

Paul Outerbridge: Advertising, Abstraction, and Platinum Prints

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Employing similar stylistic and technical devices to both commercial assignments and independent experiments with photography, Paul Outerbridge Jr. (1896–1958) oriented his practice around modernist movements taking place in Europe and the United States. During the 1920s, he used platinum and palladium printing on a regular basis to make refined, formal arrangements of everyday objects including scarves, bracelets, perfumes, cracker boxes, and eggs for magazines such as *Vanity Fair* and *Harper's Bazaar*. This body of work shaped his understanding of the possibilities of tone, form, and the interplay between shadow and light. As Outerbridge observed in 1922, "Photography's monochromatic limitation at once becomes an advantage in the simplification of design."¹ The broad tonal range and surface quality of the platinum process allowed him to achieve the dramatic effects he sought in the abstract forms, repeating patterns, angular masses, and geometric planes of his photographs. He worked in an exacting manner to expose, process, and mount his prints, often in anticipation of publication in magazines. Drawing from a range of sources, particularly his personal diaries, technical notebooks, and published works and writings, this essay evaluates how platinum printing factored into both his artistic and his commercial development in the 1920s. As Outerbridge found himself consistently shifting between gallery exhibitions and the magazine page, a conflict emerged between his commitment to the unique aesthetics of platinum and the challenge of its reproduction and dissemination through advertising.

Outerbridge's Study at the Clarence H. White School of Photography

In 1915, before becoming interested in photography, Outerbridge trained at the Art Students League in New York. The league was an influential place for many emerging American artists, including Thomas Hart Benton (1889–1975), Georgia O'Keeffe (1887–1986), and Marsden Hartley (1877–1943).² Outerbridge took anatomy classes from George Bridgman and a course on perspective and compositional theory that would be foundational for his later photographic work.³ In addition to studies of the human form, Outerbridge's student notebooks from this period include a range of drawings and meticulous notes on design, perspective, and composition.⁴ These class exercises prepared him to think spatially and consider how different shapes interact.

In the fall of 1921, Outerbridge enrolled in the Clarence H. White School of Photography in New York City, founded in 1914 as the first institution dedicated to the formal instruction of the medium in the United States. The curriculum included art history, design, and photographic technique as part of a cohesive single program rather than just presenting technical knowledge of photography.⁵ Early students, including Karl Struss (1886–1981), Anton Bruehl (1900–1982), Laura Gilpin (1891–1979), and Margaret Bourke-White (1904–1971),⁶ practiced compositional exercises that informed their personal artistic vision while also making their work marketable and accessible to the public.

Clarence H. White (1871–1925) had begun exhibiting his own photographs in 1897, often using platinum to advance his artistic pursuits in the soft, atmospheric style of Pictorialism. He passed his knowledge of platinum and other processes on to his students, whose work frequently appeared in magazines as advertisements or as accompaniment to articles. White's students explored a style of photography that applied controlled focus, dramatic angles, and several gradations of tone to commonplace

Figure 1. Paul Outerbridge, *Ide Collar*, 1922. Platinum print, 11.9 × 9.2 cm. The Museum of Modern Art, Gift of the Photographer, 393.1972. © 2016 G. Ray Hawkins Gallery, Beverly Hills, California.

