P. O. Box) .....

City .....

State .....

Watkins's advertising photographs play with femininity as much as formal design. When necessary, they rewrite what is seen as all-too-materially feminine in the new language of stark, abstracted modernity, as, for example, in her brilliant image for Johnson & Johnson's Modess sanitary pads. By constructing her modernist set with black and white paper backgrounds and judicious lighting to accentuate the geometry, Watkins displayed the rectangular Modess boxes in a contemporary form for the contemporary woman. Modess disposable pads were launched by Johnson & Johnson in 1926, making Watkins's image one of the first in a long line of advertising campaigns.

Watkins's marginalia in her copy of the September 1928 issue of *Commercial Art* are instructive of how she thought of the art of advertising photography. She railed against one image: "The huddle of forms & stupid shadows confuse the eye, can't find what you are selling and the empty space *gapes*." In another comment Watkins noted: "Be sure that the little that is left tells the whole story swiftly & clearly & emphatically.... You must feel the subject photographically and 'place it' on the ground glass yourself. Some good technicians merely achieve a perfect *map* of the object."<sup>13</sup> In these few notes we have a clear picture of the artist's eye and her principles: the image should be clear, not with the exact replica of the object, but with its placing in a significant form. The worst fault would be "utter confusion" of shapes, lines, and tones.

Watkins's photograph for Phenix Cheese illustrates her perfect control of shapes and light. Her by-now recognizable kitchen sink provides the ground for the composition, with its shadow at the two bottom corners offering points of a triangle that lead the eye upwards to connect with the darker background at the top of the image. A silver knife, strategically raised on a round cutting board, leads our eye into the image—a technique borrowed from seventeenth-century still-life paintings. Our eye follows the knife toward a round metal tray of equal value, but filled with a myriad of circular indentations, many collecting crescents of light. (This is the Roycroft copper plate that can also be seen in Watkins's *Still Life - Circles*, 1919.) The long block of cheese forms a descending diagonal almost parallel to the knife. And at the centre of the photograph is a balanced pairing of three squares of cheese (two stacked slices and the end of the block) and three rounded shapes of bread (two stacked slices and the front of the loaf). The edge of the block of cheese leads into the line of the edge of the bread. The only break in a perfect balance of circles and squares is the opened jagged foil wrap of the cheese—and the purposeful placement of a few crumbs left on the knife. This photograph is a perfect still life, its busy-ness (and labour) all contained in a seemingly simple, balanced whole.



LEFT: Margaret Watkins, *Untitled [Johnson & Johnson Modess sanitary napkin ad]*, 1924–28, gelatin silver print, 12.2 x 9.4 cm, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow.

RIGHT: Margaret Watkins, *Untitled [Lamp and Mirror]*, 1924, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow.



Margaret Watkins, *Phenix Cheese*, 1923, gelatin silver print, 19 x 14.6 cm, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow.

## LATE INDUSTRIAL PHOTOGRAPHS

Margaret Watkins's post-1928 photographs of the city, industry, and workers in Glasgow, Paris, London, Leningrad, and Moscow were influenced by her encounter with the European New Vision. She left her New York studio work of

portraits and still-life studies for advertising and took her camera outdoors. In one of the first photographs, on the boat from Dover to Ostend, she looks down into the hold of the ship. The tell-tale signs of Watkins's work are evident in the multiple rectangles at play, but the defamiliarization and disorientation is even stronger than, for instance, in *The Bread Knife (Design - Angles)*, 1919. Here, one is not sure at all of the subject of the photograph. In this way, her modernist indoor methods of photographing are transferred to an industrial site.

In 1928, she visited Cologne and Pressa, an international exposition of publishing and printing, including reproduction of photography in photojournalism, advertising, or propaganda. There, she encountered the U.S.S.R. pavilion designed by El Lissitzky (1890-1941), full of an extraordinary combination of Constructivist and agitprop (political popular media aimed at conveying communist beliefs) design and photographic montage, all of which she found to be "palpitating chaos" and "restless chaotic energy."<sup>14</sup> She became familiar with New Vision photographers such as Hungarian László Moholy-Nagy (1895-1946), German Aenne Biermann (1898-1933), and Soviets Alexander Rodchenko (1891-1956) and Boris Ignatovich (1899-1976). Her longstanding interest in graphic design and advertising images would have brought her to Pressa, but her later photography was marked by an increase in its radical perspectives, abandoning an old realism that was no longer valid for the modern, accelerated, and disorienting urban experience. She wrote: "[I'm] only beginning to see fine opportunity for [the] industrial genre."<sup>15</sup> She went on to create a startling range of urban photographs, from surreal Paris storefronts reminiscent of the urban photographs of Eugène Atget (1857-1927) to the criss-cross of steel girders on a Glasgow construction site.



Margaret Watkins, *Untitled [Hold of ship]*, 1928, gelatin silver print, 8.7 x 6.1 cm, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow.

Compare her *Untitled [Construction, Glasgow]*, 1928-38—a single man standing in the midst of a series of diagonal lines formed by the girders of a building site—with Ignatovich's *With a Board*, 1929. Or the disorienting perspective of her

1933 detail of a Moscow apartment building with Rodchenko's *Balconies*, 1926. And what she did with this image once she got back to Glasgow was indeed original—a new possibility for photomontage, in this case not superimposing one image on top of another, but multiplying and juxtaposing the image to make kaleidoscopic, symmetrical geometric design.

In Paris, London, and Glasgow, her street scenes held the irony and surrealist juxtapositions for which Atget was known. Her *Godiva and the Gossips*, 1931, picked up the reflections of onlookers in the window display of mannequins and lingerie. In her photo of the *So This Is Paris*, 1931, advertisement juxtaposed with the man who turns back, Watkins connected the two with rays of light and patterns of light and dark. She had found a language of irony through design, patterning, and juxtaposition.

Watkins's photographic style thus began with a late nineteenth-century technique of soft-focus Pictorialism, but with hints of the modernist form that would be the strengths of her New York still-life and advertising photographs of the 1920s. In her later photographs of the 1930s, she transferred her Cubist techniques of cropping and surprising perspectives to the cityscapes of Europe.



LEFT: Margaret Watkins, *Untitled [Construction, Glasgow]*, 1928–38, gelatin silver print, 16.8 x 12.2 cm, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow. RIGHT: Boris Ignatovich, *With a Board*, 1929, gelatin silver print, 24.5 x 16.5 cm, various collections.



LEFT: Margaret Watkins, *Godiva and the Gossips*, 1931, gelatin silver print, 11.8 x 14 cm, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow. RIGHT: Margaret Watkins, *So This Is Paris*, 1931, gelatin silver print, 14.7 x 10.8 cm, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow.



# WHERE TO SEE

**Most of Watkins's works are in the care of Joseph Mulholland and The Hidden Lane Gallery in Glasgow. In this book, the only Canadian public collection represented is the National Gallery of Canada, where the following works are held (though they may not always be on view).**





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## NATIONAL GALLERY OF CANADA

380 Sussex Drive  
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada  
613-990-1985  
gallery.ca



***Domestic Symphony,***  
**1919**  
Palladium print  
21.2 x 16.4 cm



***Pan Lids [Still Life -***  
***Circles], 1919***  
Gelatin silver print  
16.2 x 20.1 cm



***Still-Life - Shower Hose,***  
**1919**  
Gelatin silver print  
21.2 x 15.9 cm



***The Kitchen Sink, 1919***  
Palladium print  
21.3 x 16.4 cm



***Academic Nude - Tower***  
***of Ivory, June 1924***  
Palladium print  
21.2 x 16 cm



***Still-Life with Mirror and***  
***Flowers, c.1926***  
Gelatin silver print with  
graphite  
24.7 x 19.3 cm; image:  
20.3 x 15.2 cm



## NOTES

### BIOGRAPHY

1. Watkins to Miss Street, June 15, 1923, Box 3, f.16, Margaret Watkins Fonds, McMaster University [hereafter MWF].
2. Watkins, notes, n.d., Box 4, f.96, MWF.
3. Mary O'Connor and Katherine Tweedie, *Seduced by Modernity: The Photography of Margaret Watkins* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007): 267n7. Coincidentally, Jessie Tarbox Beals (1870-1942), a successful Canadian-born photojournalist, had also been born in that house. The Beals family lost it when they fell on hard times, as the Watkinses would do in 1900.
4. Some of Watkins's art books and sheet music of the time remained in her possession in Glasgow.
5. Margaret Eliza Anderson to Frederick Anderson, April 14, 1893, Box 2, f.12, MWF. Margaret Eliza showed at the Canadian Exhibition while she was staying with the Watkinses (Margaret Eliza Anderson to her sisters, August 2, 1894, Box 2, f.12, MWF).
6. *Hamilton Spectator*, March 20, 1899. The version shown in Watkins's store was probably the Eden Musée's *Passion Play of Ober-Ammergau*, produced by Richard Hollaman and Frank Russell, with stage direction by Henry C. Vincent and camerawork by William Paley (Charles Musser, "Passions and the Passion Play: Theatre, Film, and Religion in America, 1880-1900." *Film History* 5 [1993]: 440).
7. Watkins, "Advertising and Photography," *Pictorial Photography in America* 4 (1926): n.p.
8. These letters are now housed at McMaster University or the Glasgow City Archives.
9. Meta Gladys [Margaret] Watkins to her Anderson aunts and uncle [John Thomas], June 14, 1895, from the Mansion House, Adirondack Mountains, Box 2, f.17, MWF.
10. Frederick Watkins to Louisa Anderson, November 5, 1897, from Battle Creek, Michigan, Glasgow City Archives. Anderson Family letters.
11. The store was bought by G.W. Robinson and became a successful Hamilton department store for ninety years.
12. Typescript, "Oh Damn You, Versatility," Box 4, f.60, MWF.
13. Marginalia in Watkins's copy of Louis Nohl's *Life of Beethoven* (1880), a book she had had since 1908. The annotation is dated June 1962.



