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CALENDAR

ART PICKS OF THE WEEK

CAMERA WORK ARTISTS, LOUIS EILSHEMIUS

Until the 1913 Armory Show, the most dependable place to see modernist art in America was Alfred Stieglitz's little New York gallery and its attendant magazine. The gallery and its periodical were first called Camera Work, together championing the "pictorialism" that constituted American photography's cutting edge at the turn of the century. Stieglitz practiced this lens-borne impressionism even as he preached it, until he tired of the fuzzies and began championing a sharper, cleaner, more "objective" manner of photographing the world. The shift in Stieglitz's interest coincided with his expansion of his gallery's purview, into modernist painting. Most accounts segue into the Stieglitz-Georgia O'Keeffe screenplay at this point, but this survey of Camera Work artists has nothing by O'Keeffe in it. In fact, the show emphasizes the gallery's earlier years, misty lenses and all. In this selection, which includes Stieglitz's own work and that of F. Benedict Herzog and Alvin Langdon Coburn, the best portraits, bristling with intensity, are those



The City and Birds, 1913, by Abraham Walkowitz, from "Camera Work Artists"

by Gertrude Käsebier and David Octavius Hill; Eduard Steichen takes the prize in figure composition; and Clarence White is responsible for the most engaging landscape views, poignant and filled with weather. The gallery's shift into vanguardist gear (and its change of name to "291") is modestly but pointedly represented with landscapes rendered on paper in various degrees of abstraction by Abraham Walkowitz, Oscar Bluemner and John Marin — as well as by one of the farthest-out issues of 291 magazine, the one with machine-drawing "portraits" by Francis Picabia.

Picabia was one of several Europeans zapping the Gotham scene in the 1910s with their witty provocateurship. Marcel Duchamp was another. Among Duchamp's many acts of aesthetic subversion was the championing of Louis Eilshemius, an academically trained painter and megalomaniacal eccentric whom New York's art establishment regarded as a bothersome fruitcake. Eilshemius' art does have an edge to it. His female nudes in particular, lushly and candidly depicted, certainly push the Victorian

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