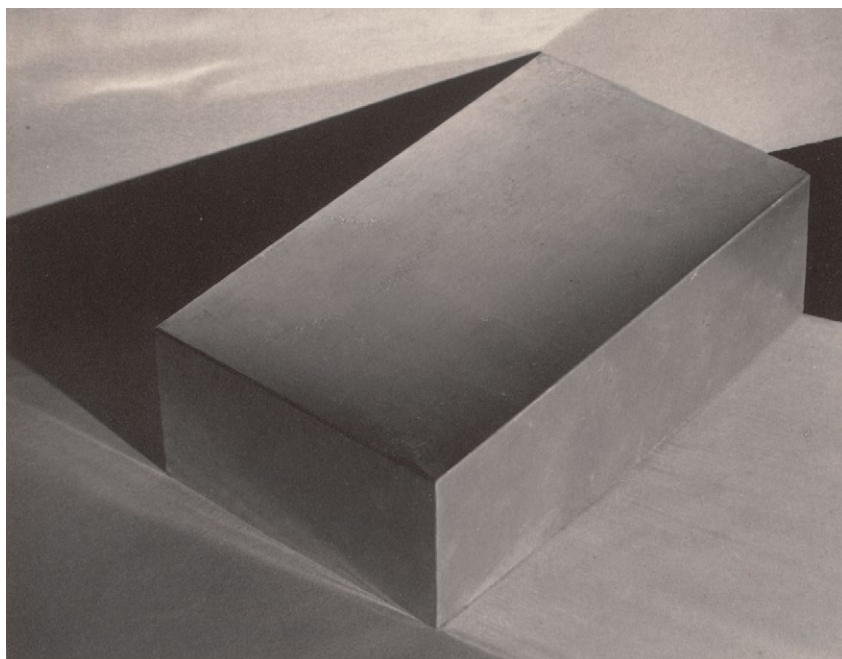


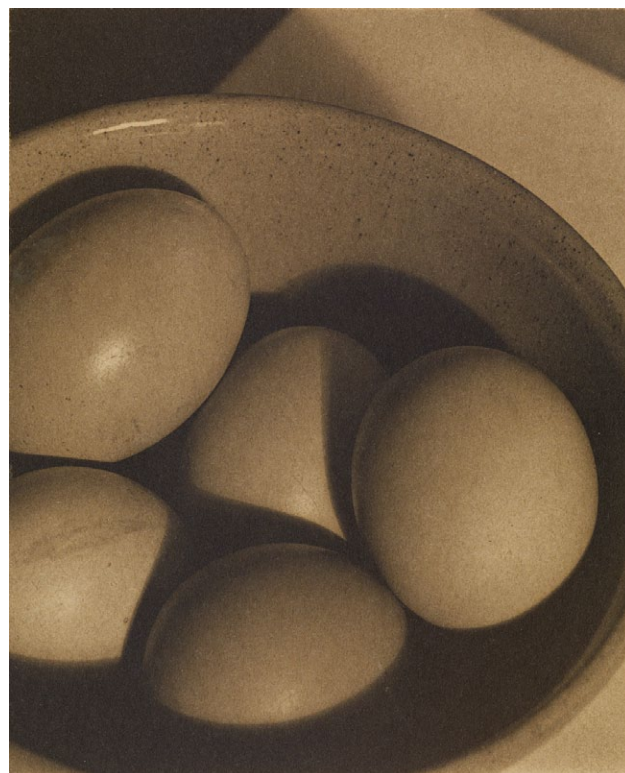
Figure 2. Paul Outerbridge, *Saltine Box*, 1922. Platinum print, 9 × 11.5 cm. The Museum of Modern Art, Gift of David H. McAlpin, 1785.1968. © 2016 G. Ray Hawkins Gallery, Beverly Hills, California.

objects. Assignments included constructing “a curved still life” through photography and experimenting with objects such as folded white towels, six or more spoons, and glasses of milk and water.⁷ This process of synthesizing Cubism and “straight photography” into a new commercial aesthetic evolved into a formula and mode of instruction.⁸ Along with Outerbridge, Margaret Watkins (1884–1969), Ralph Steiner (1899–1986), and Ira Martin (1886–1960) were among the students who translated the visual field of Cubism into a “usable language for advertising products.”⁹

Between 1922 and 1924, Outerbridge made regular visits to the White School and set meetings with “Mr. White” to discuss photography and art.¹⁰ Whether participating in print criticisms, obtaining photographic paper and mounting supplies, or attending exhibitions together, Outerbridge learned a great deal from his teacher. Although Outerbridge had only completed half of his own required coursework, White felt so confident in Outerbridge’s ability to instruct others¹¹ that when C. J. Martin left the White School to become the head of the art department of Teachers College at Columbia University, White asked Outerbridge to take his place teaching the class on art and composition.¹² Outerbridge spent several hours each day preparing his lectures, and he met with White both at school and at home, often late into the evening.¹³

Figure 3. Paul Outerbridge, *Eggs in Bowl*, 1922. Palladium print, 9.2 × 7.5 cm. J. Paul Getty Museum, 84.XP.727.3. © 2016 G. Ray Hawkins Gallery, Beverly Hills, California.

Outerbridge outlined the mission of the Clarence H. White School to the students, described “the making of pictures with photography as the medium,” and presented concepts of pure form, “translating colour into tones” and communicating “feeling but not sentimentalism.”¹⁴ One of his exercises introduced students to tests of balance within a composition by viewing objects upside down in the mirror to comprehend things more as “pure abstract form and masses of light and dark areas in the picture space.”¹⁵



These instructions coincided with his own evolving approach toward photography, which he was working to articulate.

Outerbridge's Photographic Methods

Outerbridge often staged his compositions and made many of his platinum prints in his apartment and studio, drawing from his own surroundings to construct his images.¹⁶ His prints were, on average, $4\frac{1}{2} \times 3\frac{1}{2}$ inches in size and frequently mounted on 11×14 inch cream-colored mats. He most often relied upon a 4×5 inch Korona View camera and worked late into the evening to make his prints by contact printing onto platinum paper.¹⁷ In a reference to the intaglio print as an accepted medium for works of art, he also skillfully impressed plate marks on his mounts to enhance the artistic quality of the prints.¹⁸ Also analogous to the printmaker's practice of canceling plates at the end of an edition, Outerbridge destroyed many of his glass-plate negatives after making a few prints to reinforce the artistic nature of his photographs and thereby suggest their rarity and high commercial value.¹⁹

Outerbridge consistently applied a specific process and image hue to fit the subject. For example, he printed works such as *Ide Collar* (fig. 1) and *Saltine Box* (fig. 2) in platinum with neutral tones on white paper to reinforce the sharp, angular quality of these objects. *Eggs in Bowl* (fig. 3) and *Cheese and Crackers* (fig. 4) are palladium prints with warmer tones that emphasize the brown color of the eggs and the more organic features of the cutting board and cheese.²⁰ His use of platinum and palladium during this time, with their extraordinarily rich and nuanced qualities, informed his understanding of tone and form and influenced his artistic vocabulary and philosophy about photography.

