



THE BOOK MAKER

A TINY ONTARIO PRESS
CRANKS OUT HANDMADE
LIMITED-EDITION WORKS WHILE
BREATHING LIFE INTO THE
LOST ART OF THE BOOK.



Michael Torosian stands at his letterpress, feeds it a single sheet of 100-per-cent rag paper bought from an English mill, and cranks out a page printed with a portion of a text he has written about the work of American photographer Edward Steichen. With the exception of the writing, these are actions he would repeat approximately 18,000 times in the production of *Steichen: Eduard et Voulangis* in the fall of 2011. Writer, photographer, curator, designer, typesetter, publisher, printer—Torosian is the very definition of the one-man band.

Not surprisingly, then, he was also so busy last year he blanked on his own 25th anniversary. “I might have done a commemorative edition or something, but I was so steeped in the Steichen book I didn’t notice,” he admits. The occasion was certainly auspicious: His publishing company, Lumiere Press, passed the silver mark in 2011 at a time when publishing

houses of all sizes and stripes were struggling to regain their footing or to carve out new territory in a digital world many don’t really understand or resist outright.

Unlike most of these publishers, however, Torosian isn’t making fast tracks toward apps, interactive user experiences and a paperless universe. Rather, he spends his time methodically, mechanically, setting type on a 1950s-era hot-lead Intertype machine. That’s right—he sets type. In addition, with the help of a single assistant, the self-taught publisher and entrepreneur designs page layouts, prints on individual sheets of hand-picked paper and binds his handiwork into a book. Much of this activity is carried out in a workshop—which he constructed himself, naturally—in his Toronto backyard. His print run for any edition usually runs to between 200 and 250 copies, and working at this rate, he produces about one book per year. This is what he’s been doing for 25 years. —Carolyn Kennedy

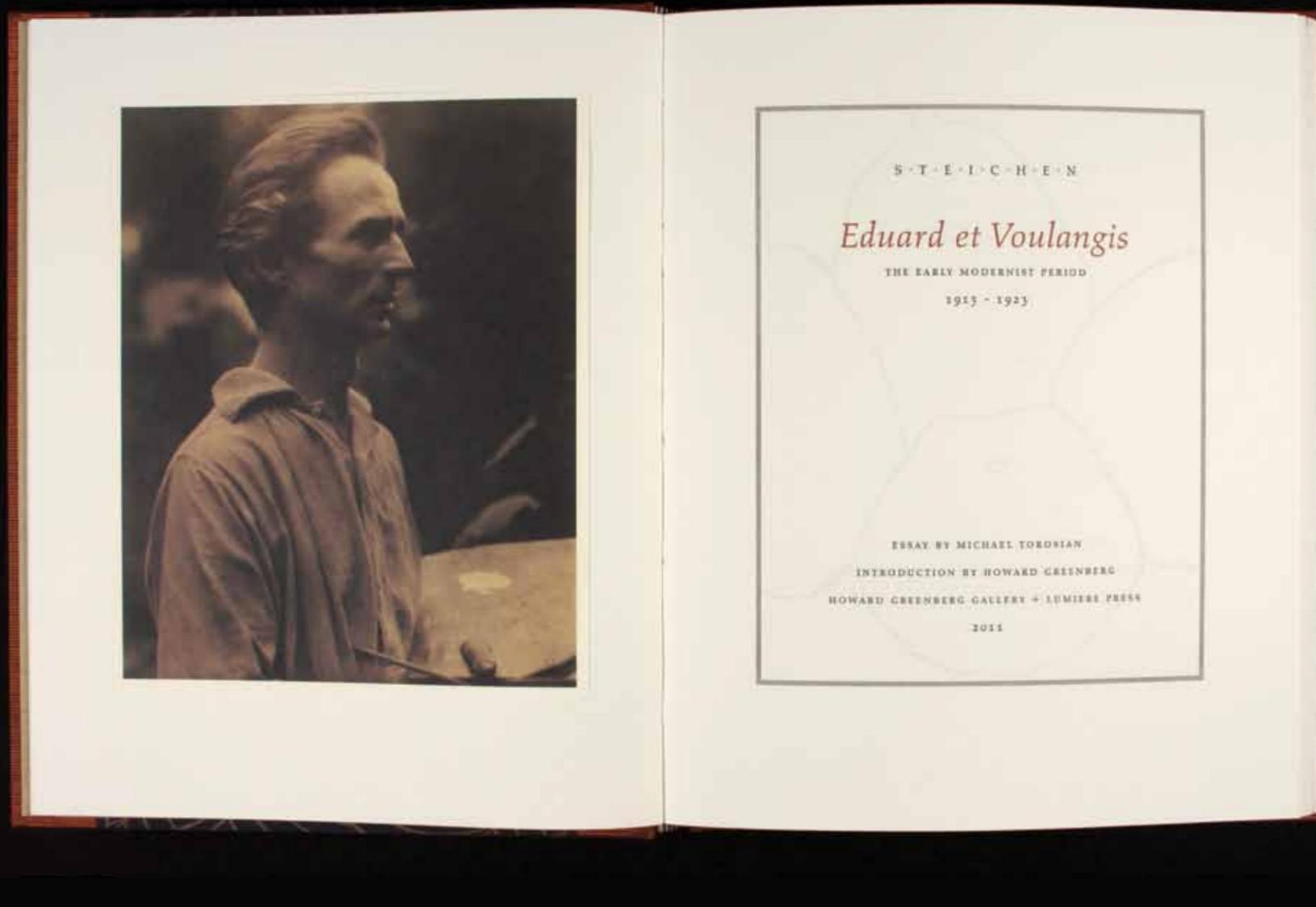
WORKSHOP PHOTOS COURTESY MICHAEL TOROSIAN

