



LOUIS COMFORT TIFFANY
PHOTOGRAPHER

FEBRUARY 13 - JUNE 10, 2001

The Charles Hosmer
Morse Museum
of American Art

WINTER PARK, FLORIDA

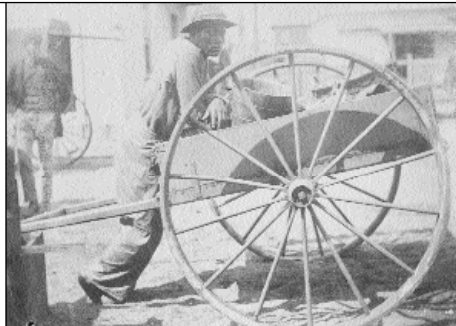
LOUIS COMFORT TIFFANY (1848-1933) was America's design master at the turn of the century. Most people know his lamps, many know his revolutionary and internationally heralded leaded windows, and some know of his mosaics and interior design. But few have any idea that he was also a photographer whose interest in the medium went beyond the help it could be on a practical level and extended to the realm of art.

This exhibition of Tiffany photographs, the first to our knowledge, is a small step toward understanding this generally unstudied creative dimension of an artist noted in his era for a "dumbfounding versatility."

The photographs of Tiffany, like much about the artist, present the inquiring eye and mind with objects of great interest and not a little mystery.

From the photographs and photographic plates that survive from Tiffany Studios in the Museum's collection, it is clear that Tiffany embraced the relatively new invention of photography enthusiastically.

Tiffany Studios used photographic images to document studio production. Also, Tiffany and his designers used photo



UNTITLED, MAN AT CART,
Sea Bright, NJ, c. 1888
Louis Comfort Tiffany (28.188)

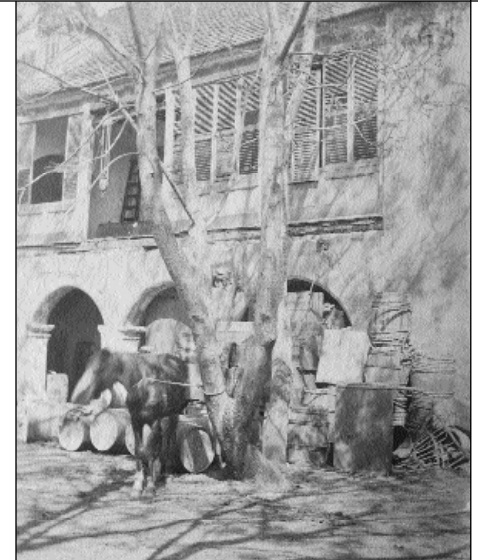
graphic images of art, architecture, and nature as sources and aids in the design process. In that many artists had similarly exploited photography as a practical tool, this is not surprising.

We know Tiffany joined one of New York's photography clubs in the early

1880s, built darkrooms in his homes, organized photography expeditions and took photographs during trips he made both in the United States and abroad. We know, too, that several and perhaps many of his own paintings were based on images from his photographs.

What is more challenging is the identification of precisely which photographs Tiffany took himself, which he collected, which he directed and which he used for what purpose. The collection shows a fascinating range of subject and styles.

We believe, however, that the photographs that were the basis of particular Tiffany paintings and those that most resemble his painting concerns and style are Tiffany's own rather than studio photographs or photographs by any other hand.



UNTITLED, SEGUI-KIRBY SMITH HOUSE,
St. Augustine, Fl, c. 1883
Louis Comfort Tiffany (28.193)

LOUIS COMFORT TIFFANY PHOTOGRAPHING
CHILDREN NEAR LEHIGH CANAL, c. 1886.
(*Photograph reproduced courtesy of
National Canal Museum, Easton, Pa.*)





UNTITLED, CASCADE AND POOL,
c. 1900, *Louis Comfort Tiffany*
(28.200)

It is these photographs that make up this exhibition of almost 30 images from the Museum's collection. In them, we recognize Tiffany's discriminating eye and what certainly must have been the artist's joy in the camera's freeing ability to capture quickly what the eye beholds.

An intriguing historical question is to what extent Tiffany viewed these photographs as works of art in a new medium versus the view that photographs were mechanical versions of preliminary sketches.

At this point in the study of Tiffany and his work, the photographs themselves are the most important evidence available to be used in forming an answer, however tentative, to this question.

Overall most of the photographs in the exhibition are in composition and subject reflective of a style of painting popular in mid to later 19th century America as practiced by artists ranging from Winslow Homer (1836- 1910) to Tiffany himself. In his photographs, just as in his paintings, his artistic concern is aesthetic rather than social. The natural world is portrayed realistically but interpreted with 19th century aesthetic idealism and a strong sense of pleasing presentation.

We believe that the photographs in this exhibition stand up to quite high aesthetic standards and that Tiffany, though he never chose to exhibit photographs, must have valued them highly.

Whatever conclusions scholars ultimately reach when this aspect of Tiffany's work is fully explored, these photographs are always interesting, often engaging and surely play an important role in our understanding of the incredible artistic life of Louis Comfort Tiffany.

On the Cover

UNTITLED, DRYING SAILS, Sea Bright, NJ, c. 1888, *Louis Comfort Tiffany* (28.078)