14. Watkins, commonplace book and diary, 1907-8, 131, Box 5, f.2, MWF.
15. Watkins, Pocket Diary, 1915, Box 5, f.4, MWF.
16. Watkins, Pocket Diary, 1915, Box 5, f.4, MWF.
17. Draft notes, circa 1912, Box 4, f.59, MWF.
18. Henry Wysham Lanier, *Photographing the Civil War* (New York: The Review of Reviews, 1911). He later published *Greenwich Village, today & yesterday. Photographs by Berenice Abbott, 1949.*
19. *Photo-Era Magazine: The American Journal of Photography*, 34.1 (January 1915), 52. See also 33.10 (October 1914), 210. The Jamieson Studios were at 394 Boylston Street and 28 Avery Street.
20. Mounted by the Ehrich Art Galleries in New York and shown at the Albright Art Gallery in Buffalo. Lewis Carroll, of course, is widely known as the author of *Alice in Wonderland* (1865).
21. Bonnie Yochelson, "Clarence H. White School of Photography," in Mitra Abbaspour, Lee Ann Daffner, and Maria Morris Hambourg, eds. *Object: Photo. Modern Photographs: The Thomas Walther Collection 1909-1949. An Online Project of The Museum of Modern Art* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2014), 3. <https://www.moma.org/interactives/objectphoto/assets/essays/Yochelson.pdf>.
22. Watkins had a first edition of Virginia Woolf's celebrated book *A Room of One's Own* (1929) in her personal collection when she died.
23. TS, Watkins to Norman Walker, November 29, 1929, Box 3, f.17, MWF.
24. Watkins to Louisa Anderson, February 18, 1923, Box 3, f.14, MWF.
25. Ralph Steiner, quoted in Lori Pauli, "'A Few Hellers': Women at the Clarence H. White School of Photography," in *Margaret Watkins, Photographs*, ed. Martha McCulloch (Glasgow: Street Level Photography Gallery and Workshop, 1994), n.p.
26. Newspaper clipping, *Flushing Evening Journal*: "Pictorial exhibit opens tonight at Unitarian Church [April 25 1921] All pictures to be shown were executed by women photographers and were recently part of an international exhibit in Copenhagen. In the early part of April they were hung at Teachers College, Manhattan. [and extended for a week there] The work of nine individuals: Miss Guy Spencer, Miss Watkins, Miss Delight Weston, Miss Edith Wilson, Miss Erving, Miss Laura Gilpin, Mrs Walter Hervey, Miss Milly Hoopes and Mrs. Doris U. Jaeger." Box 6, f.12, MWF.
27. The 1921 (November) White school alumni bulletin stated, "Miss Watkins at the first jump cleared all the fences and landed in *Vanity Fair*... a full page with most discriminating remarks under each picture."



28. She exhibited 54 photographs in the following categories: Portraits (24), Studies (11), Still Life & Design (11), Interiors (6), and Landscapes (2). See mounted typescript, "Photographs by Margaret Watkins, New York City, 1923," Box 3, f.162, MWF.
29. Watkins, "Advertising and Photography."
30. "Former Hamilton Girl in Greenwich Village," *Hamilton Spectator*, April 26, 1929.
31. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, *The New Woman Behind the Camera, Exhibition Overview*, accessed January 12, 2023, <https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2021/new-woman-behind-the-camera>.
32. A full account of the scandal appears in O'Connor and Tweedie, *Seduced by Modernity*, 160-65.
33. Watkins to Lucille Mitchell Lotus, August 10, 1930, Box 3, f.69, MWF.
34. Watkins to Mrs. Eva Chapin (Polly) Parrot, April 1929, Box 3, f.61, MWF. And Watkins to Norman Walker, February 7, 1929, Box 3, f.17, MWF.
35. Watkins to Lucille Mitchell Lotus, August 10, 1930, Box 3, f.69, MWF.
36. Watkins, Notebook, 1928, Box 5, f.5, MWF.
37. Watkins to Walter Blackie, January 1, 1941, Box 3, f.117, MWF.
38. Dates unknown, active in the 1920s and 1930s. Three films are listed on IMDb: *The Witch's Fiddle* (1924), *Miracles Still Happen* (1935), and *Sewage* (1935), <https://www.imdb.com/name/nm11065089/>.
39. Watkins, notes, August 1933, Box 4, f.90, MWF.
40. Peter Le Neve Foster, "A Movie Maker in Moscow," *Photographic Journal* (London, Royal Photographic Society), 74 (June 1934): 314-21.
41. Watkins, notes, 1933, Box 4, f.90, MWF.
42. Walter Süsskind (1913-1980) was conductor of the Scottish Orchestra in Glasgow (1946-52) and musical director and conductor with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra (1956-65).
43. Joseph Mulholland has promoted Watkins's work over the last forty plus years. There are multiple accounts by Mulholland of his friendship with "Miss Watkins," e.g., "A Sad Strange Gleam of Vision," *Photographic Collector* 3, no.1 (Spring 1982), 50-63, or the Introduction to O'Connor and Tweedie's *Seduced by Modernity*.



44. Holographic will of Margaret Watkins, April 6, 1968, National Archives of Scotland.

## KEY WORKS: THE KITCHEN SINK

1. Edgar Felloes, "The Emporium (Second Annual) Photographic Exhibition," *Camera Craft* 29 (October 1922): 456-57.

2. James Borcoman, *Magicians of Light* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1993), 144.

3. F.C. Tilney, "Pictorial Photography in 1923," *Photograms of the Year 1923* (London: Routledge, 1924), 8.

4. Sigismund Blumann, "Howling Down the Critic," *Camera Craft* 29 (December 1922): 570.

5. William Ludlum, *Camera Craft* 29 (December 1922): 584.

6. Quoted in Lori Pauli, "A Few Hellers': Women at the Clarence H. White School of Photography," in *Margaret Watkins, Photographs*, ed. Martha McCulloch (Glasgow: Street Level Photography Gallery and Workshop, 1994), n.p.

7. Watkins, commonplace book and diary, 1907-8, 131, Box 5, f.2, Margaret Watkins Fonds, McMaster University.

## KEY WORKS: DOMESTIC SYMPHONY

1. Watkins, notes, Box 4, f.84, Margaret Watkins Fonds, McMaster University.

2. Andrea Nelson, *The New Woman Behind the Camera* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 2020), 32.

## KEY WORKS: SELF-PORTRAIT

1. Watkins was well aware of Julia Margaret Cameron's photographs. They had been reproduced in Alfred Stieglitz's journal, *Camera Work*, a full set of which Watkins owned. In Watkins's 1926 essay, "Advertising and Photography," she wrote: "when Julia Margaret Cameron photographed the celebrities of [her] generation, she disdained delicacy, preferring means which gave her sitters the strength of characterization worthy of their personalities" (*Pictorial Photography in America* 4, n.p.). Cameron's photography was celebrated in a 1926 book, *Victorian Photographs of Famous Men and Fair Women*, with an introduction by her great-niece, the writer Virginia Woolf.

2. Watkins, written at the bottom of her photograph *Self-Portrait*, 1923.

3. Watkins to Miss Street, June 15, 1923, Box 3, f.16, Margaret Watkins Fonds, McMaster University [hereafter MWF].

4. Watkins wrote this on the back of her *Self-Portrait*, 1923.

5. Watkins, autograph notes, Box 4, f.59, MWF.



6. "Former Hamilton Girl in Greenwich Village," *Hamilton Spectator*, April 26, 1929.

## KEY WORKS: TOWER OF IVORY

1. Marguerite Agniel, *The Art of the Body: Rhythmic Exercises for Health and Beauty* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1931), 46.

## KEY WORKS: STUDY FOR AN ADVERTISEMENT [WOODBURY'S SOAP]

1. In fact, the roughness of Woodbury's Soap prevented the company from keeping consumers. Although the advertising campaign was very successful, Woodbury's could not maintain its market because the soap was too rough (Kathy Peiss, lecture, McMaster University, 2000).

2. Raymond Bourne (J. Walter Thompson Co., 244 Madison Avenue, New York) to Watkins, June 3, 1926, Box 3, f.27, Margaret Watkins Fonds, McMaster University.

3. Watkins, "Advertising and Photography," *Pictorial Photography in America* 4 (1926): n.p.

## KEY WORKS: UNTITLED [GLASGOW, FINNIESTON CRANE]

1. Watkins to Walter Blackie, January 1, 1941, Box 3, f.117, Margaret Watkins Fonds, McMaster University [hereafter MWF].

2. Watkins to Walter Blackie, January 1, 1941, Box 3, f.117, MWF.

## KEY WORKS: MOSCOW [YOUTH FESTIVAL]

1. Margaret Bourke-White, "Land of the Day After Tomorrow," *Portrait of Myself* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1963).

2. The twenty-five were chosen from six hundred negatives she brought back with her. They were perhaps prepared in response to the request she received from the Scottish Congress of Peace and Friendship with the U.S.S.R. (whose explicit goals were non-party and non-sectarian) to show her photographs at its meeting in Edinburgh in November 1937. They proposed to have an exhibition of photographs called "We have been to Russia." See Alison Bonfield, Hon. Secretary, Scottish Congress for Peace and Friendship with the U.S.S.R., to Watkins, June 11, 1937, Margaret Watkins Fonds, McMaster University.

