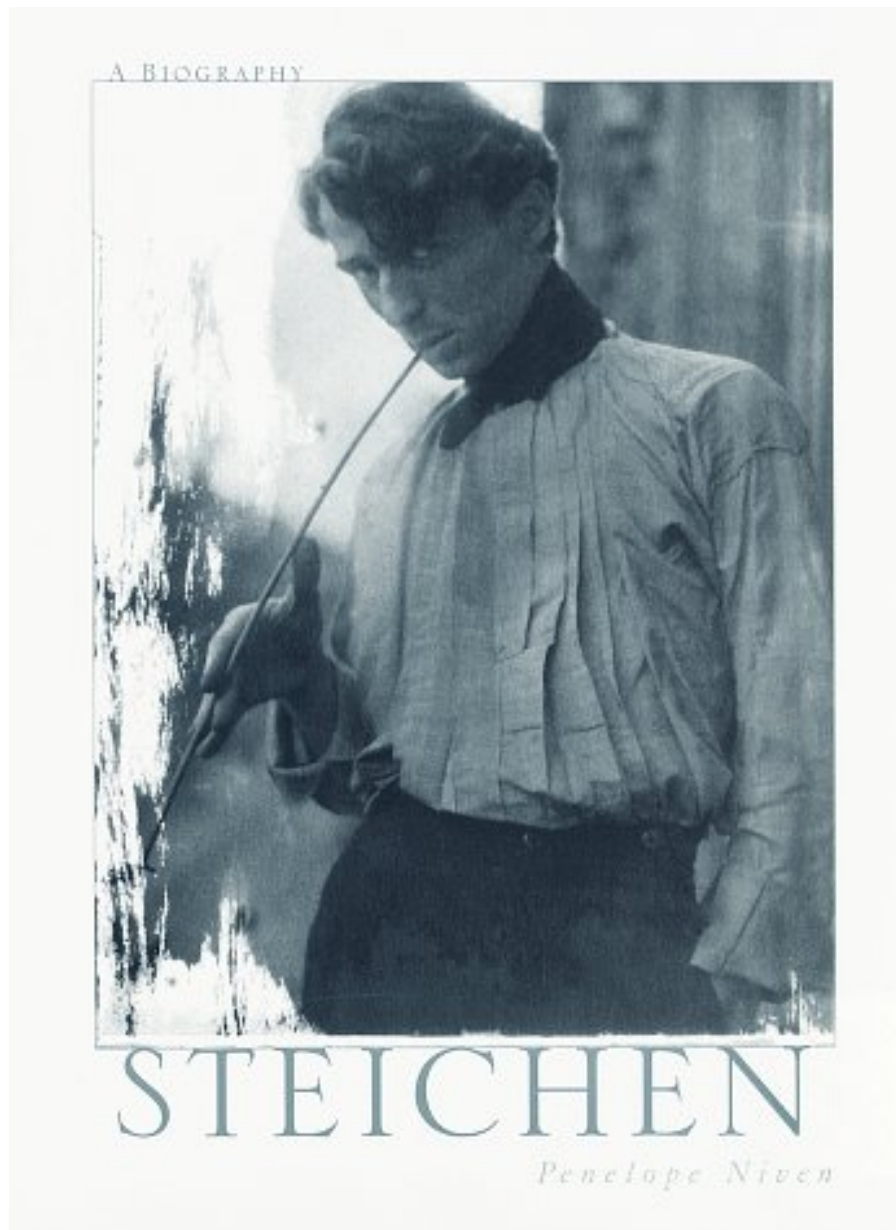


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Amazon.com Review

From his legendary association with Alfred Stieglitz in the groundbreaking 291 Gallery to his selection of photographs for The Family of Man exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art, Edward Steichen (1879-1973) stood at the forefront of artistic innovation in America and Europe. Penelope Niven, biographer of Carl Sandburg (Steichen's brother-in-law), affectionately depicts her subject. She carefully assesses Steichen's three marriages, his supportive relationships with other artists, and the humanistic vision that informed his photography. Her comprehensive study reminds us of Steichen's central role in elevating photography to a crucial 20th-century art form.

