



Alfred Stieglitz (American, 1864–1946)

The Hand of Man

1902

Photogravure

Alfred Stieglitz Collection

AIC accession number: 1949.850

Stieglitz Estate number: 123A

Inscriptions: No markings recto or verso

Dimensions: 24.2 x 31.8 cm (image); 30 x 37.7 cm (paper); 35 x 50 cm (mount)

Print thickness: NA

Surface sheen: Low gloss (5.8 GU @ 85°)

Paper tone: L*75.63, a*4.83, b*20.84

Mount: Original

Mount tone: L*86.76, a*1.12, b*15.01

Ultraviolet-induced (UV) visible fluorescence (recto): None

X-ray fluorescence (XRF) spectrometry:
N/A

Fourier transform infrared (FTIR) spectrometry:
N/A

CONTEXT

This photograph, taken from the back of a moving train, was published in the first issue of *Camera Work*, in January 1903. A note in the issue explained the image as conveying not the contrast between man and machine, but rather a link between art and the everyday: “The Hand of Man by Alfred Stieglitz, the last plate in this number, is an attempt to treat pictorially a subject which enters so much into our daily lives that we are apt to lose sight of the pictorial possibilities of the commonplace.”¹ Evidence suggests that Stieglitz reworked the photogravure plate in order to darken the top edge, making for a more even and pleasing composition.

TECHNICAL SUMMARY

This print is a photogravure on a sheet of thin Japanese paper with deckled edges. Photogravure is an intaglio method of printing photographic images in ink. A plate mark, an embossed contour of the plate that occurs during printing, can be seen around the image area and further emphasizes the actual printing process. At the top left and top right edges of the print, patterned ink deposits indicate that the plate was mechanically reworked during printing. The paper fibers within the plate mark were heavily compressed during printing and are now very smooth compared with the rest of the paper. The print has been dry mounted overall to a pale yellow board. Adhesive residue from previous hinges is present on the verso of the mount. There are no inscriptions either on the print or on the mount. A later gelatin silver print created by Stieglitz from the same negative, also titled *The Hand of Man* (1949.703), is in the Art Institute’s Stieglitz Collection. The image in this photogravure has been cropped slightly at all sides from the original negative shown in the silver gelatin print. When the surface of the print is viewed under high magnification, the fibers from the paper are visible and the printing ink sits directly on the surface, with no intermediary binder. The print is extremely matte and does not fluoresce when exposed to long-wave UV radiation. The printing ink is most likely carbon or an oil-based material and cannot be detected by XRF spectrometry.

¹ “The Pictures in This Number,” *Camera Work* 1 (Jan. 1903), p. 63.