Outerbridge's Ide Collar Image in Platinum and Advertising

Outerbridge's work for the George P. Ide & Company of Troy, New York, began to appear regularly in *Vanity Fair* beginning in 1922.²¹ His first advertisement for the company displayed the St. Andrews shirt neatly pressed inside an open suitcase with other clothing and toiletries (fig. 5).²² When he originally composed this image, Outerbridge had the shirt laundered and even rented the suit-



Figure 4. Paul Outerbridge, *Cheese and Crackers*, 1922. Palladium print, 11.6×9.2 cm. J. Paul Getty Museum, 84.XP.208.137. © 2016 G. Ray Hawkins Gallery, Beverly Hills, California.

8 VANITY FAIR

Photograph by Paul Outerbridge, Jr.
for Geo. P. Ide & Co., Inc.

ST. ANDREWS

NAMED for the oldest golf club in the world, St. Andrews is a shirt that gives plain token of its authority. Its lemon-colored taffeta will make wearing quality and fine appearance equally important.

Its smart flap-pockets carry real utility in their bellows-fold. And its broad box-pleat along the back gives extra play to shoulder-blades. The attached soft collar is buttoned down, or not, as you prefer.

St. Andrews is one of the Street Line, a special grouping of Ide shirts with soft collar. These shirts are created in a variety of fine materials with characteristic Ide styling and workmanship. They include many exclusive features—the smart Ide cricket cuff, for instance, which can be turned back over its button to prevent rolling and save wear.

GEO. P. IDE & CO., INC.
TROY, N. Y.

Ide

STREETLINE SHIRTS

Figure 5. Paul Outerbridge, advertisement for Ide Streetline Shirts, George P. Ide & Company, *Vanity Fair* 19, no. 2 (October 1922): 8. Page 31.1×22.7 cm, image 14.6×17.1 cm. Courtesy of Condé Nast Publications. © 2016 G. Ray Hawkins Gallery, Beverly Hills, California.

case from Majestic Luggage Company.²³ He added a tennis racket to the outside of the suitcase to create more dimension and texture. According to his technical notebooks, he made six exposures. The final print, which featured the overall composition at an angle and was tightly cropped, may have been made on one of the Platinotype Company papers recommended to the White School students.²⁴

Outerbridge became fascinated with the shape and form of the detachable shirt collar itself and began to make drawings and assemble notes to demonstrate its structure and versatility (figs. 6, 7). This method of sketching his compositions in advance of photographing aided his visualization of form and shadow, and he continued to make similar preliminary drawings throughout his career. He photographed the Ide Collar in several different arrangements,²⁵ but the advertisement in the November 1922 issue of *Vanity Fair* was to become Outerbridge's most celebrated platinum print and frequently reproduced image: a stark photograph of a gentleman's collar hovering above a checkerboard-patterned surface (see fig. 1).²⁶

Unlike his first published photograph for the Ide Collar Company, this simple yet striking image, with its dramatic slopes and edges, emphasized the inherent abstraction



Figure 7. Paul Outerbridge, *Sketch for Ide Collar*, c. 1922. Graphite on paper, page 14.8 × 11.4 cm, sketch 10.5 × 7.9 cm. Courtesy of The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (870520). © 2016 G. Ray Hawkins Gallery, Beverly Hills, California.



Figure 6. Paul Outerbridge, *Sketch for Ide Collar*, c. 1922. Graphite on paper, page 10.5 × 11.4 cm, sketch 5.7 × 7 cm. Courtesy of The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (870520). © 2016 G. Ray Hawkins Gallery, Beverly Hills, California. Outerbridge drew this image to the very top edge of the page, severely cropping it.

of the collar. Photographed from the side and above to display as many angles as possible, the image morphs into a series of curved shapes that reveal the interior part of the collar, labeled with the unusually small neck size of 14¾. Although the background looks like a checkerboard, Outerbridge anticipated the problem of the scale of a real checkerboard's squares and subsequently cut squares of linoleum until they fit the composition.²⁷

Once this image started circulating, J. G. Berrien, president of the advertising agency that designed previous Ide Collars advertisements, wrote to a colleague:

I wanted you to see this Ide advertisement, where we let the excellence of the thing itself do its own talking instead of depending on the patent-leather haired collar boy and a lot of windy words. . . . Pictures like this Ide collar advertisement could be made for Waltham Watches, foot-wear, food, candy, machinery, textiles, and when the public sees these pictures, it will say, "Gee! I didn't know anybody made such good stuff. I must get some."²⁸

Outerbridge's dynamic collar photograph demonstrated that "the excellence of the thing itself" could be an effective approach toward enticing consumers. However, for the final advertisement the company's designers added an elaborately drawn frame of arabesques and scrollwork around the image (fig. 8). Outerbridge did not learn of these additions until the magazine already hit the stands, and he disliked the design:

When I did my Collar Picture, showing the product was entirely left to me, and the agency didn't know what they were going to see until I brought it in. But instead of showing it simply, as it should have been, the art director got Donald Teague to do an ornate border to go around it in its first full-page presentation in *Vanity Fair*. . . . When I remonstrated about this he explained to me that when the average viewer beheld the rococo interior of the (old) Waldorf he was impressed with its richness and elegance, and this was done to produce the same result. Later, when they used it for subway and elevated car cards and station posters they didn't use the border—thank goodness.²⁹

