## Antoinette Detcheva, 1938



In 1916 Johan Hagemeyer, a Dutch born horticulturalist, vegetarian, intellectual, anarchist, and amateur photographer, met Alfred Stieglitz in his New York Gallery "291." According to Hagemeyer, this single encounter with the brilliant and influential Stieglitz, the first American champion of the notion of photography as art, encouraged him to pursue a career in photography and abandon plans to grow fruit trees in California. Soon after, Hagemeyer met and developed a close friendship with another young photographer, Edward Weston. The two men spent a good deal of time together for the next several years. Hagemeyer, at the time, was photographing the landscape in the prevailing Pictorialist, soft-focus style, often recording its industrial aspects, then considered unaesthetic, even radical.

The Pictorialist style dominated photography for the first two and a half decades of this century. Its proponents believed that by making romantic, impressionist scenes that relied heavily on the painting styles of artists such as James McNeill Whistler, they could elevate photography to the status of a fine art. However, by 1924 Weston was convinced that the camera should accentuate its natural objectivity. He criticized Hagemeyer's urban landscapes as "nicely seen, but lacking in definition--an inexcusable fault when it comes to photographing modern architecture and machinery--even the 'mood' could be better interpreted with sharp clean lines." (The Daybooks of Edward Weston, Vol. I).

By the early twenties Hagemeyer had opened a portrait studio in San
Francisco. He also built a
summer studio in Carmel, then
as now a wealthy summer resort.
At the height of his career,
Hagemeyer's studio was a meeting
place for artists and intellectuals. From the twenties
through the forties he photographed leading figures of
the day.

Influenced by Stieglitz, Hagemeyer used only natural light and, for the most part, practiced a straightforward, informal style. Many of his images are sharply focused, though he permitted himself the option of using a softfocus lens if in so doing he could best express the desired mood. Even though the practice was frowned upon by Weston, Hagemeyer regularly retouched his photographs as well. Hagemeyer's refusal to adhere strictly to Weston's formal tenets which, simply stated, were based on giving the viewer only a sharply focused, unretouched reproduction of what the camera actually saw, was a major cause in the growing alienation of the two men. When Weston, Ansel Adams and others founded Group f/64, devoted to the straight, unmanipulated photograph, Hagemeyer did not join. His romantic view of the artist as one who is destined to struggle alone in creating his art precluded involvement in any group. "Why should I be a copy, a second, third, or fifth-rate Edward Weston...I just go my own way...it was too one-sided." (Oral history, p. 61. Courtesy of The Bancroft Library.)

Though Hagemeyer remained independent, he was working in the modern spirit, using a 4" x 5" view camera and preferring the clarity of the contact print to the enlargement. He exploited the innate

qualities of the medium to uncover the personality of the sitter and often produce portraits as true as any of Weston's. The contact prints tend to be sharper than the enlarged prints as the enlarging process always results in some loss of definition. Also, a glossy, white paper has a tonal range from bright white to dense black, as in the haunting, light-streaked portrait of Hagemeyer's mistress, the dancer Elsa Naess; whereas the matte, cream-colored paper Hagemeyer most often used in the enlargements, as in the portrait of Robinson Jeffers with its predominant middle values, creates an overall softer quality. The light quality in Hagemeyer's portraits in general is rarely as harsh as the brutal light found in Weston's Mexican portraits, for instance. Though Hagemeyer and Weston may have differed on several points, they shared a preference for simple means, unlike Ansel Adams, for example, who was always profoundly engaged in the technical aspects of the medium.

