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Edward Steichen and Hollywood Glamour

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Abstract

As a word, glamour is hard to define, but is instantly recognizable. Its association with Hollywood movie stars fully emerged in the 1930s in the close-up celebrity portraits by photographers like George Hurrell. The aesthetic properties in these images that help create glamour are characterized by the Modernist style, known for sharp focus, high contrast, seductive poses, and the close-up (tight framing). My essay will explore the origins of the visual aesthetics of glamour, arguing that their roots can be found in the still life photographs of the 1910s, produced by fine art photographers such as Edward Steichen. This essay will primarily focus on the photography of Edward Steichen because he used these same techniques found in his still life portraits on Hollywood celebrities when he began working for Condé Nast's *Vanity Fair* and *Vogue* in 1923. Steichen changed the conversation on how to photograph celebrities and his practices eventually led to the creation of glamour portrait photography. This thesis documents the ways in which Steichen established the precedent for glamour photography when he applied the close-up and Modernist style on Hollywood stars. The result of Steichen's application was photography that provided visually identifiable and mechanically reproducible glamour.

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