Outerbridge wrote in his diary about seeing the Ide Collars advertisement for the first time as he was getting off the subway.³⁰ The image also appeared on posters and billboards, in magazines, including as a double-page spread in the *New York Evening Post*,³¹ and in the New York International Salon in 1923. The writer Temple Scott even used Outerbridge's photograph as an example of the White School's still life for product advertising in his 1925 essay "The Use of Photography in Advertising."³² In what is now a celebrated story mentioned in several biographical accounts of Outerbridge, Marcel Duchamp, flipping through the magazine in Paris, saw the advertisement, took the page, and fixed it to his studio wall as a kind of ready-made.³³

Outerbridge's Concerns for Translating Platinum Prints to Photomechanical Reproductions

Outerbridge made approximately nine original prints of *Ide Collar*, in either platinum or gelatin silver,³⁴ and he was very discriminating about how these photographs were to be reproduced as advertisements. According to him, in the early 1920s a photographer could suggest ideas to the advertising agency, but the final product was not always consistent with the original vision. He noted that back then, "Publishers were having a great deal of trouble with their printers—and subsequently established their own presses. Comparison with the proof will show how badly it was reproduced—and the stock was pretty thin at that time, too."³⁵ As demand increased for softer, more artistic approaches toward advertising, both printers and paper producers attempted to adjust paper and ink quality, with mixed results.³⁶

Outerbridge realized that it was essential to compare his original platinum prints with the final magazine

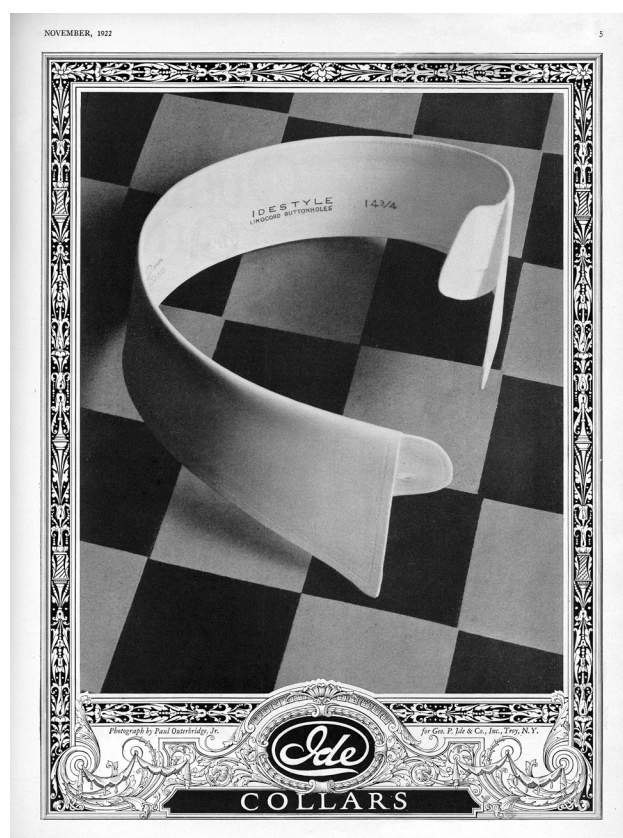


Figure 8. Paul Outerbridge, advertisement for Ide Collars, George P. Ide & Company, *Vanity Fair* 19, no. 3 (November 1922): 5. Page 31.1 × 22.7 cm, image 22.2 × 17.8 cm. Courtesy of Condé Nast Publications. © 2016 G. Ray Hawkins Gallery, Beverly Hills, California.

page in order to judge how accurately the reproduction reflected the appearance of the source photograph. Relief halftone by letterpress was commonly used for mass-producing photographically illustrated publications during this period because it provided a low-cost, straightforward method of producing both text and images.³⁷ Photographers such as Edward Steichen (1879–1973) and Ralph Steiner typically used gelatin silver for their advertising work, and glossy bromide prints were preferred for relief halftone reproduction during this time.³⁸ The halftone process increases contrast by its nature, so to compensate, photographers prepared smooth, glossy prints, rendered at a lower contrast for use as camera-ready art.³⁹ Intentionally deviating from this common practice, Outerbridge used the costly platinum process for many of his commercial projects. While he did employ gelatin silver for some commissions, it is likely that he continued to adjust the tones of his prints throughout his career, hoping that his platinum prints would better convey the subtle shadow and highlights details of his negatives. But the image transfer that took place with