Though most of Hagemeyer's portraits on view were no doubt commissioned by the sitter, Hagemeyer never looked upon his work as merely commercial. "I tell my subjects so often, 'I don't try to please your wife, your children, your grandfather... I have got to be pleased myself. " (Oral history, p. 90. Courtesy of the Bancroft Library.) Hagemeyer developed a remarkable speed abetted by his intuitive sense of light, enabling him to photograph the sitter almost without his or her awareness of the camera. All of the photographs in the exhibition were

almost all cases, the sitter is placed before a neutral background. Characteristically, Hagemeyer portrays only the upper portion of the body, never the full figure. At times, he crops extremely close to the head, in some instances cutting off a portion of it, as in the portraits of Lincoln Steffans and Tina Modotti. The effect is to concentrate all attention on the face. In contrast with the theatrical styles of fashionable portrait photographers of the time such as Yousuf Karsh and Edward Steichen who romanticized and flattered their subjects, Hagemeyer attempted to reveal something personal of the individual. There is an unpretentiousness in most (though some of the actors in the group such as Judith Anderson and John Carradine seem posed). Hagemeyer left Carmel in 1947, disgusted with its commercialism, and continued working in San Francisco. As he grew older, he became increasingly bitter, perhaps envious of the success of Weston and Adams. It therefore became more and more difficult for Hagemeyer to find customers, and he was known to drive away those few who came, once refusing to photograph a man who had come a great distance because his face lacked "character." Hagemeyer's last years were spent in Berkeley. He died poor and virtually forgotten in 1962 at the age of 78. We gratefully acknowledge The Bancroft Library, which owns the largest archive of Hagemeyer's work, for their

printed by Hagemeyer at the

time they were taken. In

Constance Lewallen

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Works in MATRIX:

All works are lent by the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley. All are gelatin-silver prints.

Judith Anderson, 1941, 9 1/2" x 7 1/4". Martin Baer, 1942, 4 3/4" x 3 5/8". Beniamino Bufano, 1938, 3 5/8" x 4 5/8". John Carradine, 1944, 9 1/8" x 7 3/8". Salvador Dali, 1944, 3 5/8" x 4 5/8". Antoinette Detcheva, 1938, 3 5/8" x 4 5/8". Albert Einstein, 1945, 9 3/8" x 7 1/8". Alfred Frankenstein, 1939, 4 1/2" x 3 1/2". Mrs. Fenner (Esther) Fuller, 1946, 4" x 5". Roland Hayes, 1927, 9" x 6 1/4". Michio Ito, 1938, 9 1/8" x 6 5/8". Robinson Jeffers, 1932, 8 1/2" x 6". Tina Modotti, (n.d.), 9 1/8" x 6 5/8". Elsa Naess, 1931, 8 1/2" x 7 1/4". Radiana Pazmore, 1938, 9 1/4" x 7 1/8". Ezio Pinza, 1944, 9 1/4" x 7 1/8". Robert Pollack, 1928, 6 1/2" x 8 3/4". Vincent Price, 1948, 5" x 4". Lincoln Steffans, 1932, 9 1/8" x 6 5/8". Varda, 1942, 9 3/4" x 7 1/8". Edward Weston, (n.d.), 8 7/8" x 6 3/4''. Elaine Whitaker, 1941, 4 5/8" x 3 1/2".

Portrait of Johan Hagemeyer by George Smith, 1942, 10"x 8".

Selected one-person exhibitions:
Gumps Gallery, San Francisco
'25 (with Edward Weston);
M.H. de Young Museum, San
Francisco '33, '38; Oakland
Art Museum, CA '55.

Selected group exhibitions:

Golden Gate International
Exposition, San Francisco '39;
Photography in the Twentieth
Century, The National Gallery
of Canada, Toronto '67 (traveling exhibition, cat. pub.);
California Pictorialism, San
Francisco Museum of Modern
Art '77 (traveling exhibition,
cat. pub.); Photography Rediscovered, Whitney Museum of
American Art, NY '79 (cat.
pub., essay by David Travis).

Selected bibliography about Hagemeyer:

Kestler, Aline. "The Man Who Paints With a Camera,"

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Magazine (April '27).

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Hagemeyer, Johan. "Johan Hagemeyer: Photographer," typescript of an oral history conducted 1955 by Corinne L. Gilb, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1956, 107 p.

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Weston, Vol. I Mexico, Vol.
II California. Nancy Newhall,
Ed. (NY: Aperture '73).

Lyons, Nathan. Photography in the Twentieth Century (NY: George Eastman House of Photography '67).

Maddow, Ben. <u>Faces</u>
(Boston: New York Graphic Society; Little, Brown and Co. '77).

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