

**#84 July-Aug 2023 Cameraderie
Group f/64 (1932-35)**



Exhibition poster with an image by member Willard Van Dyke

This is the second of five articles in which I am taking up five organizations (or movements) throughout the 20th century that were major forces in the direction of American photography. There were similar organizations (or movements) in Europe and elsewhere. Some of the organizations (or movements) were international from the start.

Last month, I discussed the Photo-Secession movement. This month, I am going to discuss Group f/64. In the next three months, I will look at The Photo League, Magnum Photos, and Getty Images.

Here is the summary paragraph in the Wikipedia article

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Group_f/64):

Group f/64 or f.64 was a group founded by seven 20th-century San Francisco Bay Area photographers who shared a common photographic style characterized by sharply focused and carefully framed images seen through a particularly Western (U.S.) viewpoint. In part, they formed in opposition to the pictorialist photographic style [see last month, #83, the Photo-Secessionists] that had dominated much of the early 20th century, but moreover, they wanted to promote a new modernist aesthetic that was based on precisely exposed images of natural forms and found objects.

Note that this meant that the Group f/64 photographers were not interested in elevating photography to be in competition with drawing and painting but wanted to set it apart as a high use of the camera with all its technical capabilities—hence the name, referring to the ability to set a view camera aperture to f/64, where everything in view was in sharp focus.

The Group's inception came about as follows (again from the Wikipedia article):

In 1931, [Edward] Weston [#1, Oct. 2012] was given an exhibition at the M.H. de Young Memorial Museum in San Francisco, and because of the public's interest in that show the photographers who gathered at [Willard] Van Dyke's home decided to put together a group exhibition of their work. They convinced the director at the de Young Museum to give them the space, and on November 15, 1932, the first exhibition of Group f/64 opened to large crowds. The group members in the exhibition were Ansel Adams (10 photographs) [#12, March 2014], Imogen Cunningham [#16, Dec. 2014], John Paul Edwards, Sonya Noskowiak, Henry Swift, Willard Van Dyke, and Edward Weston (nine photographs each). Four other photographers—Preston Holder, Consuelo Kanaga, Alma Lavenson, and Edward Weston's son Brett Weston [#51, June 2020]—were invited to join the exhibition, each contributing four photographs. Edward Weston's prints were priced at \$15 each; all of the others were \$10 each. The show ran for six weeks.

You know what I am thinking, of course—Oh! to have been there and seen images by Edward and Brett Weston, Ansel Adams, and Imogen Cunningham as they “came out” to the world in this exhibit. I don't know the others yet, but we will soon meet some of them in my future articles.

Here is a statement of purpose, again from the Wikipedia article:

In 1933 Adams wrote the following for *Camera Craft* magazine:
... the Group [f/64] Exhibits suggest distinctive individual view-points, technical and emotional, achieved without departure from the simplest aspects of straight photographic procedure.

So that's it: “straight photography,” tiny aperture; in other words, use the camera to the limit of its technical ability to capture images. It was Adams who wrote the book, *The Camera* (as well as *The Print* and *The Negative*).

Here is a short article from the Metropolitan Museum of Art in NYC that sums everything up: [Group f/64 | Essay | The Metropolitan Museum of Art | Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History \(metmuseum.org\)](https://www.metmuseum.org/education/essays/group-f64)

FYI: For most of you—living I presume in the DC area—consider visiting the Department of the Interior (DOI) headquarters building downtown. It is just a couple of blocks west of the White House, and its main hallways are filled with 26 giant Ansel Adams prints, installed in 2010 by Department Secretary Ken Salazar. Public tours of the entire highly artistic DOI building, including the Adams prints, are available by appointment: call the DOI Museum at 202-208-4743 to make an appointment. If you can't go in person, here is the DOI link: <https://www.doi.gov/photos/news/photos/Ansel-Adams-Mural-Project-Opens-at-Interior-Department>.

Here is another excellent article about the DOI Adams prints: <https://www.npr.org/2010/03/27/125228486/forgotten-ansel-adams-murals-brought-back-to-light>

Here are some samples of the Group f/64 work. You may recognize the style of the photographers, although I have taken care not to reproduce images I have shown in earlier articles.

Edward Weston, Church Door, Hornitos, 1940.



Talk about view camera detail!

Ansel Adams, In Saguaro National Monument, Ariz., National Archives.



Note that this, and many other Ansel Adams images, are in the public domain, as Adams shot them while on assignment for the U.S. Government to document our National Parks. Anyone can download and print them. Here is an interesting article from the National Archives telling the story, together with links to a large number of Adams' images you can download, some quite famous ones: <https://www.archives.gov/research/ansel-adams>

Imogen Cunningham, Martha Graham.



One of a series of portraits that Cunningham did of Martha Graham. I like this one the best. Look at those shadows.

Imogen Cunningham, Martha Graham dancing.



A neat capture of rhythm in still photography—quite a feat.

Willard Van Dyke, Untitled, 1934.



This is the juxtaposition of found objects that we are all watching out for.