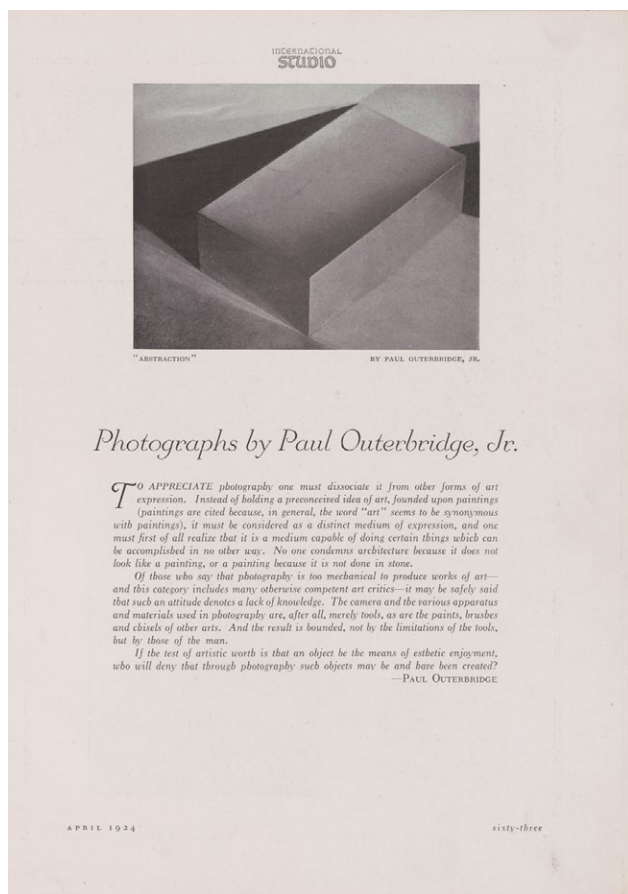


Figure 9. First page of “Photographs by Paul Outerbridge, Jr.,” *International Studio* 79, no. 323 (April 1924): 63, with image titled *Abstraction*. Page 29.5 × 22.5 cm, image 8.7 × 11.4 cm. Courtesy of The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (870520). © 2016 G. Ray Hawkins Gallery, Beverly Hills, California. Outerbridge often used the alternate title, *Saltine Box*, for this photograph (see fig. 2).

the letterpress relief halftones in his published work invariably compressed the long tonal range of platinum into interpretations that were inferior to his original photographic works of art.⁴⁰

Regardless of these less-than-ideal results, Outerbridge continued displaying his work in different types of publications, ranging from advertising commissions in fashion magazines to illustrations in fine art journals accompanied by essays describing his personal aesthetic philosophy. This tension between the original photograph and its reproduction on the printed page dictated many of Outerbridge’s concerns and strategies at this time. As much as he relied on platinum to calibrate light and shadow and accentuate the ambiguity of amorphous forms and structures, this practice was tested each time his images were reproduced. Outerbridge developed compositions that addressed the formal, theoretical properties of photography, but he had to remain cognizant of how these works would be distributed and consumed and to adjust his approach accordingly.

Outerbridge’s Semi-Abstractions

Early in his career, Outerbridge began using the term “semi-abstraction” to describe much of his work. This term referred to objects that contained concrete elements

of reality but veered more into abstraction through careful manipulation of shadows, dramatic angles, cropping, and unusual perspective.⁴¹ Many of Outerbridge’s “semi-abstract” photographs depict objects stripped of labels and commercial identity. As he stated in *Advertising Fortnightly*, “Commonplace articles need not appear commonplace when imagination is used in arranging them for illustration purposes. [They] can be arrayed into a design pleasing from an art sense and practical from an advertising one.”⁴² For example, *Saltine Box* (1922) (see fig. 2) is comprised of a solid rectangular block positioned at a sharp diagonal to reveal a range of warm tonalities and dense shadows. To construct this image, Outerbridge turned the box upside down and placed the corner of a dark slide from a film holder to the right of it to create the illusion of a stark shadow.⁴³ Outerbridge wrote an assessment of his composition on the back of the platinum print itself: “This abstraction created for aesthetic appreciation of line against line and tone against tone without any sentimental associations, utilizes a tin Saltine cracker box, so lighted that the shadow and reflections from its highly polished surface produced this result. Note especially the gradation on the top of the box.”⁴⁴ His description presents tone and gradation as transformative elements, replacing the material identity of the saltine box with a pure form of abstraction achieved in the platinum print.

In 1924 *Saltine Box*, titled *Abstraction*, appeared on the first page of an article in *International Studio* magazine that featured eight pages of Outerbridge’s photographs (fig. 9).⁴⁵ This was the first time his photographs appeared in this publication as art.⁴⁶ An introductory paragraph by Outerbridge declared the artistic status of photography by highlighting the camera and its materials as “merely tools, as are the paints, brushes and chisels of other arts.”⁴⁷

Planning for this article first took place between Outerbridge and the editor F. F. (“Jock”) Fulton at the end of January 1924.⁴⁸ Less than a month later, Outerbridge delivered the prints, and he soon wrote in his diary about looking over the proofs made by Walker Engraving, which he found “very bad, many corrections necessary—many plates needing remaking, very discouraging.”⁴⁹ So again, even with his careful platinum printing methods, he

insisted that some plates needed adjusting. In March 1924, Outerbridge returned to the offices of *International Studio* with the original prints to review the corrected proofs and approve the changes. During the same visit, he took several of these same platinum prints to the Art Center in New York for inclusion in his first one-man exhibition.⁵⁰ The Art Center, which Clarence H. White helped to establish in 1920, aimed to promote the convergence of modern art, advertising, and photography.⁵¹ So just as Outerbridge was circulating his photographic artworks in magazines, he simultaneously displayed the platinum originals in exhibitions.