3. We are reminded of the Pressa mural she saw in Cologne in 1928: "The Task of the Press Is the Education of the Masses."

## KEY WORKS: DESIGN FOR CARPET, "BLYTHSWOOD," FRONT STEPS, CENTERED

1. Watkins, written on the mount of her photograph *Covent Garden Market dome*, London, c.1937.

2. Watkins, written on the mount of her photograph *Covent Garden Market dome*, London, c.1937.



## SIGNIFICANCE & CRITICAL ISSUES

1. Watkins, Pocket Diary, 1915, Box 5, f.4, Margaret Watkins Fonds, McMaster University [hereafter MWF].
2. See Anne McCauley, ed., *Clarence H. White and His World: The Art and Craft of Photography, 1895-1925* (New Haven and London: Princeton University Art Museum and Yale University Press, 2017) for a full re-evaluation of Clarence White, his photography, and his teaching, emphasizing his Arts and Crafts ethos, his socialism, his attention to everyday life, his building of photographic institutions, and his aesthetic experiments.
3. She is listed as an instructor in 1919, 1921, 1922, and 1925. She was registrar and co-director of the summer school in 1920, 1921, and 1925.
4. Quoted by Joseph Mulholland, "A Life in Photographs," in *Margaret Watkins, 1884-1969*, ed. Martha McCulloch (Glasgow: Street Level Photography Gallery & Workshop, 1994), n.p. Greenberg singled out Margaret Bourke-White, Paul Outerbridge, Jr., and Ralph Steiner as those influenced by Watkins.
5. Constance McCabe: "Like carbon prints, the gum bichromate print process is based on the light-sensitive properties of dichromated colloids....The paper is coated with a solution of gelatin or gum arabic, potassium dichromate, and pigment. Once dry, the sensitized paper is exposed to light through a negative to harden the light-sensitive dichromated gum in direct proportion to the amount of light it receives. After exposure, the print is washed with water, leaving behind the hardened, pigmented gum, which forms the positive image. The gum process can be manipulated during processing with brushwork, variations in temperature, or by controlling the force of the water." "Gum Bichromate Prints," National Gallery of Art, <https://www.nga.gov/research/online-editions/alfred-stieglitz-key-set/practices-and-processes/gum-bichromate-prints.html>.
6. Ralph Steiner, "An Interview with Ralph Steiner," by Donna Sandroock, in Lucinda Barnes, *A Collective Vision: Clarence White and His Students* (Long Beach: University Art Museum, California State University, Long Beach, 1985), 28.
7. Margaret Bourke-White to Watkins, March 29, 1928, Box 3, f.51, MWF.
8. James Borcoman, *Magicians of Light* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1993), 144.
9. Inglis, *Hamilton Spectator*, July 28, 1984.
10. Margaret Watkins, "Advertising and Photography," *Pictorial Photography in America* 4 (1926): n.p.
11. Fewer than 15 percent of ads in the early 1920s used photography; almost 80 percent by 1930. Patricia Johnston, *Real Fantasies: Edward Steichen's Advertising Photography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 1.



12. Watkins, "Advertising and Photography."
13. Raymond Bourne (J. Walter Thompson Co., 244 Madison Avenue, New York) to Watkins, June 3, 1926, Box 3, f.27, MWF.
14. Marginalia in Watkins's copy of *Camera Craft* 29 (December 1922), Joseph Mulholland, Glasgow, Scotland.
15. The Mulholland archive includes more than two hundred advertising images as well as page proofs or original pages from magazines and newspapers in the 1920s. The campaigns included Cutex, Phenix Cheese, Dromedary Dates, Myer's gloves, Johnson & Johnson, Woodbury's Soap, and perfume products by Gabilla and Chypre, as well as different products for Macy's Department store, such as glassware, lamps, and luggage.
16. S.H. Ankeney (J. Horace Lytle Co., Dayton, Ohio) to Watkins, November 12, 1926, Box 3, f.26, MWF.
17. Watkins, "Advertising and Photography."
18. The 19th amendment to the United States Constitution, which gave (some) women the vote, passed in 1920.
19. Andrea Nelson, *The New Woman Behind the Camera* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1920).
20. Clarence H. White's essay "Photography as a Profession for Women" adds architectural photography, photography in museums and libraries, and teaching photography, even in agricultural schools. *News-Bulletin of the Bureau of Vocational Information*, New York, vol. 2, no. 7 (April 1, 1924): 49-50, 54-55.
21. Watkins, commonplace book and diary, 1907-8, 131, Box 5, f.2, MWF.
22. "Photography Comes into the Kitchen," *Vanity Fair*, October 1921.
23. As Katherine Tweedie and I have argued: Mary O'Connor and Katherine Tweedie, *Seduced by Modernity: The Photography of Margaret Watkins* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007).
24. Watkins, "Concerning the Pervasive Influence of Art," *Boston Sunday Globe*, June 6, 1915.
25. "How My Art Enriches Life," *Ground-Glass: Bulletin of the Newark Camera Club* 8 (September 1926): 5.
26. Watkins, "Advertising and Photography."
27. Watkins to Walter Blackie, January 1, 1941, Box 3, f.117, MWF.
28. Watkins, notes, Box 4, f.84, MWF.





29. "A Fresh Angle: The Revolutionary Gaze of Margaret Watkins—in Pictures," *Guardian*, August 12, 2021.

30. "Canadian Photography," *Canada Post*,  
[https://web.archive.org/web/20131017025736/http://www.canadapost.ca/cpo/mc/personal/collecting/stamps/2013/2013\\_mar\\_photography.jsf#main](https://web.archive.org/web/20131017025736/http://www.canadapost.ca/cpo/mc/personal/collecting/stamps/2013/2013_mar_photography.jsf#main).

## STYLE & TECHNIQUE

1. Anne McCauley, ed., *Clarence H. White and His World: The Art and Craft of Photography, 1895-1925* (New Haven and London: Princeton University Art Museum and Yale University Press, 2017).

2. Maynard Pressley, Jr., *Clarence H. White: A Personal Portrait*, PhD dissertation, Wilmington: University of Delaware, 1975, 47.

3. Watkins to Lotus Lucille Mitchell, August 10, 1930, Box 3, f.69, Margaret Watkins Fonds, McMaster University [hereafter MWF].

4. Watkins to Walter and Antoinette Hervey, August 17, 1930, Box 3, f.73, MWF.

5. Watkins, Address book, Box 5, f.20, MWF.

6. Watkins's talk was published as "How My Art Enriches Life," in *Ground-Glass: Bulletin of the Newark Camera Club* 8 (September 1926): 5.

7. The Clarence H. White School, for instance, promised students instruction in ten different photographing processes: bromide, gelatin silver, kallitype, carbon, platinum, palladium, gum-bichromate, gum-platinum, oil and bromoil, and bromoil transfer.

8. For an excellent analysis of Clarence H. White's printing processes, see Adrienne Lundgren, "Cyanotype, Platinum and Palladium Printing: The Siderotype Artistry of Clarence H. White," in McCauley, ed., *Clarence H. White and His World*, 342-52.

9. "Photography Comes into the Kitchen," *Vanity Fair* (1921): 60.

10. Karl Robinson, "The New York Salon," *American Photography* (August 1925): 435.

11. Gertrude Stein, "A Feather," *Tender Buttons: Objects, Food, Rooms*, Project Gutenberg, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/15396/15396-h/15396-h.htm>.

12. Margaret Watkins, "Advertising and Photography," *Pictorial Photography in America* 4 (1926): n.p.

13. Watkins marginalia, *Commercial Art*, September 1928, Private Collection, 122, under a "Photographic Study for Parke Davis and Co. by Charles Wormald, London"; and annotation of an article by Sir Lawrence Weaver on "The London Press Exchange and Its Outlook on Commercial Art."



# MARGARET WATKINS

Life & Work by Mary O'Connor

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14. Watkins, autograph notes, 1928, Box 5, f.5, MWF.

15. Watkins, autograph notes, 1928, Box 3, f.160, MWF.



## GLOSSARY

### **abstract art**

Also called nonfigurative or nonrepresentational art, abstract art uses form, colour, line, and gestural marks in compositions that do not attempt to represent images of real things. It may interpret reality in an altered form, or depart from it entirely.

### **Art Deco**

A decorative style of the early twentieth century, first exhibited in Paris in 1925 at the Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes. The style had several influences, including Egyptian and Asian motifs, modernist fine art movements, and its design predecessor, Art Nouveau.

### **Arts and Crafts**

A precursor to modernist design, this decorative arts movement developed in the mid-nineteenth century in England in response to what its proponents saw as the dehumanizing effects of industrialization. Spearheaded by William Morris, the Arts and Crafts movement valued craftsmanship and simplicity of form and frequently incorporated nature motifs in the design of ordinary objects.

### **Art Students League of New York**

A progressive art school established by artists for artists in 1875. By the turn of the twentieth century, the Art Students League was attracting many students who would become central figures in contemporary American art. Teachers included William Merritt Chase, Thomas Eakins, and Robert Henri.

### **Atget, Eugène (French, 1857–1927)**

A photographer best known for his images of Paris on the cusp of the modern era. His photographs of Parisian city streets, architecture, and landmarks were influential for avant-garde artists like the Surrealists who were interested in the creative potential of his documentary works.

### **Bonheur, Rosa (French, 1822–1899)**

A French artist known for her realist, dramatic paintings of animals, with a particular focus on depictions of livestock and pastoral scenes. Born in Bordeaux and based in Paris for most of her life, she received widespread acclaim during her career and was the first female artist to be awarded the French Legion of Honour in 1865.

