

WORLD RECORD



TAFT MUSEUM OF ART

Craft and Camera: The Art of Nancy Ford Cones

October 1, 2022–January 15, 2023

For more than thirty years, on a small riverside farm in Loveland, Ohio, Nancy Ford Cones created photographs that earned her an international reputation. Despite the praise they received during her lifetime, Cones's imaginative and exquisitely crafted works were largely forgotten after her death. This exhibition celebrates the gifted artist's career and her contributions to the field of photography. Cones made thousands of photographs that featured country life, fantastical visions, and literary characters, employing the help of neighbors, friends, and family who posed in costume around the farm and its environs. Working in partnership with her husband, James, who printed her work using a variety of techniques and papers, Cones conceived evocative subjects that fortified photography's status as a fine art. Her images were published in prestigious journals such as *Camera Craft*, as well as in popular outlets including *National Geographic* magazine and Kodak advertisements. The first major presentation of her work, this exhibition demonstrates that Cones was an exceptional artist who rivaled the top photographers of her time.

Craft and Camera: The Art of Nancy Ford Cones is a curated exhibition for the 2022 FotoFocus Biennial: *World Record*. Now in its sixth iteration, the 2022 FotoFocus Biennial encompasses more than 100 projects at Participating Venues across Greater Cincinnati, Northern Kentucky, Dayton, and Columbus, and features more than 600 artists, curators, and participants—the largest of its kind in America. The *World Record* theme considers photography's extensive record of life on earth, humankind's impact on the natural world, and the choices we now face as a global community.

CURATOR: Pepper Stetler, PhD, Associate Professor of Art and Architecture History and Associate Director of the Miami University Humanities Center, Miami University, Oxford, Ohio

Taft Museum of Art

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www.taftmuseum.org

Wed–Sun 11am–4pm

Free to Passport Holders in October
and Taft Members; \$12 for adults;
\$10 online; \$10 for seniors; \$8
online; free for active military &
youth (18 & under). Sundays Free

FOTOFOCUS

Cover Image: Nancy Ford Cones, *The Abode of the Gnomes*, about 1921. Kallitype tissue print, 9½ × 6¾ inches.
Collection of W. Roger and Patricia K. Fry



John R. Schmidt (b. 1878)
Twenty-Third Wedding Anniversary, 1923
Gelatin silver print
6¾ × 8¼ inches
Collection of Randle and Cristina Egbert



Nancy Ford Cones
The Camera Club Picnic, 1923
Gelatin silver print
7 × 9 inches
Loveland Museum Center, 1983.048.105



Threading the Needle or Helping Grandmother Sew, 1907
(negative 1903)
Gelatin silver print
9 7/8 x 7 7/8 inches
Dayton Art Institute, Gift of Miss Jane Reece, 1952.19.495



Mama's Kodak, about 1912
Gelatin silver print
6 x 4 3/8 inches
Collection of W. Roger and Patricia K. Fry

KODAK AND OTHER COMPETITIONS

In the decade after the Eastman Kodak Company introduced its first point-and-shoot camera in 1888, amateur photography became a national pastime. Local camera clubs and photographic societies sprang up throughout the country to foster the creativity and commitment of serious shutterbugs. Many companies such as Kodak and Bausch & Lomb established national competitions to reward committed photographers who used creative compositions and intricate printing techniques to make

artistic pictures. Cones began submitting her photographs to national competitions in 1902. Her knack for arranging scenes of rural life in formally striking and artfully lit settings earned her many prestigious prizes. Cones was so successful in Kodak's national contests that the company solicited her work directly to use in their advertisements. From 1902 until 1917, Cones produced pictures that helped Kodak promote photography as a modern leisure activity.