The first Lumiere Press book, on another American photographer, Edward Weston, was published in 1986.

The press also published Canadian photographer Edward Burtynsky’s first book, in 2001.

Remarkably for a book publisher, the entire Lumiere Press backlist is sold out. More than 100 libraries and museums worldwide hold the books. Last fall, the Special Collections Department at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland acquired the complete collection of Lumiere Press work.

Left: *Untitled (Man with Cap and Cigar)*, Edward Steichen, c. 1915



ON HIS BEGINNINGS

“ When I started publishing I took complete control. I came up with a template for the books—a business plan would be too grandiose a title. I don’t think I knew what I was doing, but little by little, I suppose I refined the business model. I always work with absolute editorial autonomy. ”



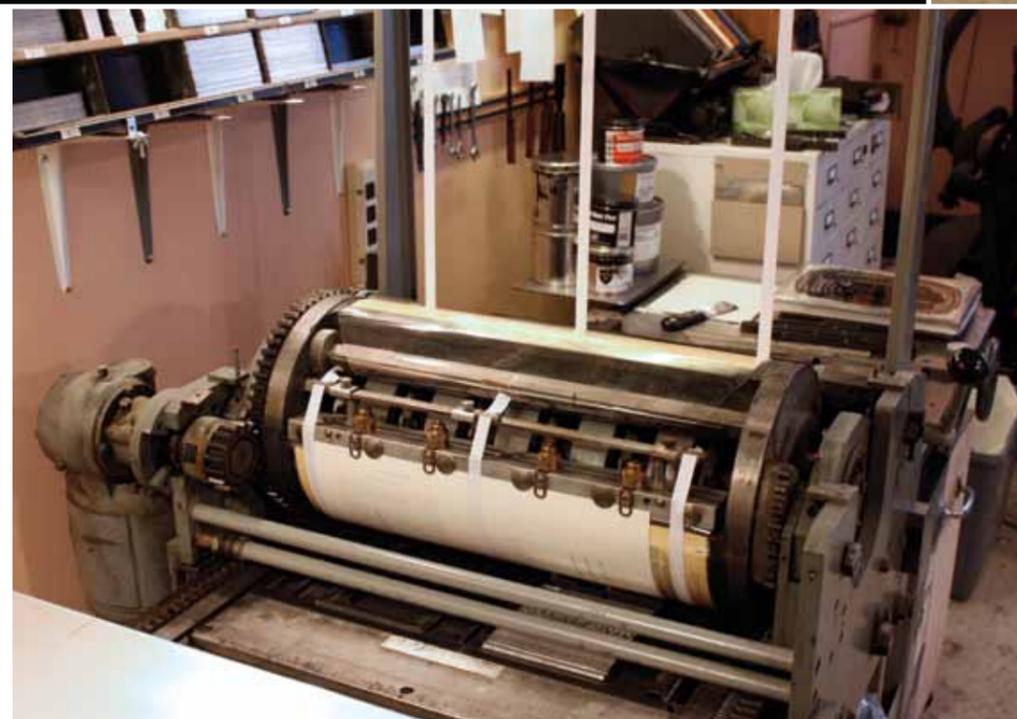
ON PHOTOGRAPHY

“ I think books are the best medium for photography. Until recently, most photographs that existed were contact prints, usually about 8” by 10”, usually only seen in exhibitions. And over their careers, photographers have produced monographs of their work. But they’ve discovered, over the last 50 years, that the only way to stay current with photography is through books; the two are highly amenable in scale and process. ”

To create the book, images were photographed using an extraordinarily high-resolution digital camera; it produces a 289-megabyte file for each 8”-by-10” photo. The idea is to give the reader, as closely as possible, the sense of holding the original prints. To this end, each plate is hand-tipped onto the page.