### **Boughton, Alice (American, 1866–1943)**

A Brooklyn-born photographer best known for her portraits of notable celebrities, socialites, and artistic figures. Alongside her shots of famous painters, poets, and writers, she also created allegorical and theatrical images of women and children, often in outdoor settings. She was closely affiliated with the Photo-Secession movement, which advanced the idea of photography as a form of fine art, and often exhibited alongside the group.

### **Bourke-White, Margaret (American, 1904–1971)**

A New York City-born photographer known for her documentary approach, covering social issues such as poverty, race relations, industrial conditions in



America, and global politics. She was a pioneer in her field: she was the first female photojournalist hired at *Life Magazine*, the first woman to work as a war correspondent during the Second World War, and the first Western photographer to be allowed access into the Soviet Union.

### **Brâncuși, Constantin (Romanian, 1876–1957)**

An abstract sculptor, with a unique focus on expressing natural forms as simply as possible, Brâncuși influenced later sculptors, including Amedeo Modigliani and Carl Andre. Active for most of his life in Paris, Brâncuși became known in America following his inclusion in the Armory Show, the 1913 International Exhibition of Modern Art.

### **Cameron, Julia Margaret (British, 1815–1879)**

A British photographer, born in Calcutta, British India, who was best known for her portraits of famous writers, philosophers, and scientists of the Victorian era, as well as for her allegorical shots of men, women, and children. Her work is marked by its extensive use of soft-focus effects, as well as its highly theatrical nature, often drawing inspiration from and recreating scenes from literature, art, religious narratives, and mythology.

### **Cartier-Bresson, Henri (French, 1908–2004)**

A French artist and photographer who was one of the first practitioners of candid, observational street photography. Known for his ability to capture spontaneous yet poetic moving shots of everyday life, he exclusively shot his images in black and white and was deeply inspired by the Surrealist movement. In 1947 he co-founded Magnum Photos, an international photographic cooperative with headquarters in New York City, Paris, London, and Tokyo.

### **Cézanne, Paul (French, 1839–1906)**

A painter of arguably unparalleled influence on the development of modern art, associated with the Post-Impressionist school and known for his technical experiments with colour and form and his interest in multiple-point perspective. In his maturity, Cézanne had several preferred subjects, including his wife, still life, and Provençal landscapes.

### **chiaroscuro**

A term that refers, at its most general, to an artist's use of light and dark and the visual effects thus produced in a painting, engraving, or drawing. Chiaroscuro can serve to create atmosphere, describe volume, and imitate natural light effects. From the Italian *chiaro* (light) and *scuro* (dark).

### **Conceptual art**

Traced to the work of Marcel Duchamp but not codified until the 1960s, "Conceptual art" is a general term for art that emphasizes ideas over form. The finished product may even be physically transient, as with land art or performance art.

### **Constructivism**

Emerging in Russia in the early 1920s, Constructivism was an artistic trend that championed a materialist, non-emotional, utilitarian approach to art and linked art to design, industry, and social usefulness. The term continues to be used



generally to describe abstract art that employs lines, planes, and other visual elements in composing abstract geometric images of a precise and impersonal nature.

## **Cubism**

A radical style of painting developed by Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque in Paris between 1907 and 1914, Cubism is defined by the representation of numerous perspectives at once. Cubism is considered crucial to the history of modern art for its enormous international impact; famous practitioners also include Juan Gris and Francis Picabia.

## **Dada**

A multidisciplinary movement that arose in Europe in response to the horrors of the First World War, whose adherents aimed to deconstruct and demolish traditional societal values and institutions. Artworks, often collages and ready-mades, typically scorned fine materials and craftsmanship. Chief Dadaists include Marcel Duchamp, Tristan Tzara, Kurt Schwitters, and Hans Arp.

## **Dow, Arthur Wesley (American, 1857–1922)**

An American painter, photographer, and printmaker deeply inspired by Japanese woodblock prints, often making use of minimalist compositions; flattened, soft colours; and unconventional cropping techniques in his work. He was largely based in New York City, where he taught at the Pratt Institute, the New York Art Students League, and Columbia University's Teachers College. In 1891 he founded the Ipswich Summer School of Art in his hometown of Ipswich, Massachusetts.

## **Dreier, Katherine (American, 1877–1952)**

A painter, collector, patron, and—following her exposure to the European avant-garde with the 1913 Armory Show—a fierce promoter of modern art in the United States. To champion this cause, Dreier co-founded the Société Anonyme with Marcel Duchamp and Man Ray in 1920.

## **Duchamp, Marcel (French/American, 1887–1968)**

One of the most significant artist-thinkers of the twentieth century, Duchamp influenced Conceptual, Pop, and Minimal art. Best known for the sensational painting *Nude Descending a Staircase (No. 2)*, 1912, he is also recognized for his ready-made sculptures, among them the urinal *Fountain*, 1917, and his “desecrated” *Mona Lisa* print, *L.H.O.O.Q.*, 1919.

## **Hill, David Octavius (Scottish, 1802–1870)**

A prominent Edinburgh painter, and one half of the photography team Hill and Adamson, in which Hill's role was largely that of artistic director. Known for pioneering artistic photographic portraiture and for early mastery of the calotype process, Hill and Adamson rank among the most important photographers of the nineteenth century.

## **Jamieson, Arthur L. (American)**

A portrait photographer based in Boston in the early twentieth century, Jamieson studied with the Parisian portraitist Léopold-Émile Reutlinger. Known



for his portraits of women and children, Jamieson employed Canadian pictorialist photographer Margaret Watkins as an assistant early in her career.

### **Kandinsky, Wassily (Russian, 1866–1944)**

An artist, teacher, and philosopher who settled in Germany and later in France, Kandinsky was central to the development of abstract art. Much of his work conveys his interest in the relationships between colour, sound, and emotion. *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (1911), his famous treatise on abstraction, draws on mysticism and theories of divinity.

### **Kertész, André (Hungarian/American, 1894–1985)**

Born in Hungary, Kertész moved to the United States in 1936 and became known for combining documentary photography and photojournalism with artistic and formalist tendencies. He worked for major publications including *Collier's*, *Harper's Bazaar*, and *Condé Nast* before breaking out on his own.

### **Käsebier, Gertrude (American, 1852-1934)**

An Iowa-born photographer who, as co-founder of the Photo-Secession group of Pictorialist photographers, worked to earn photography recognition as a high art form by imitating aspects of painterly technique using the camera. Käsebier became well known for her intimate portraits of mothers and children, writers and artists such as Auguste Rodin, and an 1898 series of portraits of Sioux men.

### **Lissitzky, El (Russian, 1890–1941)**

A pioneer of early twentieth-century nonrepresentational art, Russian artist El Lissitzky is associated with Suprematism and Constructivism. His paintings and poster designs often combine the basic geometric shapes and limited colour palette of Suprematist art with typography. An influential figure in the field of graphic design, Lissitzky is recognized for his innovative contributions to typography, advertising, and exhibition design.

### **Matisse, Henri (French, 1869–1954)**

A painter, sculptor, printmaker, draftsman, and designer, aligned at different times with the Impressionists, Post-Impressionists, and Fauvists. By the 1920s he was, with Pablo Picasso, one of the most famous painters of his generation, known for his remarkable use of colour and line.

### **Metropolitan Museum of Art**

A major art museum located in Manhattan, New York City, considered to be one of the largest and most-visited museums in North America. Colloquially referred to as "The Met," the museum was founded in 1870 and holds a vast collection of over two million objects, including global artworks and artifacts dating from antiquity to contemporary times.

### **modernism**

A movement extending from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century across artistic disciplines, modernism rejected academic traditions in favour of innovative styles developed in response to contemporary industrialized society. Modernist movements in the visual arts have included Gustave Courbet's Realism, and later Impressionism, Post-Impressionism, Fauvism, Cubism, and on to abstraction. By the 1960s, anti-authoritarian postmodernist styles such as Pop



art, Conceptual art, and Neo-Expressionism blurred the distinction between high art and mass culture.

### **Moholy-Nagy, László (Hungarian, 1895–1946)**

Hungarian artist László Moholy-Nagy was a professor in the famed Bauhaus school (1923–28) in Germany. Influenced by Constructivism, he explored the integration of life, art, and technology in his radically experimental and wide-ranging practice. Moholy-Nagy is best known for his innovations in photography, notably his camera-less photographs, known as photograms. He led the New Bauhaus in Chicago from 1937 until his death.

### **National Gallery of Canada**

Established in 1880, the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa holds the most extensive collection of Canadian art in the country as well as works by prominent international artists. Spearheaded by the Marquis of Lorne (Canada's Governor General from 1878 to 1883), the gallery was created to strengthen a specifically Canadian brand of artistic culture and identity and to build a national collection of art that would match the level of other British Empire institutions. Since 1988, the gallery has been located on Sussex Drive in a building designed by Moshe Safdie.

### **Neue Sachlichkeit (New Objectivity)**

A movement in German modern art that embraced realist representation as a means of social criticism, often employing brutal satire. Neue Sachlichkeit, or New Objectivity, emerged after the First World War as an artistic response that rejected the avant-garde forms in favour of traditional approaches. Prominent Neue Sachlichkeit artists were Otto Dix, George Grosz, Max Beckmann, and George Schrimpf.

### **New Vision**

An artistic movement, largely based in photography, that emerged in the 1920s and was inspired by the innovative, modernist designs of the Bauhaus art school. Practitioners embraced the technical qualities of the photographic medium, experimenting with contrasting shades of light and dark, unusual choices in cropping and framing, and varying camera angles and perspectives. Notable figures included Alexander Rodchenko, László Moholy-Nagy, and Walter Peterhans.

### **New Woman**

A term used from the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries, borne out of the burgeoning feminist and suffrage movements of the era. It referred to independent women who embraced changing gender ideals and took a more active role in public life and the workplace, as well as within the educational and political spheres of society.

