

Maine and photography— *inextricably linked*

Jessica Skwire Routhier



2015 is the year of the photograph here in Maine, with the debut of the Maine Photo Project (mainephotoproject.org), a year-long celebration of photography hosted at different locations throughout the state. More than thirty participating museums, galleries, historical societies,

and other non-profit cultural organizations are offering public exhibitions, a major publication, and a variety of programs exploring Maine's role as a magnet for photographers, both as a subject and as a unique place for introspection, discourse, and innovation.

Michael Alpert, *Life Studies (Semicassis Aldrichi)*, 2013, silver-gelatin photographic print. Courtesy Ogunquit Museum of American Art.



Rose Marasco, *Paus Grange Number 540*, 1990, Ektacolor print and silver gelatin print, ©Rose Marasco, courtesy Ogunquit Museum of American Art.

Almost from their beginnings, Maine and photography have been inextricably linked. It was less than twenty years after Maine became a state that Saco native John Johnson invented (with his partner Alexander S. Wolcott) what was probably the first commercial camera in the world, in 1839-40. An early version of that camera is now on display at the Saco Museum. Mainers also played a significant role in another major watershed in photographic history: the “dry plate” process, which transformed photographers’ ability to go out into the field to capture images, including the landscape shots that have come to be almost synonymous with “Maine photography.”

Kingfield natives F.E. and F.O. Stanley (the brothers who also invented the famous early automobile the Stanley Steamer) invented a new dry-plate method in 1883 and manufactured it in their shop in Lewiston for several years, ultimately selling the patent and the business to Eastman Kodak in 1899. The Stanleys’ invention—and Kodak’s subsequent marketing of it—changed photography forever, bringing it out of the

studio and into the outdoors, and making it accessible and affordable for people from all walks of life.

Still, the equipment was awkward, at least through the turn of the century, and the chemicals used for developing were tricky, so those who immersed themselves in photography, whether they were professionals or amateurs, had to become scholars of the craft. The photographs they produced range from family snapshots to sophisticated landscapes with multiple exposures and include some of the most beautiful and beguiling Maine images ever made.

In southern Maine, three Maine Photo Project exhibitions in 2015 celebrate the photographers and photographs of this time: *Memory in Black and White: Albion Moody’s Turn-of-the-Century Photographs* at the Brick Store Museum in Kennebunk (May 8-November 3); *Emma Lewis Coleman: Photographs of Maine* at the Museums of Old York in York (May 23-October 17); and *Capturing Maine: Photographs from the Collection of Historic New England* at the Sarah Orne Jewett House Museum



Stuart
Nudelman,
Reflections,
2008, digital
photograph,
Courtesy of
Eva Nudelman.

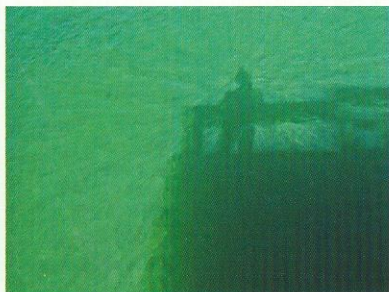
and Visitor Center in South Berwick (September 4, 2015-January 2, 2016). Moody, Coleman (*shown on page 38 of this article*), and Elise Vaughan Tyson, who is featured in the Historic New England show, all represent the vibrant photographic scene in turn-of-the-century Maine.

The allure of Maine's natural beauty—and its reputation as a peaceful but invigorating place to make art—also drew a generation of modernist photographers to the state. The Ogunquit Museum of American Art will host five Maine Photo Project exhibitions throughout 2015, and three of those are dedicated to mid-century modernist photographers who made Maine one of their major, recurring subjects: Verner Reed (May 1-31;

Reed is also represented in the Historic New England show), George Daniell (July 10-August 9), and Todd Webb (August 14-September 27). Rough contemporaries, these three photographers have many similarities: they worked mostly in black-and-white, they were interested in the faces and places of everyday life, and their photographs embrace the rich contrasts and sharp angles of the modernist movement. But the subjects of their photos range from sensitive portraits to studies of rural life to crowded city scenes, showing that there has always been diversity and depth within the Maine photographic tradition.