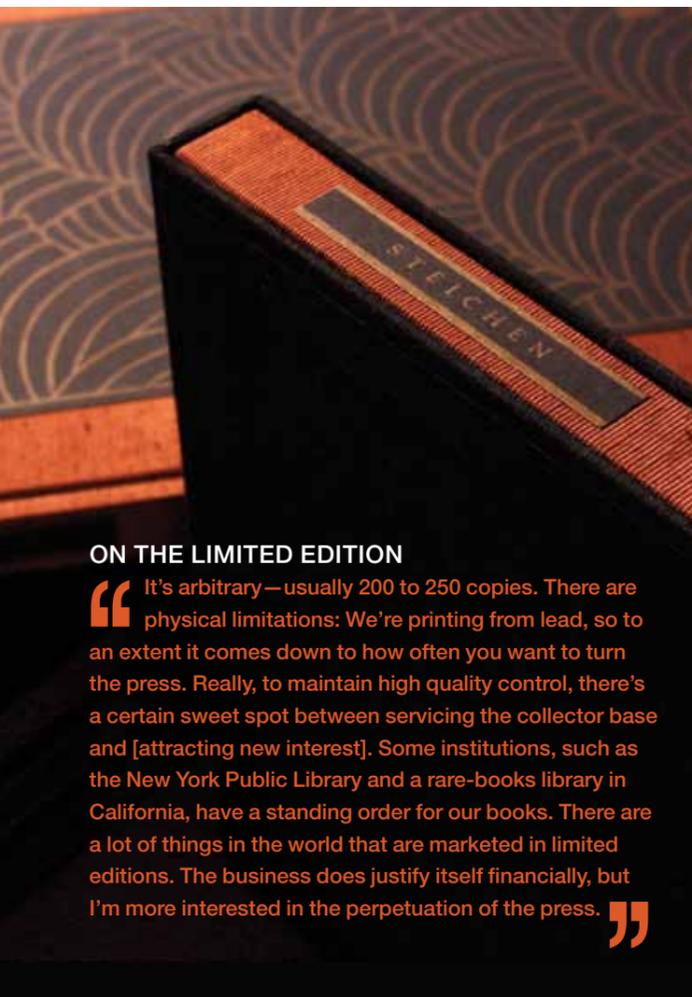
Three never-before-published photographs appear in *Steichen: Eduard et Voulangis*. The book covers a period in the photographer’s career during and after the First World War, when he lived and worked in the village of Voulangis, France. The three images were reproduced from the only prints Steichen made of them, when he returned from France after the war. These images, included here, are *Untitled (Man with Cap and Cigar)*, c.1915, and *Untitled (Coal Stove with Poker)*, c. 1920. The third, *Self-Portrait*, c. 1915, appears on the title spread of the book (above). Photographs courtesy Lumiere Press and Howard Greenberg Gallery.