### **notan**

A Japanese term that translates to “light-dark harmony,” used as a design concept in artmaking. *Notan* describes a pared-down, minimally detailed composition made entirely in shades of black and white. The technique is often used to create preparatory studies for artworks, as it allows the artist to balance and gauge visual elements such as shape, line, and perspective.



## **palladium print**

A type of photographic print made by exposing paper coated with light-sensitive iron salts, including palladium, to UV light through a negative. The process creates a monochromatic image. The palladium printing process was patented by British inventor William Willis in the late nineteenth century and prized by artists for its ability to produce a more durable print with a range of soft tonal effects.

## **Photo-Secession**

An artistic movement, founded in 1902 by a group of American photographers that included founder Alfred Stieglitz, Alvin Langdon Coburn, Clarence H. White, Gertrude Käsebier, Frank Eugene, and Edward Steichen. The Photo-Secessionists advocated for photography as a form of fine art and favoured a Pictorial style, which entailed using techniques such as hand-tinting and soft focus to lend a painterly effect to their images.

## **Picasso, Pablo (Spanish, 1881–1973)**

One of the most famous and influential artists of his time, Picasso was a prominent member of the Parisian avant-garde circle that included Henri Matisse and Georges Braque. His painting *Les Femmes d'Alger*, 1907, is considered by many to be the most important of the twentieth century.

## **Pictorialism**

An international movement that flourished from the 1880s to the first decades of the twentieth century and promoted the idea of photography as art rather than as a scientific or documentary tool. Pictorialists experimented with a variety of photographic techniques to achieve artistic effects. Their photographs are broadly characterized by soft focus and diffuse lighting.

## **Ray, Man (American, 1890–1976)**

Born Emmanuel Radnizky, Man Ray was a Dada and Surrealist artist and photographer and the only American associated with both groups. After working with Marcel Duchamp in New York City, Ray moved to Paris, where he began his experiments in photography and developed camera-less photographs (photograms or rayographs) by placing objects on light-sensitive paper. He also created ready-mades and films and published photographic portraits in fashion magazines and collaborated with the photographer Lee Miller, the subject of much of his work in the 1930s.

## **Roycroft Arts and Crafts company**

An artists' colony focused on handicrafts and artisanry, founded by American writer and artist Elbert Hubbard (1856–1915) in 1895. Located in the village of East Aurora, New York, it contained a self-publishing printing press, as well as workshop and meeting spaces. By 1910 the community numbered nearly 500 artists, skilled in printing, furniture making, metalsmithing, and bookbinding, amongst other trades. It was designated as a National Historic Landmark in 1986.





## **Société Anonyme**

An organization initiated in New York in 1920 by Katherine Dreier, Marcel Duchamp, and Man Ray to promote the appreciation and practice of modern art in the United States. It organized exhibitions, lectures, public programs, and publications and collected actively. The collection is now held at Yale University. Lawren S. Harris was instrumental in arranging for the Société's International Exhibition of Modern Art to be mounted at the Art Gallery of Toronto (now the Art Gallery of Ontario) in 1927, creating enormous controversy.

## **Steichen, Edward (Luxembourgish/American, 1879-1973)**

Highly influential across multiple genres, Luxembourg-born, Michigan-raised Edward Steichen's Pictorialist photography helped pioneer the medium's potential as an art form, before his innovative fashion and advertising photography made him world famous as chief photographer for *Vogue* and *Vanity Fair* in the 1920s. Steichen later served as Director of the U.S. Naval Aviation Photography Unit in the Second World War and of the Museum of Modern Art's Photography Department from 1947 to 1961, where he curated hugely popular exhibitions such as *The Family of Man*, 1955.

## **Stieglitz, Alfred (American, 1864-1946)**

Educated in Germany, Stieglitz began his career as a photographer in the Pictorialist style. He was also a critic, the editor and publisher of the periodical *Camera Work*, and a gallerist whose influence shaped the development of photography as a fine art in the United States in the twentieth century. In 1917 his work turned toward an attempt to transparently capture the shifting, fast-paced reality of modernity. His serial portrait of his wife, the painter Georgia O'Keefe, exemplifies this late style.

## **still life**

The still life is an important genre in Western art and includes depictions of both natural and manufactured objects. Often used to emphasize the ephemerality of human life in the *vanitas* and *memento mori* paintings of the seventeenth century, the still life was at the bottom of the hierarchy of styles established by the French Academy.

## **Weber, Max (American, 1881-1961)**

A Russian-born painter, sculptor, printmaker, and writer, trained as an artist in Paris. Weber's early admiration and adoption of European modernist movements—including Fauvism and Cubism—made him one of the most significant artists of the American avant-garde.

## **White, Clarence H. (American, 1871-1925)**

An Ohio-born photographer and teacher considered to be one of the founding members of the Photo-Secession movement, which advanced the acceptance of photography as a medium of fine art. In 1914 he established the Clarence H. White School of Photography in New York City, where his students included notable figures such as Margaret Bourke-White, Dorothea Lange, and Margaret Watkins.



## **Women's Art Association of Canada**

This association, founded in 1887 by Mary Dignam, who was also the association's first president, was inspired by the Art Students League in New York. Today it is a non-profit organization of approximately two hundred members that provides scholarships to women in various fields of fine art and crafts.

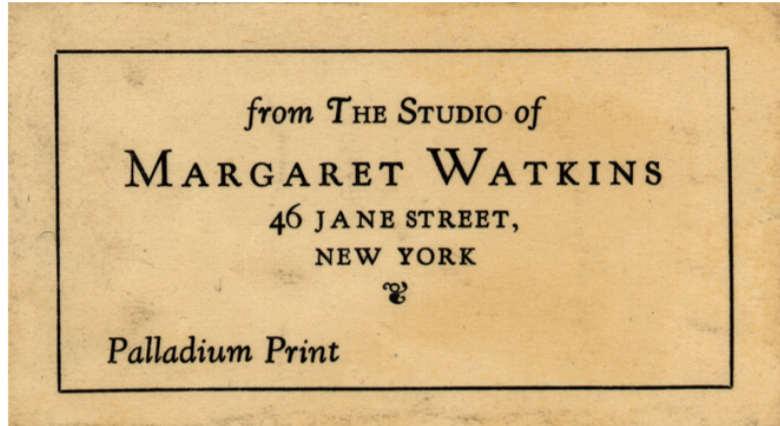


# SOURCES & RESOURCES

Margaret Watkins published three short essays on photography and left a large archive of documents, now at the McMaster University Library in Hamilton, Ontario. She had a major solo show in New York in 1923 and exhibited in over twenty-six group shows in her lifetime, in the U.S., Canada, and internationally. Due to the efforts of her neighbour Joseph Mulholland, she has been included in photographic history since the 1990s. A major research study of her life and work is Mary O'Connor and Katherine Tweedie's *Seduced by Modernity: The Photography of Margaret Watkins* (2007). Two major exhibitions of her work (*Domestic Symphonies*, National Gallery of Canada, 2012; and



*Black Light, diChroma Photography, 2021*) have brought her work to a wider public.



LEFT: Installation view of *Margaret Watkins: Black Light*, curated by Anne Morin, produced by diChroma Photography, CentroCentro, Madrid, 2022. RIGHT: Margaret Watkins's Studio Card, 1919-28, The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow.

## KEY EXHIBITIONS (INCLUDING POSTHUMOUS EXHIBITIONS)

### In Watkins's Lifetime

#### a) Solo Exhibitions

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**1923** Art Center, New York City

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**1924** Jackson St. Branch Library of the New York Circulating Library, New York City  
Canadian Business and Professional Women's Club of New York

#### b) Group Exhibitions

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**1917** An Exhibition of Pictorial Photography, Clarence H. White School of Photography, New York City

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**1920** Copenhagen Photographic Amateur Club Exhibition (American section - collected under the auspices of the Pictorial Photographers of America), Copenhagen

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**1921** Clarence H. White School of Photography alumnae exhibition (nine women photographers), Wellesley College, Wellesley, and Smith College, Northampton. Also exhibited at Columbia Teachers College, Manhattan; at Unitarian Church, Flushing; and as part of the 1920 Copenhagen exhibition. Exhibition of the Pictorial Photographers of America, Art Center, New York City (first prize: *Still Life - Circles*)  
First Annual International Exhibition of Pictorial Photography, Pictorial Photographers Society of San Francisco

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**1922** First International Kohakai Salon of Photography, Kobe, Tokyo, Osaka, and Kyoto



Second Annual International Exhibition of Pictorial Photography, Photographic Society of San Francisco  
The Emporium Second Annual Photographic Exhibition, San Francisco (second prize: *The Kitchen Sink*)

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## 1923

International Salon of the Pictorial Photographers of America, Art Center, New York City  
Second International Kohakai Salon of Photography, Kobe, Tokyo, Osaka, and Kyoto  
Third Annual International Exhibition, The Emporium, San Francisco (second prize: *At the Baby Clinic*)  
Third International Exhibition of Pictorial Photography, New Westminster, B.C. (honourable mention: *Domestic Symphony*)  
Second Annual International Exhibition of Pictorial Photography, Pictorial Photographers Society of San Francisco and Oakland Art Association, San Francisco  
Frederick & Nelson Fourth Annual Salon of Pictorial Photography, Seattle (first prize: *The Princess*)  
International Exhibition of the London Salon of Photography Galleries of the Royal Society of Painters in Water-Colours, London, England