Diversity and depth are also among the goals of the Barn Gallery in Ogunquit, one of the state's earliest

and strongest artist associations, with roots in the nineteenth century. The gallery has long embraced both professional and amateur artists in all media, with frequent members' exhibitions as well as juried shows that are open to a larger regional community. Photography will be the focus of two such exhibitions in 2015, presented in conjunction with the Maine Photo Project: *Photography: An Open Regional Juried Exhibition* (June 24–July 25) and *Ogunquit Art Association Photographers* (September 9–October 12). The shows seem, at least in part, an homage to Stuart Nudelman, who was deeply connected to the Barn Gallery and the Ogunquit art scene and was a passionate advocate for photography, and who passed away in 2014. Nudelman's image of dock pilings and a lobster buoy reflected in rippled water (*shown at left*) is a paean to Maine photography, and Tom Hibschan's *Remembering Stuart* (*shown below*) seems almost a companion piece—the same subject, perhaps, viewed from the other side.



Tom Hibschan,
Thinking of Stuart,
circa 2013,
inkjet on Epson
archival paper,
Courtesy of the
artist.



Verner Reed, *Aroostook County Potato Picking, Maine, 1954*,
gelatin silver print. Collection of Historic New England.

In a completely different way, the ocean is also the subject of Michael Alpert's *Architectonica Chipolana* series on view at the Ogunquit Museum of American Art (October 2–31), named for a variety of fossilized shell that appears in the black-and-white photographic prints (*see page 34*). The isolated shells are spotlighted against an inky black background, with a ghostly reflection articulating the otherwise invisible surface upon which they rest. These elegantly composed photographs are studies in form and value, intensely alluring on a purely visual level—but by echoing the display techniques of museums as well as jewelers, they also pose poignant questions about what we save, value, and remember. Memory and preservation are also motifs in Rose Marasco's *Patrons of Husbandry* series, also at the OMAA (June 5–July 5). This exhibition is an accumulation of images from a decades-long project to photograph Maine's extant Grange Halls, many of which remain a vital presence in their community.

The images (*top of page 35*) are resolutely geometric, almost dispassionate. And yet the transfer from black-and-white, for the exteriors, to color, for the interiors, seems poignant and almost intimate, checked only by the camera's respectful distance from the displays at the front of each hall.

The OMAA has also put together an impressive lineup of related programs in conjunction with each of their exhibitions, including artist talks by Marasco and Alpert and a lecture by Maine State Historian Earle G. Shettleworth, Jr. (Shettleworth, along with Susan Danly and Libby Bischof, is co-author of *Maine Photographs: A History, 1840-2015*, to be published by the Maine Historical Society and Down East Books in conjunction with the Maine Photo Project, due out in September 2015.) Adding to the variety of such programs offered by its

participating organizations, the Maine Photo Project will also present special "project- wide" events to serve a broad statewide community as well as Maine's visitors: open portfolio days, a distinguished lecture scheduled for the fall, and a photography symposium on October 16 at the University of Southern Maine. Details can be found at www.mainephotoproject.org where visitors will also find a constantly changing, crowd-sourced, virtual display of photos with the Instagram tag #mephoto project. It is visible to all, and all are invited to contribute. The Maine Photo Project is an unprecedented, limited-time opportunity to explore and participate in Maine's rich photographic heritage, from its honored past to its exciting future.

The Maine Photo Project is organized and supported by the institutions of the Maine Curators' Forum and is generously sponsored by the Bates College Museum of Art, the Bowdoin College Museum of Art, and the Colby College Museum of Art, with fiscal management provided by the Maine Historical Society. Funded in part by a grant from the Maine Arts Commission, an independent state agency supported by the National Endowment for the Arts.

Emma Lewis Coleman, *Boat Sunk in the River*, circa 1882, albumen print. Museums of Old York Collection, York, Maine, P2011.5.65

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The Art Guide 2015

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