Above left: *Untitled (Coal Stove with Poker)*, Steichen, c. 1920



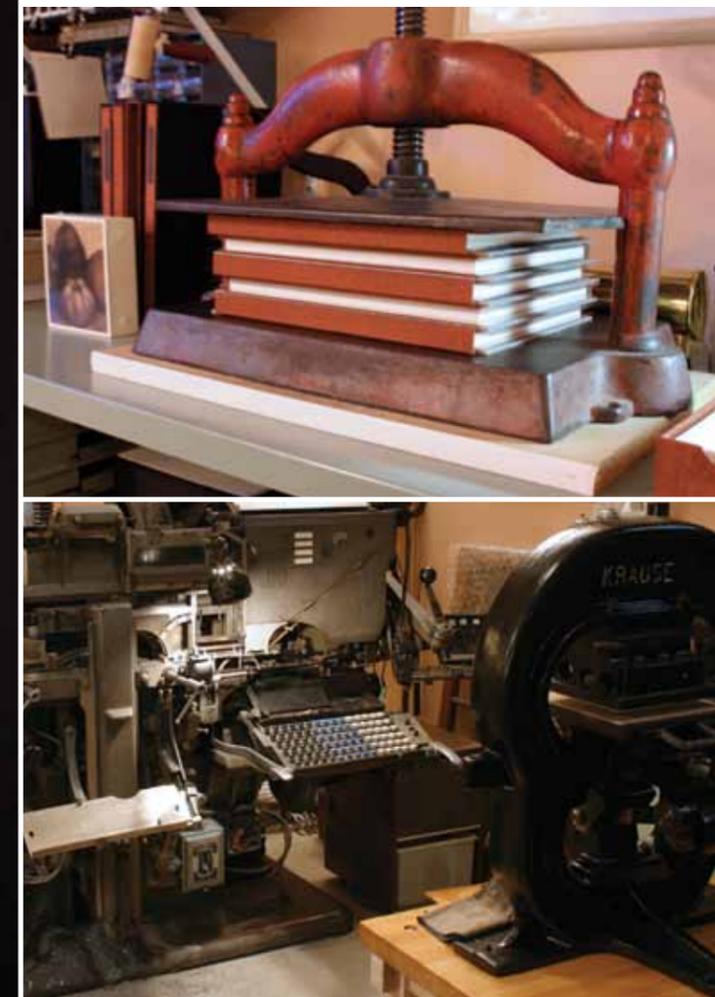
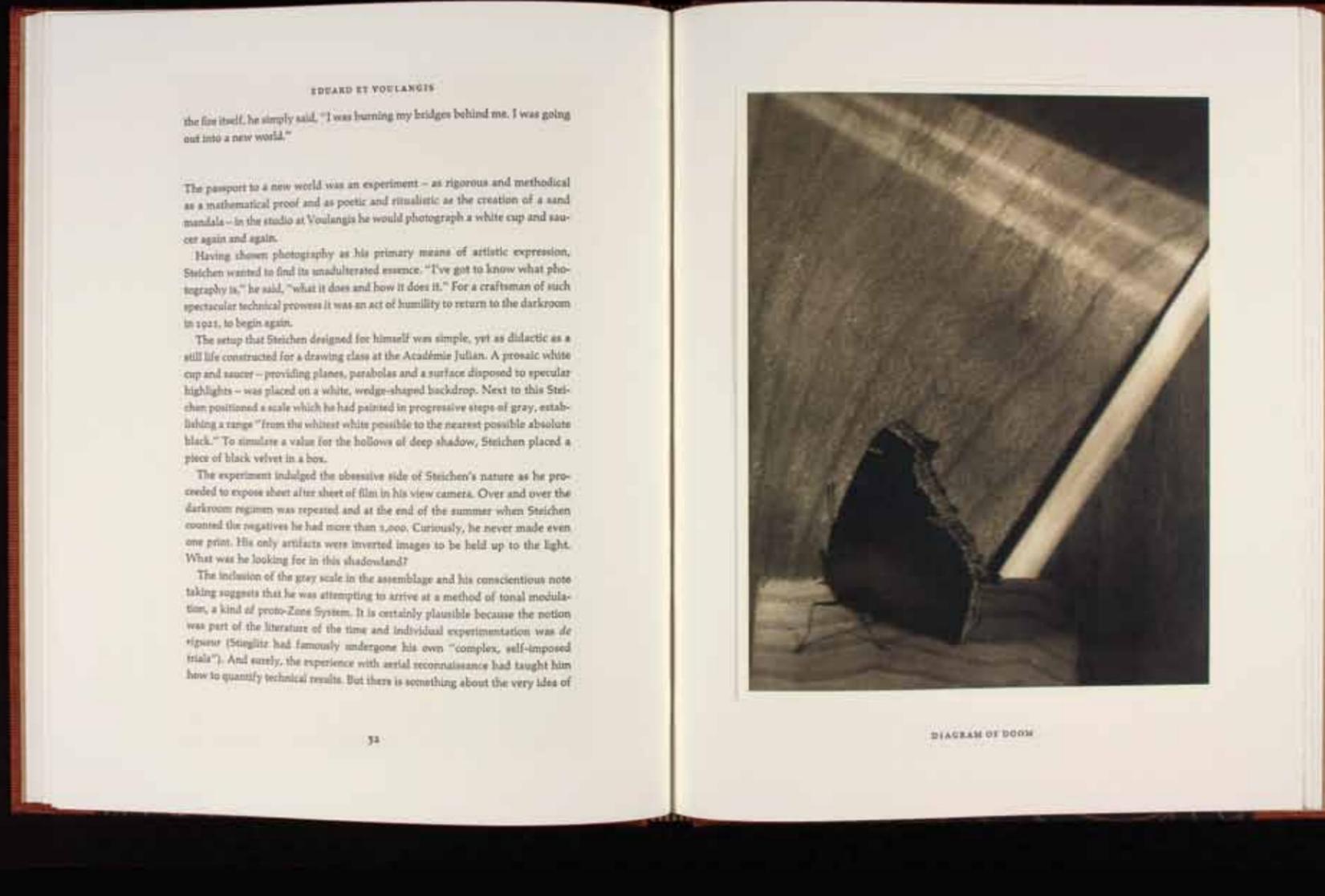
Steichen’s widow, Joanna, kept a substantial archive of his material, finally revealing the work in the late 1990s. Its impact at the time was such that it elevated the status of New York City’s Howard Greenberg Gallery, the estate’s representative. Greenberg, in turn, who had a long business association with Torosian, suggested they co-publish the work.