Cones House, Road's End, Loveland, 1908
6 3/4 x 9 inches
Multiple gum bichromate print
Loveland Museum Center, 2009.037.007



Picnic Fun on the Little Miami River, about 1912
Gelatin silver print
11 x 14 inches
The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
Gift of Margaret Ford Cones, 1983
(1983.1091.20)
Image copyright © The Metropolitan
Museum of Art
Image source: Art Resource, NY



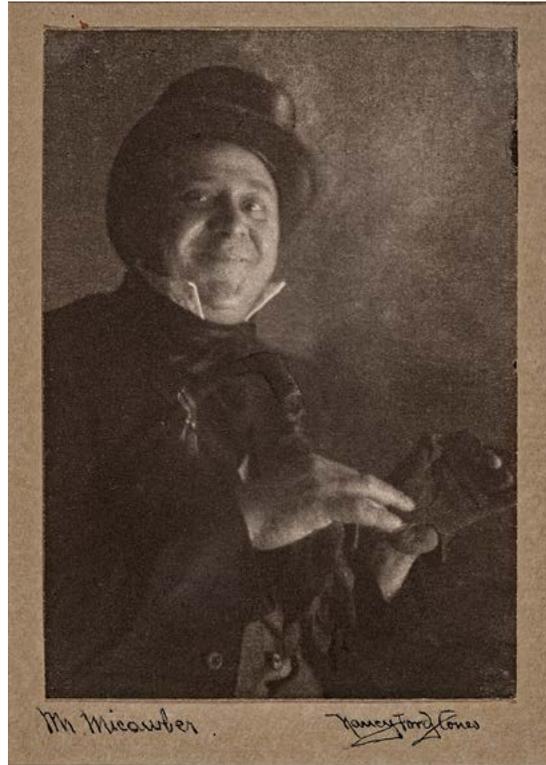
THE FARM IN LOVELAND

Home, both a concept and a physical space grounded in family and communal life, was deeply important to Cones's photographic practice. Nancy, her husband James, and their young daughter Margaret moved to a farm called Road's End in 1907. Built in 1847 along the Little Miami River, their home sat on 33 acres of land located a mile from the small town of Loveland. Their

farm and the surrounding riverbanks, walking paths, and bridges provided the setting for many of Cones's photographs. Most of the images of harvesting, planting, and outdoor leisure were taken on the farm. Cones captured the natural beauty of her everyday surroundings while also using her camera to preserve memories of family gatherings and holiday traditions.



Cinderella, about 1915
Gelatin silver print
13½ × 10½ inches
Loveland Museum Center, 2016.001.033



Mr. Micawber, about 1925
Gum bichromate print
7¾ × 5½ inches
Collection of Randle and Cristina Egbert

FAIRY TALES AND LITERARY SCENES

Cones's domestic practice of photography blended imagination and reality, transforming her extended family into fantastical characters and her farm into a variety of enchanted settings. Posing for photographs was routine for the many neighbors and family members Cones recruited to act out fairy tales in the woods around Loveland. Her daughter Margaret later recalled that dress-up was her favorite pastime: "We had to sort of make our own entertainment." Although Cones had little interest in traveling and remained in Ohio her entire life,

she drew inspiration from favorite scenes and stories from European art and literature. Cones's photographs depicted many characters from the novels of Charles Dickens. Given her own interest in visual description, it is likely that she admired the English author's close observations of human temperament. Literary references were common among Pictorialist photographers like Cones, who aspired to associate their work with the history of cultural and artistic pursuits.

The New Bonnet, 1909
Hand-colored tissue print
6½ × 4¾ inches
Collection of Randle and Cristina Egbert



Sugarmaking, 1920
Hand-colored print
4¾ × 6¾ inches
Collection of Randle and Cristina Egbert



RURAL SCENES

Pictorialism was an international movement in photography that flourished in the early 1900s. Pictorialist photographers like Cones prioritized personal expression and the material beauty of printing techniques over the documentation of reality. The subject matter of pictorial photographs was usually rural and sentimental, offering a nostalgic alternative to the rapidly modernizing world of the turn of the century. Cones drew creative inspiration from her community in Loveland. Her rural scenes feature intense studies of characters and

evocative landscapes. She approached photography as a craft, a product of layers of artistic intervention in various forms. Pictorialists cared deeply for how their images were printed, often choosing delicate papers and painterly techniques that showed the artist's hand. Nancy collaborated with her husband, James, to transform her artistic scenes into elaborate prints. James's printing talents complement the mood and atmosphere of Nancy's rural compositions.