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## 1924

Kodak Park Camera Club, Rochester, N.Y.  
Third International Kohakai Salon of Photography, Kobe  
International Foto-Tentoonstelling, Bandoeng, Java  
Salons of America Exhibition: Water Colors, Etchings, Drawings, etc., Anderson Galleries, New York City  
Frederick & Nelson Fifth Annual Salon of Pictorial Photography, Seattle (fifth prize: *At the Baby Clinic*)  
Third Annual International Exhibition of Pictorial Photography, Pictorial Photographic Society of San Francisco and San Francisco Museum of Art, Galleries of California School of Fine Arts

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## 1925

Exhibition of Photographs by the Students & Alumni of the Clarence H. White School of Photography, Art Center, New York City  
Second International Salon of Pictorial Photography, Pictorial Photographers of America, Art Center, New York City  
San Francisco International Salon of Photography

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## 1928

London Salon of Photography, Galleries of the Royal Society of Painters in Water-Colours, London, England

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## 1936

Glasgow and West of Scotland Photographic Association Annual Exhibition, Glasgow (first prize, class 1: *The Kitchen Sink*; Sir Hugh Reid Trophy, class 2: *The Princess*; second prize, class 2: *Model Resting*)

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## 1937

Glasgow and West of Scotland Photographic Association Annual Exhibition, Glasgow  
Third Annual Exhibition, Scottish Photographic Competition under the auspices of Scottish Photographic Federation, Daily Record Newspaper House,



# MARGARET WATKINS

Life & Work by Mary O'Connor

Glasgow (highly commended: *A Study - Ellipse & Triangle*, and *Angna Enters - Dancer*)

## Posthumous Exhibitions

### a) Solo Exhibitions

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- 1981** June 20–July 11. *Margaret Watkins: Photographs from the '20s*, Third Eye Centre, Glasgow
- 
- 1986** Light Gallery, New York City
- 
- 1996** *Margaret Watkins: 1884–1960: Photographs*, Street Level Gallery, Glasgow  
*Margaret Watkins*, Robert Mann Gallery, New York City
- 
- 2012** *Margaret Watkins: Domestic Symphonies*, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa; McMaster Museum of Art, Hamilton (2013); Museum London (2014)
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- 2013** *Margaret Watkins: Domestic Symphony*, Robert Mann Gallery, New York City
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- 2021–22** *Margaret Watkins: Black Light*, Kutxa Kultur Artegunea, San Sebastian, Spain; CentroCentro, Madrid; Mai Mano House, Budapest; Art Gallery of Hamilton; Centro Cultural de Cascais, Portugal

### b) Selected Group Exhibitions

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- 1996** *Pictorialism into Modernism: The Clarence H. White School of Photography*, Detroit Institute of Arts  
*Women in Photography*, New York Public Library
- 
- 2018** *Clarence H. White and His World: The Art and Craft of Photography, 1895–1925*, Princeton Art Museum
- 
- 2021–22** *The New Woman Behind the Camera*, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., and Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City  
*Uninvited: Canadian Women Artists in the Modern Moment*, McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario
- 
- 2022** *Our Selves: Photographs by Women Artists from Helen Kornblum*, Museum of Modern Art, New York

Watkins has had numerous solo exhibitions at The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow, but these are too numerous to list.

## SELECTED PUBLISHED WRITINGS BY THE ARTIST

"Charity" and "Sympathy." *Methodist Magazine and Review: Devoted to Religion, Literature, and Social Progress* 57 (1903): 457, 320.



"Concerning the Pervasive Influence of Art." *Boston Sunday Globe*, June 6, 1915.

"The House I Love." *Canadian Magazine* 47, no. 3 (1916): 199.

"Advertising and Photography." *Pictorial Photography in America* 4 (1926).

"Editorial Comment." *Pictorial Photography in America* 4 (1926).

"How My Art Enriches Life." *Ground-Glass: Bulletin of the Newark Camera Club* 8 (September 1926): 5.

## SELECTED WRITINGS ON THE ARTIST'S WORK

Mulholland, Joseph, writings from 1972 to 2021. Multiple articles on the life and work of Margaret Watkins, including:

Mulholland, Joseph. "Chance Request Leads to Discovery and Exhibit at Light Gallery." *Photograph Collector*, May 15, 1984.

---"Glasgow Notes" and "Margaret Watkins in Russia." *Glasgow Review*, Summer 1997, 18, 23-28.

---"A Life in Photographs." In *Margaret Watkins, 1884-1969: Photographs*, edited by Martha McCulloch. Glasgow: Street Level Gallery and Workshop, 1994.

---"Photographs by Margaret Watkins." *Glasgow Review*, Summer 1972, 23.

---"Portrait of an Artist." *Scottish Field*, October 1981, 73-78.

---"A Reminiscence." In *Margaret Watkins: Photographs 1917-1930*. Glasgow: Third Eye Centre, 1981.

---"A Sad Strange Gleam of Vision." *Photograph Collector*, Spring 1982.

---"Preface." In *Seduced by Modernity: The Photography of Margaret Watkins*, by Mary O'Connor and Katherine Tweedie, xvii-xx. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007.

---"Margaret Watkins." In *Margaret Watkins: Domestic Symphonies*, by Lori Pauli, 8-11. Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 2012.

---"Miss Watkins." In *Margaret Watkins: Black Light*, edited by Anne Morin, 17-18. Madrid: diChroma Photography, 2021.

Mulholland, Joseph, and George Oliver. *Margaret Watkins: Photographs 1917-1930*. Glasgow: Third Eye Centre, 1981.

Publications from The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow: *Margaret Watkins - Forgotten Woman* (2009/2015), *Glasgow in the 1930s* (2010/2015), *Glasgow in*



*the 1930s II* (2014), *Paris 1933* (2011), *Leningrad and Moscow 1933 - I* (2012), *Art and Advertising* (2013), and *London in the 1930s* (2015).

"A Fresh Angle: The Revolutionary Gaze of Margaret Watkins—in Pictures." *Guardian*, August 12, 2021.

"Photography Comes into the Kitchen: A Group of Photographs by Margaret Watkins Showing Modernist, or Cubist, Patterns in Composition." *Vanity Fair*, October 1921, 60.

Borcoman, James. *Magicians of Light*. Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1993.

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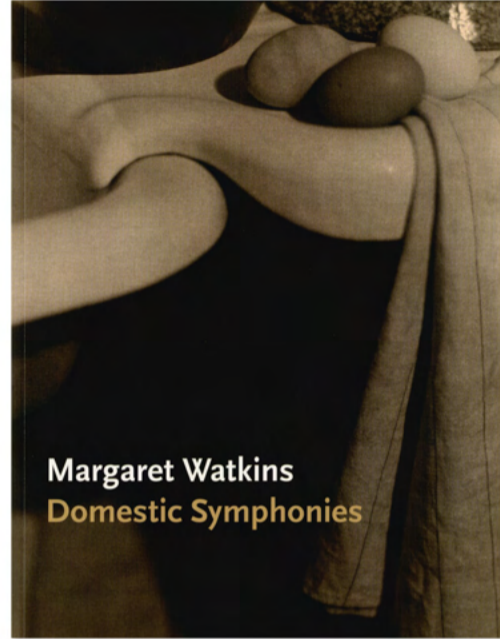
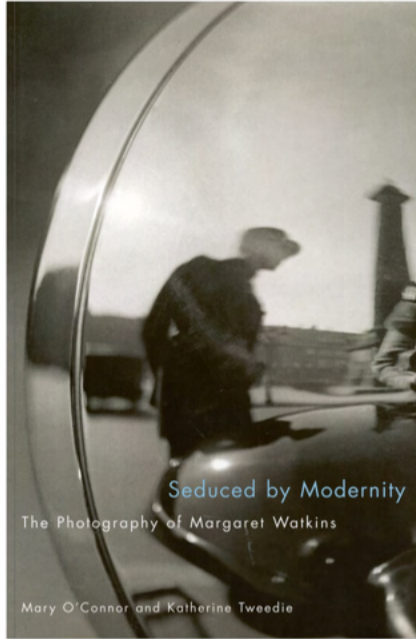
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LEFT: Cover of *Seduced by Modernity: The Photography of Margaret Watkins* by Mary O'Connor and Katherine Tweedie (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007). RIGHT: Cover of *Margaret Watkins: Domestic Symphonies* by Lori Pauli (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 2022).