The idea of a book on Edward Steichen is something Torosian had considered for many years. The edition of 250 copies of *Steichen* was launched in New York City in December 2011. It is 55 pages and its price is set at \$650.



ON THE LIMITED EDITION

“It’s arbitrary—usually 200 to 250 copies. There are physical limitations: We’re printing from lead, so to an extent it comes down to how often you want to turn the press. Really, to maintain high quality control, there’s a certain sweet spot between servicing the collector base and [attracting new interest]. Some institutions, such as the New York Public Library and a rare-books library in California, have a standing order for our books. There are a lot of things in the world that are marketed in limited editions. The business does justify itself financially, but I’m more interested in the perpetuation of the press.”

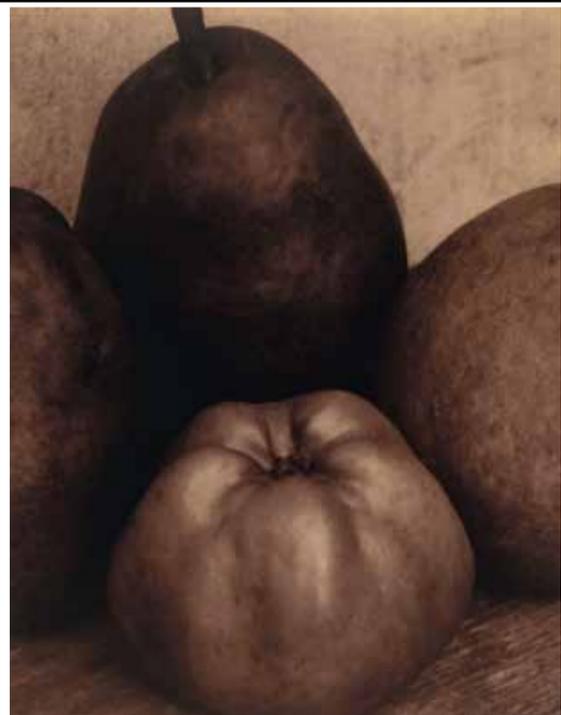


The spine and edges of *Steichen* are covered in copper-coloured Japanese silk. The book was set in 10-point Palatino and printed on 100-per-cent rag paper, custom-made at a mill in England for this edition.

Torosian casts type in lead on a 1950s Model C4 Intertype machine, which dates to 1911. It’s a contemporary of the Linotype, the industry standard from the late 1800s. Both machines were used through the 20th century.

To cast type, Torosian sits at a keyboard divided into lower case, upper case and punctuation keys. Each keystroke causes a small brass mould with an engraving of the character (in roman and italic) to drop down a chute onto a shelf—the composing stick—where the characters slowly assemble into words and sentences. The brass moulds, known as matrices, are then injected with molten lead. A collection of type—or a slug—is placed on the press, inked and a proof is pulled. A single day’s production results in about three pages of type.

Right: *Three Pears and an Apple*, Steichen, 1920



ON THE IMPACT OF THE INTERNET

“Once people got addicted to buying books on the Internet, it changed the whole mindset. I don’t think there’s anything to be done about that. But although I don’t earn anything directly from the resale of my books that way, on the other hand, I’m the beneficiary of the aura when one of my books is sold on eBay at a higher price.”