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Niven provides an exhaustive, oftentimes excessively meticulous, yet ultimately reverent year-by-year

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Nivens ... complements her own clear, lyrical voice with the eloquent words of Steichen's contemporaries.... for the most part she succeeds in weaving the many threads of Steichen's life into a seamless narrative. -- The New York Times Book Review, Jake Miller

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Not since 1929 has there been a biography of Edward Steichen, photographer, painter, and a pivotal yet enigmatic figure in twentieth-century art and culture on two continents. Steichen, who died just short of his ninety-fourth birthday, was fifty and internationally famous when *Steichen the Photographer* was written by his brother-in-law, the poet and biographer Carl Sandburg. Now Penelope Niven, whose highly acclaimed biography of Sandburg appeared in 1991, has written the first comprehensive biography of Steichen.

Here, she illuminates the full story of Steichen's avant-garde life in Paris and New York and his roles in introducing modern art to the American audience, in shaping aerial reconnaissance photography in World War I and navy photography in World War II, in revolutionizing American fashion and portrait photography through his years as chief of photography at *Vanity Fair* and *Vogue*, and in creating the unprecedented photographic exhibition *The Family of Man*, which has touched a global audience of millions since it opened in 1955.

Searching the world over for Steichen's letters, paintings, and photographs, Niven has reconstructed his major, pioneering achievements. Steichen's enduring contributions to the fine art of photography have not been fully recognized because they have not, until now, been fully documented and placed within the context of his times and his turbulent, romantic, and often tragic personal life.

With the help of public and private papers and interviews, Niven builds a compelling portrait of the charismatic, complex, very human man behind the camera. We explore Steichen's gardens and his artful love of nature, manifested in his obsessive achievements as a master breeder of delphinium. We step inside his intimate, private world--and view his passionate attachment to his mother, his sister, and his two daughters; the heartrending battles of his first marriage; and his alleged and actual love affairs. This biography also explores Steichen's catalytic relationships with August Rodin, Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, Alfred Stieglitz, Gertrude and Leo Stein, and Carl and Lilian Steichen Sandburg.

"Steichen was a rebel, stubbornly independent and largely self-taught, who also believed passionately in the fundamental intersections of art and life," Penelope Niven writes. As this biography reveals, Edward Steichen's life, like his art, was brilliantly original, dramatic, and unforgettable.

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2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

Perhaps Out-of-Print, but Not Out-of-Mind!

By A Customer

This is an exhaustively researched and beautifully written book about a major force in American photography and American life. There have been many academic and art books devoted to the work of Edward Steichen, and he has written about himself on one or two occasions, but never had someone written the definitive biography . . . until Penelope Niven decided to do so after "getting to know Steichen" during the years she spent researching and writing about his equally famous brother-in-law, Carl Sandburg.

Readers should not be put off by the book's density (it runs to almost 800 pages). Niven is exhaustive but not exhausting, and her narrative is easy to read, detailing the long and fascinating life of an extraordinary man. The biography is also extremely accurate. Future writers in years to come will look to this book for critical source material. The author is a born researcher.

The book is presently out-of-print, a lamentable situation given the recent Whitney Museum of American Art

Steichen retrospective and a dazzling new book by Steichen's widow, Joanna Steichen. This biography, if it had been available, would have been a fine accompaniment to both, giving museumgoers and general readers the chance to learn more about this American artist, and providing a counterbalance to Joanna Steichen's more visual, personal, and introspective book.

In sum, this is the grand story of the life of an important American artist, written by a biographer not an art historian. As such, it will appeal to a wide range of readers. We look for a paperback edition of this book, and can only hope one will soon be available.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

A fine survey of an incredible life

By G. Miller

This book is an incredibly fascinating look at the life of one of the most important men in the melding of art and photography. I am accustomed to looking at photographers mostly through their work, and I was a little hesitant to actually read a biography of a photographer. But Steichen's life is so fascinating, and he existed in such a rich time period for art and photography, that I found this account to be totally enveloping. I had trouble putting this book down, all 700 pages of it. Really a must book for any photographer to understand the roots of a Master photographer/artist and also the emergence of photography as a true fine art form. It is well worth investing the time to read this book.

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

The only biography about an extraordinary man

By A Customer

Surprisingly, this is the only biography I have found so far about Edward Steichen. Thank goodness it is an excellent one, combining extraordinary research with fine writing. For those interested in Edward Steichen's long and productive life as well as his work, this is a "must have" book, especially now that there is a retrospective exhibition of his work at the Whitney Museum in New York.

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