# MARGARET WATKINS

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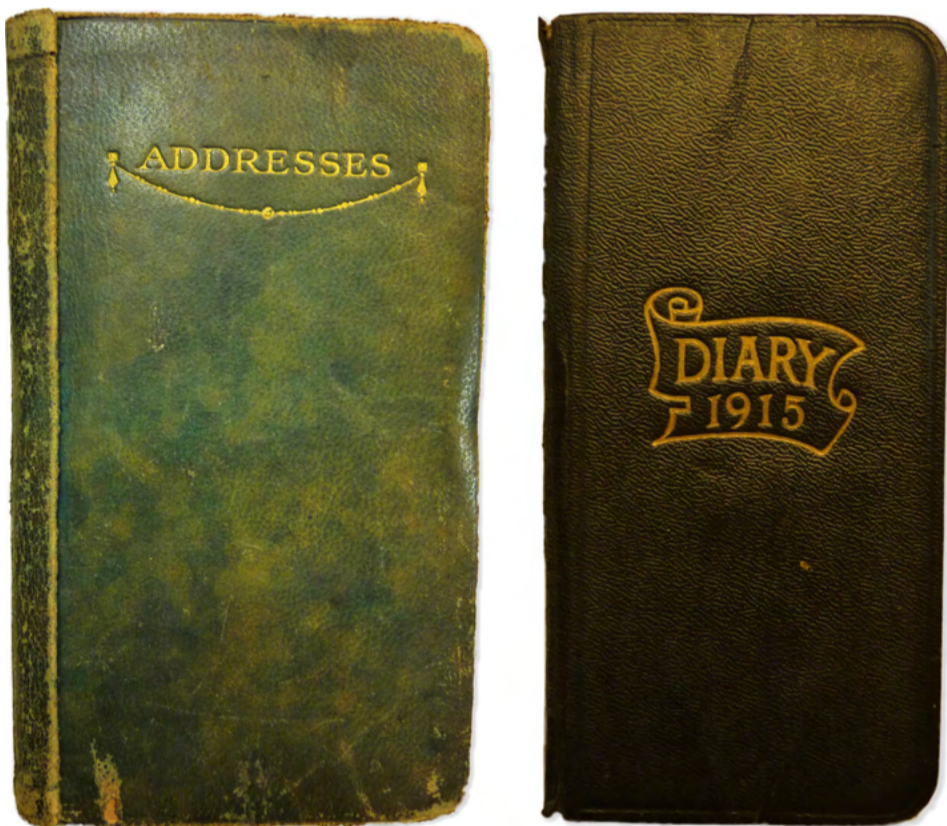
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Warren and Margot Coville Collection, Prints and Photographs Division

Henry Putnum Correspondence, Collections of the Manuscript Division



LEFT: Cover of Margaret Watkins's address book, 1938-69, Margaret Watkins Fonds, McMaster University, Hamilton. RIGHT: Cover of Margaret Watkins's pocket diary, 1915, Margaret Watkins Fonds, McMaster University, Hamilton.



Margaret Watkins Fonds, William Ready Division of the Archives and Research Collections, Mills Memorial Library, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

### MARY O'CONNOR

Mary O'Connor is Professor Emerita, Department of English and Cultural Studies, at McMaster University. Her research interest in modernist culture (1890–1939) has remained constant since her doctoral work at the University of Toronto, despite the many tangents of her research life—which have included African American women's novels, women's life-writing of the seventeenth century, women's health promotion, and photography. Arguably, the main thread of her research has been about everyday life across various cultural and social expressions. She has co-curated art exhibitions on women's art at the McMaster Museum of Art (*Embodied Matter*, 2006) and at the Ontario Science Centre (*The Archive and Everyday Life*, 2015).

Her research on everyday life and its objects led her to the kitchen still-life photographs of Margaret Watkins at the National Gallery of Canada. Since 1999, O'Connor's work on Watkins has appeared in chapters in books, in exhibition catalogues, and in her co-authored monograph with Katherine Tweedie, *Seduced by Modernity: The Photography of Margaret Watkins* (2007). In 2022, she co-created with Tweedie the short film *Archive Traces: Margaret Watkins Photographer*, which showed at the Art Gallery of Hamilton.



**“Since seeing the radical arrangement of everyday objects in *The Kitchen Sink* in 1993, I have often returned to Watkins’s work, finding new ways to understand this creative New Woman of the 1920s and her pioneering modernist art.”**



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#### From the Author

As always, I must thank Joseph Mulholland for welcoming me into his extraordinary archive of Margaret Watkins's photographs and documents, for gifting the documents to McMaster University, and for allowing us to reproduce many photographs here in this book. I thank Tobi Bruce at the Art Gallery of Hamilton for her interest in Margaret Watkins and for encouraging me to write this book. But the book could not have been written without the foundational research and writing Katherine Tweedie has done with me over the years on Watkins, primarily for our 2007 McGill-Queen's University Press book *Seduced by Modernity: The Photography of Margaret Watkins*. The work we did together on our 2022 film *Archive Traces: Margaret Watkins Photographer* prepared me



to dive into the writing of this ACI publication. Thanks also to Katherine for the original scans of the images. Thank you to Rick Stapleton and the McMaster University William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections for making the handling of Watkins's papers so easy and comfortable, and a big thank you to the ACI team and all their detailed and creative work behind the scenes: Sara Angel, Jocelyn Anderson, Emma Doubt, Tilman Lewis, Olivia Mikalajunas, Tara Ng, Claudia Tavernese, Simone Wharton, and all other members of the ACI team who worked on this book. Thanks to my family, Gaby and Sarah Moyal, for their love and support, and to many friends for listening to me go on and on about the life and photographs of Margaret Watkins.

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Margaret Watkins, *The Tea Cup* [advertisement for Cutex], 1924. (See below for details.)

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Biography: Frances Bode, Clarence H. White School of Photography, *Margaret Watkins*, 1921. (See below for details.)



# MARGARET WATKINS

Life & Work by Mary O'Connor



Key Works: Margaret Watkins, *Study for an advertisement [Woodbury's Soap]*, 1924. (See below for details.)



Significance & Critical Issues: Margaret Watkins, *The Builder, "Peter the Great,"* 1933. (See below for details.)



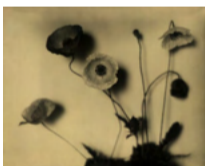
Style & Technique: Margaret Watkins, *Phenix Cheese*, 1923. (See below for details.)



Sources & Resources: Margaret Watkins, *The Negative*, 1919. (See below for details.)



Where to See: Installation view of *Margaret Watkins: Black Light*, curated by Anne Morin, produced by diChroma Photography, Kutxa Kultur Artegunea, San Sebastian, Spain, 2021. (See below for details.)



Credits: Margaret Watkins, *Untitled [Poppies]*, c.1920. (See below for details.)

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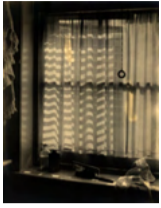


*At the Baby Clinic [Greenwich Settlement House]*, 1918. Collection of The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow. Courtesy of The Hidden Lane Gallery. © Joseph Mulholland, Glasgow.



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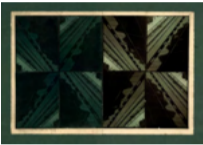


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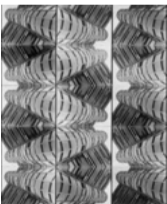
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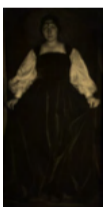
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"The Relations of Art to Democracy," *Boston Sunday Globe*, 1915, by Margaret Watkins. The William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton, Margaret Watkins Fonds, Box 4, f.68. Courtesy of McMaster University. © Joseph Mulholland, Glasgow.



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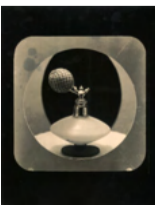
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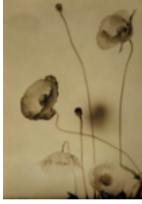


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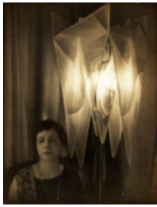
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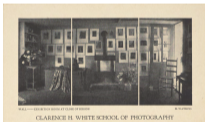
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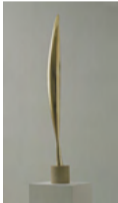
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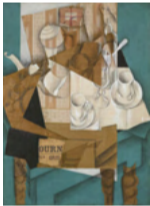
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*Bird in Space*, 1928, by Constantin Brâncuși. Collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, Given anonymously (153.1934). Courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art. © Succession Brâncuși - All rights reserved (ARS) 2018.



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Brochure for the Seguinland School of Photography, Clarence H. White, *Fifth Season*, 1914. Clarence H. White Collection, Princeton University Art Museum, New Jersey, Photography Archives, Assembled and organized by Professor Clarence H. White Jr., Given in memory of Lewis F. White, Dr. Maynard P. White Sr., and Clarence H. White Jr., the sons of Clarence H. White Sr., and Jane Felix White (CHW A151). Courtesy of the Princeton University Art Museum.

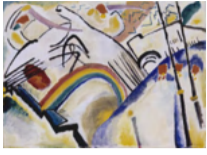


Centenary Methodist Church Choir (*front row, first on the left: Margaret Watkins*), 1904. Photographer unknown. Collection of The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow. Courtesy of The Hidden Lane Gallery.



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*Cossacks (Cosaques)*, 1910, by Wassily Kandinsky. Collection of the Tate Modern, London, U.K., Presented by Mrs Hazel McKinley (N04948). Courtesy of the Tate Modern. Photo credit: © Tate.



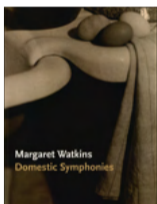
Cover of *Camera Work: A Photographic Quarterly* no. 48 (October 1916), published and edited by Alfred Stieglitz, with a spread featuring Paul Strand, *New York*, 1916. Collection of the Victoria & Albert Museum, London, U.K. (RPS.1256-2018). Courtesy of the Victoria & Albert Museum. Photo credit: © Victoria and Albert Museum.



Cover of Margaret Watkins's address book, 1938-69. The William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton, Margaret Watkins Fonds, Box 5, f.20. Courtesy of McMaster University.



Cover of Margaret Watkins's pocket diary, 1915. The William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton, Margaret Watkins Fonds, Box 5, f.4. Courtesy of McMaster University.



Cover of *Margaret Watkins: Domestic Symphonies* by Lori Pauli (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 2022). Courtesy of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Photo credit: NGC.



Cover of *Seduced by Modernity: The Photography of Margaret Watkins* by Mary O'Connor and Katherine Tweedie (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007). Courtesy of McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal and Kingston.



Cover of *Traumerei* sheet music owned by Margaret Watkins, date unknown (Boston: Oliver Ditson Company). Private collection.