Two years earlier, in 1922, *Arts & Decoration* had featured six of Outerbridge's photographs arranged on a single page of the magazine accompanied by his own text, titled "Visualizing Design in the Commonplace."⁵² The images were accompanied by descriptive captions highlighting the use of angular, abstract compositions and dramatic use of light and shadow. Outerbridge made multiple references to tone:

Anyone who has attempted the making of a tone scale of only nine separate steps, from black to pure white, will appreciate how difficult it is for the human eye to differentiate between the subtle gradations of the progression. And when one considers that the eye of the camera, the lens, sees a thousand or more tones, surely one will grant that the camera has a quite definite artistic scope.⁵³

The subtle gradations possible with the platinum and palladium processes became an essential part of how Outerbridge organized compositions. His "aesthetic constructions" combined the medium's soft tones with modernist abstract forms to achieve a distinctive kind of photography that could operate within a commercial context yet also function as fine art.

Outerbridge in Europe

From the end of 1924 to the end of 1928, Outerbridge spent most of his time in Europe, occasionally returning to New York City for short trips. His temporary move to Europe and his interactions with several avant-garde circles there, including Man Ray (1890–1976), Constantin Brancusi (1876–1957), Marsden Hartley, and Adolf de Meyer (1868–1949) in Paris, Berlin, and London, further shaped his engagement with platinum printing. While in Paris, he often exchanged printing techniques with Man Ray, and they discussed doing commercial work for *Vogue*. Man Ray even suggested which silver papers to use when Outerbridge was having trouble finding good platinum papers.⁵⁴

One of the more lasting connections Outerbridge made while in Paris was with the abstract sculptor Constantin Brancusi, who was also a distinguished photographer in his own right. He used photography to document his sculptures and would not allow anyone else to take pictures of his work.⁵⁵ Outerbridge met Brancusi through their shared connection with Man Ray in Paris in 1925 and took several portraits of him in his studio as a commission for *Vogue*.⁵⁶ Although the portraits were never published, Outerbridge and Brancusi became close acquaintances as a result. While in the studio, Outerbridge observed the sculptor working in his environment and realized how much they had in common. As the two became more familiar with each other's work, Outerbridge specifically mentioned platinum printing to Brancusi, suggesting that the subtleties of form within sculpture could be better documented through platinum than through the gelatin silver process that Brancusi used so consistently. Outerbridge wrote in his diary: "Noticed a camera standing as he was in the middle of photographing. He showed us a number of his heads which he unwrapped from chamois covers. I showed him a few of my abstractions; we talked photography. I advising him to take up platinum printing."⁵⁷

Back in New York, Outerbridge continued to support his friend by viewing Brancusi's exhibition at the Brummer Galleries. He found the forty-two pieces "beautifully shown and lighted."⁵⁸ By absorbing the purity and balance of these sculptures, Outerbridge applied many of the same compositional principles to photographing everyday objects. Moreover, these exchanges with Brancusi demonstrate Outerbridge's continued dedication to platinum as a process that reinforced superb details of surface texture and shape, tactile qualities so inherent to Brancusi's work.

Magazine Commissions and Reproductions

While in Paris, Outerbridge met with the editors of the Paris office of *Vogue*, Main Bocher and Edna Chase, as well as with publisher Condé Nast, to discuss potential photographic commissions.⁵⁹ In September 1925, Outerbridge worked intensively on a commission for French *Vogue* featuring a variety of perfume bottles. His first step was hunting for platinum papers, and he sent a request to the Platinotype Company in London for four dozen sheets.⁶⁰ He then gathered together bottles of Worth, Callot, Molyneux, Lelong, Patou, Premet, and Drecol to create a series of moody, abstract compositions with different backdrops and textured surfaces, and he made



Figure 10. Paul Outerbridge, *Necklace, Fan and Perfume*, 1925. Platinum print, 13.1 × 18.3 cm. Courtesy of Bloomsbury Auctions. © 2016 G. Ray Hawkins Gallery, Beverly Hills, California. Note the rich blacks and shadow detail.

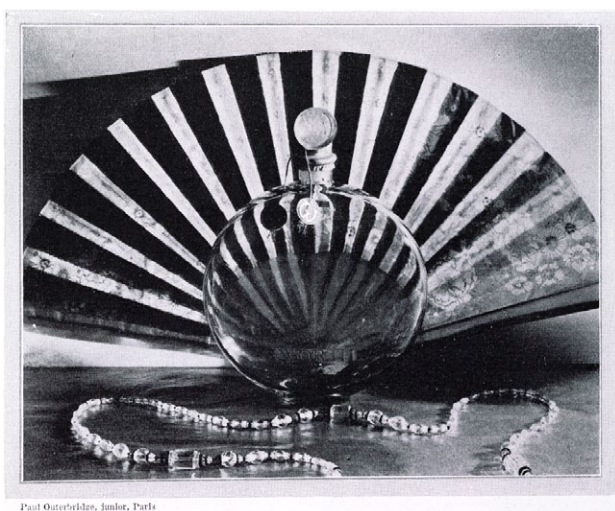
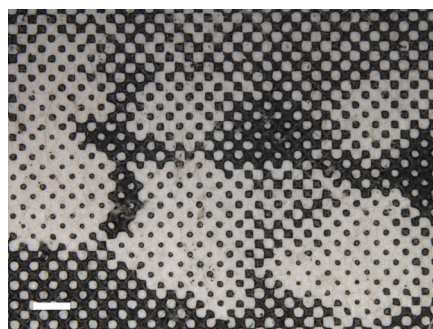


Figure 11. Paul Outerbridge, *Necklace, Fan and Perfume* (fig. 10), reproduced in letterpress relief halftone in “The Perfume of the Couture,” *Vogue* (New York edition) 66, no. 10 (November 15, 1925): 66–68. Image 10.2 × 12.7 cm. Courtesy of Condé Nast Publications. © 2016 G. Ray Hawkins Gallery, Beverly Hills, California.