Mrs. Lawrence Smith and Her Baby, 1932
Gelatin silver print
7¾ × 9 inches
Private collection

PORTRAITS

For over thirty years, Cones maintained a portraiture business, which provided her family with a steady income. Soon after marrying in 1900, Nancy opened a studio just across the Ohio River in Covington, Kentucky. After the Coneses moved to Loveland in 1907, clients traveled to the farm to have their picture taken. By the 1920s, Cones adapted to the burgeoning business of

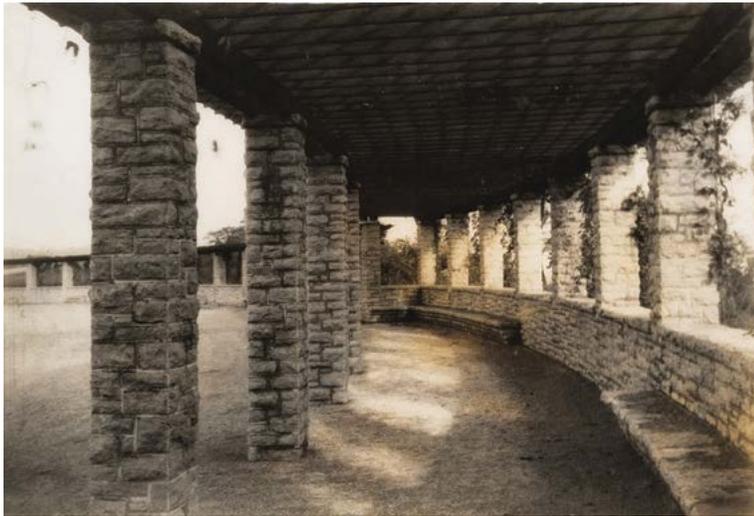
home photography, traveling to the local communities of Walnut Hills, Hyde Park, and Indian Hill to meet the demand for her pictures. While Cones saw portraiture as the more professional part of her photographic practice, it was also an expression of her artistic imagination and of her most important personal relationships with friends and family.



Portrait of an Unknown Sitter with Butterfly, about 1920
Positive digital image taken from a glass plate negative with drawing
7 × 5 inches
Collection of W. Roger and Patricia K. Fry



Maple Street, about 1926
Kallitype tissue print
4 1/16 x 6 3/4 inches
Mariemont Preservation Foundation,
1987.12.003



The Concourse, Miami Bluff Drive, about 1926
Kallitype tissue print
6 1/2 x 9 5/8 inches
Mariemont Preservation Foundation,
1987.12.015

THE MARIEMONT PROJECT

In 1926, Cones was commissioned by the Emery family, founders of the model town of Mariemont, to photograph this emerging community. Now an eastern suburb of Cincinnati, the village was envisioned as a neighborhood for families of different sizes and economic backgrounds. The Cones family moved to Mariemont for a year, living in a house on Chestnut Street. The modern amenities of their home and the structured plan of their neighborhood must have seemed worlds away from their farm.

Their decision to live in Mariemont, rather than commute from Loveland, might have been based on convenience, but it also testifies to how important it was for Cones to have an intimate, domestic connection to her subject. Some photographs in the series document the construction of Mariemont's Tudor Revival houses and tree-lined streets, while others focus on the beauty of its archways and inviting public spaces.



Spirit of the Wood, 1920
Multiple green gum bichromate print
9 x 6 3/4 inches
Loveland Museum Center, 1998.023.019

DRYADS IN THE WOODS

Cones's photographs were inspired by mythology and legend as well as by fairy tales. Around 1920, Cones posed her daughter, Margaret, and her teenage friends as dryads and woodland nymphs. Gum and softer platinum prints allowed the female figures to be suffused with an atmospheric haze. Such effects minimize the photograph's origins in reality and announce its allegiance to



The Abode of the Gnomes, about 1921
Kallitype tissue print
9 1/2 x 6 3/4 inches
Collection of W. Roger and Patricia K. Fry

the realm of artistic fantasy. Despite its artistic nature, the nude and scantily clad young women would have been considered morally suspect subjects for a rural photographer like Cones. Nudes rarely appeared in photography magazines and journals of the early 1900s, and Cones exhibited only one of her photographs of dryads during her lifetime.

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CRAFT AND CAMERA

THE ART OF

NANCY FORD CONES

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