# MARGARET WATKINS

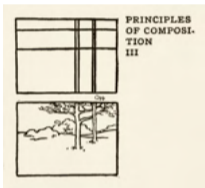
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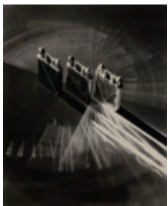
Cutex advertisement "The Well Groomed Woman's Manicure," *Ladies' Home Journal* 42, no. 2, February 1925, 37. Collection of The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow. Courtesy of The Hidden Lane Gallery.



Design for the flag of the Soviet pavilion, Pressa exhibition, Cologne, 1928, by El Lissitzky. Courtesy of arthive.com.



Detail from *Composition: A Series of Exercises in Art Structure for the Use of Students and Teachers* by Arthur Wesley Dow, seventh edition (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1913), 25. Courtesy of hank\_b on archive.org.



*Douglass Lighters*, 1928, by Edward Steichen, printed by George Tice. Courtesy of Gallery 270, Westwood, New Jersey.



*Eiffel Tower*, c.1927, by Germaine Krull, from the portfolio *MÉTAL*, edited by A. Calavas (Paris: Librairie des Arts décoratifs, 1928). Courtesy of artblart.com. © Estate Germaine Krull, Museum Folkwang, Essen.



Frederick Watkins's 1899 store (later Robinson's), James St. South, Hamilton, c.1910-19. Collection of the Hamilton Public Library.



Photograph of an unidentified person (*left*) and Meta G. Watkins (Margaret Watkins), date unknown. Photograph by E.H. Price. Collection of The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow. Courtesy of The Hidden Lane Gallery. © Joseph Mulholland, Glasgow.



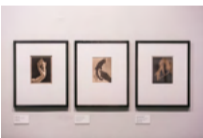
Graflex Series B view camera, 1907-27. Collection of the Queensland Museum, South Brisbane (H14743). Courtesy of the Queensland Museum. © Queensland Museum, Peter Waddington.



Group portrait of the Tarbox and Houghton families outdoors, in front of Eastlawn, their family home (later Watkins's "Clydevia"), c.1878. Collection of the Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge (MC602-8.12v-25). Courtesy of Harvard University.



*The Horse Fair*, 1852-55, by Rosa Bonheur. Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of Cornelius Vanderbilt, 1887 (87.25). Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Installation view of *Margaret Watkins: Black Light*, curated by Anne Morin, produced by diChroma Photography, CentroCentro, Madrid, 2022. Courtesy of CentroCentro. © Joseph Mulholland, Glasgow. Photo credit: Lukasz Michalak.



Installation view of *Margaret Watkins: Black Light*, curated by Anne Morin, produced by diChroma Photography, Kutxa Kultur Artegunea, San Sebastian, Spain, 2021. Courtesy of diChroma Photography. Photo credit: © Juantxo Egaña.

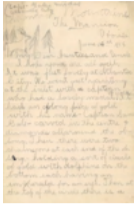


*The Kitchen Table: a Study in Ellipses*, by Paul Outerbridge, Jr., featured in *Vanity Fair* 18, no. 5, July 1922, 52. Courtesy of View: Theories and Practices of Visual Culture, Warsaw.



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Letter from Meta G. Watkins (Margaret Watkins) to Uncle Tom (Anderson), June 14, 1895. The William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton, Margaret Watkins Fonds, Box 2, f.17. Courtesy of McMaster University. © Joseph Mulholland, Glasgow.



Magazine advertisement for Edison Mazda Lamps (light bulbs), 1920s. Courtesy of Mariangela Buch Restoration on archive.org.



*The Manger*, 1899, by Gertrude Käsebier. Collection of the Art Institute of Chicago, Gift of Mina Turner (1973.40). Courtesy of the Art Institute of Chicago.



*Margaret Watkins*, c.1919, by Alice Boughton. Collection of The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow. Courtesy of The Hidden Lane Gallery.



*Margaret Watkins*, 1921, by Frances Bode, Clarence H. White School of Photography. Collection of The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow. Courtesy of CentroCentro, Madrid. © Joseph Mulholland, Glasgow.



*Margaret Watkins's A Portrait [Bernard S. Horne]*, 1921, featured in *Shadowland* no. 8.5, July 1923, 62-63. Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., on archive.org.

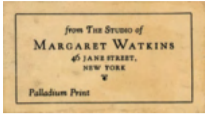


Margaret Watkins's pocket diary, 1915. McMaster University, Hamilton, The William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, Margaret Watkins Fonds, Box 5, f.4. © Joseph Mulholland, Glasgow.

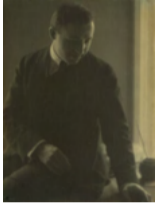


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Margaret Watkins's Studio Card, 1919-28. Collection of The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow. Courtesy of The Hidden Lane Gallery.



*Max Weber*, 1914, by Arthur D. Chapman. Collection of the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., Prints and Photographs Division, Warren and Margot Coville Collection, Purchase, Coville Photographic Art Foundation, 2000 (DLC/PP-2000:090). Courtesy of the Library of Congress.



*Mondrian's Glasses and Pipe*, 1926, by André Kertész. Thomas Walther Collection, Museum of Modern Art, New York City, Grace M. Mayer Fund (1721.2001). Courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art. © 2023 Estate of André Kertész.



*Morning*, 1905, by Clarence H. White. Collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, Alfred Stieglitz Collection, 1933 (33.43.315). Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.



*Mrs. Herbert Duckworth as Julia Jackson*, 1867, by Julia Margaret Cameron. Gilman Collection, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Purchase, Alfred Stieglitz Society Gifts, 2005 (2005.100.26). Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Newspaper clipping from the *Sun and Globe* (New York), October 24, 1923. Collection of The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow. Courtesy of The Hidden Lane Gallery.



*Oumayagashi*, from the series *One Hundred Famous Views of Edo* (*Meisho Edo hyakkei*), 1857, by Utagawa Hiroshige. Courtesy of Galerie Christian Collin, Paris.





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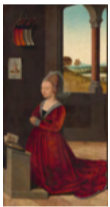
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*Peck Dam in Montana*, 1936, by Margaret Bourke-White, featured on the first cover of *LIFE* 1, no. 1, November 23, 1936. Courtesy of archive.org. The LIFE Picture Collection © Meredith Corporation.



"Photography Comes into the Kitchen," *Vanity Fair* 17, no. 2, October 1921, 60. Collection of The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow. Courtesy of The Hidden Lane Gallery.



*Portrait of a Female Donor*, c.1455, by Petrus Christus. Samuel H. Kress Collection, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. (1961.9.11). Courtesy of the National Gallery of Art.



Photograph of women with cameras at Lanier Camp, date unknown. Photographer unknown. Collection of The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow.



Portrait of Frederick W. Watkins, 1896, photographer unknown. Collection of The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow. Courtesy of The Hidden Lane Gallery.



Postage stamp from the Great Canadian Photographers series, featuring Margaret Watkins, *The Kitchen Sink*, 1919. Collection of Canada Post. Postage stamp © Canada Post 2013. *The Kitchen Sink* © Joseph Mulholland, Glasgow.



Postcard of 41 Westbourne Gardens, date unknown. Photographer unknown. Collection of The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow. Courtesy of The Hidden Lane Gallery.



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Poster for the film *Archive Traces: Margaret Watkins Photographer*, poster design by Sarah Dinnick, film directed by Mary O'Connor and Katherine Tweedie, 2022, funded by the Art Gallery of Hamilton and diChroma Photography, Madrid.



Poster for *Pressa* (World Press Exhibition), Cologne, 1928. Courtesy of thecharnelhouse.org.



Pratt & Watkins store, Hamilton, 1893. Photographer unknown. Baldwin Collection of Canadiana, Toronto Public Library (SOUV\_PIC-R-922). Photo credit: *Hamilton: The Birmingham of Canada* (Hamilton: Times Printing Company, 1893), 122.



*The Quarry at Bibémus (La carrière de Bibémus)*, 1895, by Paul Cézanne. Collection of the Museum Folkwang, Essen, Acquired in 1907, Since 1922 Essen, Confiscated in 1937, Re-acquired in 1964 with the support of the Westdeutschen Rundfunk. Courtesy of the Museum Folkwang. Photo credit: © Museum Folkwang.



*Satiric Dancer*, 1926, by André Kertész. Collection of the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles (84.XM.193.29). © André Kertész Estate.



Clarence H. White (*seated centre*) and Gertrude Käsebier (*seated right*), with students, Summer School of Photography, Five Islands, Maine, c.1913. Photograph by Gertrude L. Brown. Collection of the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., Prints and Photographs Division (PH - Brown [G]), no. 1 (A size [P&P]). Courtesy of the Library of Congress.



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"Take a Kodak with you," date unknown, by Eastman Kodak Company. Collection of the George Eastman Museum, Rochester (2005.001.03.3.093). Courtesy of the George Eastman Museum.



*Typewriter Keys*, 1921, printed 1945, by Ralph Steiner. Collection of the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., Prints and Photographs Division (2004666344). Courtesy of the Library of Congress. © Ralph Steiner Estate.



*Untitled (Anna Romana Wright reading by candlelight)*, c.1795, by Joseph Wright of Derby. Collection of the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Gift of Alina Cade in memory of her husband Joseph Wright Cade, 2009 (2009.562). Courtesy of the National Gallery of Victoria. Photo credit: Digitisation Champion Ms. Carol Grigor, Metal Manufactures Limited.



*Untitled [Two women under a tree]*, c.1910, by Alice M. Boughton. Collection of the George Eastman Museum, Rochester, Purchase (1973.0023.0005). Courtesy of the Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C., on flickr.com.



*With a Board*, 1929, by Boris Ignatovich. Various collections. Courtesy of Nailya Alexander Gallery, New York. © Boris Ignatovich Estate, Moscow.



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# MARGARET WATKINS

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