12a. Detail of beads, showing halftone. Scale bar = 1 mm.

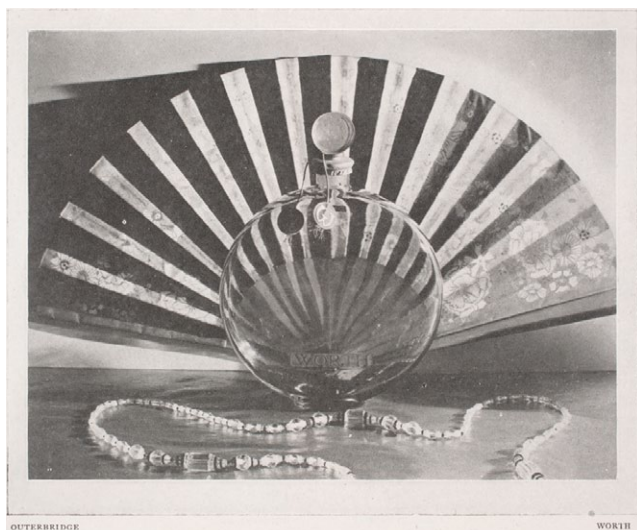
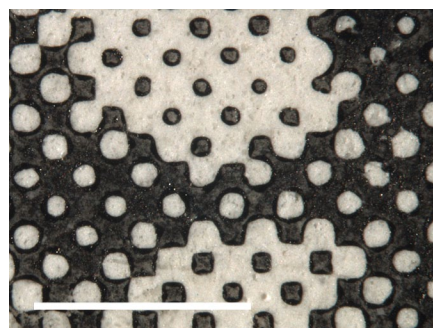


Figure 12. Paul Outerbridge, *Necklace, Fan and Perfume* (fig. 10), reproduced in letterpress relief halftone in “Les Parfums des Grands Couturiers,” *Vogue* (Paris edition) 90, no. 12 (December 1, 1925): 28–30. Image 11 × 14.4 cm. Private collection. Courtesy of Condé Nast Publications. © 2016 G. Ray Hawkins Gallery, Beverly Hills, California.



12b. Detail of beads, showing halftone at higher magnification. Note how the long tonal range of the platinum print has been reduced to a limited palette of grays. When the original platinum print is compared with the printed page, it is clear that the range of blacks are much more intense in the original. Under magnification, the impression of the screen used for halftone photomechanical reproduction is visible as hard-edged dots with dark rims. Scale bar = 1 mm.



13

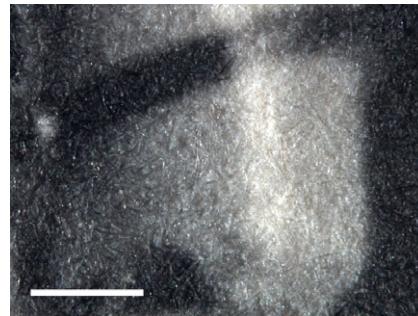


14

various exposures that emphasized the way the bottles cast shadows when lit from certain directions with spotlights. After finishing the photographs for this layout, he submitted sets of platinum prints to both French and American *Vogue*. When he later saw the published layouts, he noted that portions of the American version were “badly made up and very badly reproduced and presented—not a pure black.”⁶¹ This concern with achieving a “pure black” was prompted by an awareness of the rich shadow details attainable with the platinum process.

For example, in a photograph of a Worth perfume bottle set against a flowered paper fan with a crystal-beaded necklace in the foreground, Outerbridge worked carefully to cast “proper” shadows on either side of the fan.⁶² A comparison of the original platinum print (fig. 10) with

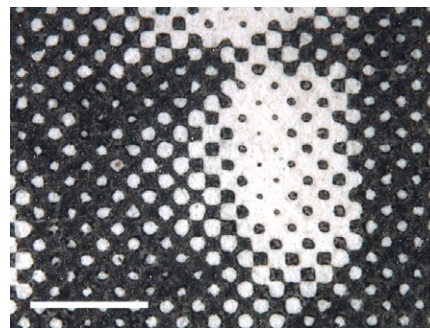
Figure 13. Paul Outerbridge, *Toy Display (Circus)*, c. 1924. Platinum print 15.9 × 15.2 cm. National Gallery of Art, Corcoran Collection (Museum Purchase with the aid of funds from the Polaroid Corporation), 2015.19.4169. © 2016 G. Ray Hawkins Gallery, Beverly Hills, California. The details in this photograph exhibit the long and nuanced tonal range of a platinum print, with rich blacks and details from shadow to highlight.



13a

13a. Detail of horse's nose and bridle. When viewed under magnification, the subtle details of the platinum print's continuous tones are readily apparent. Scale bar = 1 mm.

Figure 14. Paul Outerbridge, *Toy Display (Circus)* (fig. 13), reproduced in letterpress relief halftone in *Harper's Bazaar* 58, no. 12 (December 1924): 71. Page 33.8 × 24 cm, image 13.9 × 13.3 cm. © 2016 G. Ray Hawkins Gallery, Beverly Hills, California. The long tonal range of the source platinum print has been reduced to abbreviated gray tones. When the original platinum print (fig. 13) is compared to this relief halftone, it is obvious why Outerbridge was so disappointed in the loss of tonal gradations.



14a

14a. Detail of horse's nose and bridle, showing halftone at higher magnification. Examination under high magnification reveals the coarse halftone dots of photomechanical reproduction. Scale bar = 1 mm.

those reproduced on the pages of the New York and Paris editions of *Vogue* (figs. 11, 12) demonstrates that the range of tones is far greater in the original. This difference is a consequence of breaking up the finely detailed platinum print's continuous tone-image in order to produce a black-and-white halftone (see figs. 12a, 12b). Moreover, the New York and Paris versions also differ, as the New York reproduction is less detailed and much higher in contrast, while the Paris one is subdued.

As Outerbridge took on more magazine commissions, he sought to understand better how the reproductions would appear on the magazine page. He originally worked on the composition for *Toy Display (Circus)* in late August 1924, and he printed it in platinum (fig. 13). By October 18, 1924, the proof of the plate (fig. 14) was at the printer

for him to review. When he went to Superior Color Company to see it, he found the proof “lacking in vitality and in blacks.”⁶³ He believed the platinum process, with its extraordinarily long and nuanced tonal range, would better render highlights and shadow detail in the relief halftone, but no matter how well controlled his printing process was, the reproduction stripped the image of any subtle nuances.

Two years later, Outerbridge contacted Superior Color Company, again to compare issues of *Harper's Bazaar* with original platinum prints. After studying them side-by-side, the printer suggested he use silver bromide papers, advising that the colder tone of the brand Defender was preferable to Cyko but both would make good reproduction material. Outerbridge even met with someone at Ansco to discuss color and manipulation of papers for reproduction purposes.⁶⁴ Continuing his work for *Harper's Bazaar*, he tried various silver papers but was again displeased with the proofs of the plates, describing them as “very poor, mealy-gray and lacking in brilliancy.”⁶⁵ After reviewing them, he took his platinum photographs to the printer:

Decided I'd better take them and the prints over and see Schwenker about them personally. So over to his place and went over all the plates in detail with him and the gray bearded Frenchman who was formerly a wood block artist and who had an artists' feeling and understanding of all the prints—Schwenker put him and another man on the plates and told them to do nothing else and to stay with them until they were right.⁶⁶

But the photographs printed in magazines would never come out “right.” Working with the exquisite effects of platinum revealed to Outerbridge the deficiencies of silver and the inconsistencies and flaws introduced when photographic images were translated as reproductions in halftone ink.

Conclusions

By the end of the 1920s, Outerbridge had cultivated his practice and identity around a firm belief in the potential for artistic merit in commercial photography, insisting on collapsing distinctions between fine art and popular culture. He had learned from his teachers and fellow students at the Clarence H. White School of Photography that the union of art and industry could be experimental, dynamic, and quite profitable. His use of platinum printing was integral to shaping his distinct style and approach to photography even though he faced the distinct dilemma of translating his original platinum prints to the printed magazine page. His attempts to incorporate platinum into his published work had mixed results, but this practice taught him several things. He harnessed the unique properties of platinum to satisfy the needs of his commercial clients, expand upon his interest in abstraction, form, and tone, and develop both artistic and commercial identities. This process was difficult and often produced failures along the way. The exacting standards that went into the making of his prints often suffered in translation to ink on paper and compelled him to question their use in advertising. His struggles with relief halftones reinforced his appreciation for the integrity and rigor of the platinum process. Although Outerbridge would eventually turn for brief periods to photogravure and then to vibrant tri-color carbonyl printing in the 1930s and 1940s, his work with platinum was critical to the shaping of his decisions and approaches toward form, composition, and technique throughout his career.

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Notes

Portions of this essay appeared in thesis form in fulfillment of the requirements for the author's PhD at the University of Wisconsin–Madison in 2014.

1. Outerbridge 1922, 320.
2. Art Students League 1925, 62.
3. These classes evidently stayed with Outerbridge. While in Paris, he lent Marcel Duchamp two of his Bridgman books on the human figure. See Paul Outerbridge, diary, May 30, 1925, Paul Outerbridge Papers, box 7, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.
4. Outerbridge, student notebook, c. 1915, Outerbridge Papers, box 5.
5. Yochelson and Erwin 1996, 140.
6. Barnes 1985.
7. Barnes 1985, 152.
8. “Straight photography” refers to pictures that are not heavily manipulated to mimic other forms of art such as painting, an approach championed by Paul Strand (1890–1976), Alfred Stieglitz (1864–1946), and Charles Sheeler (1883–1965). See Pultz and Scallen 1981, 43.
9. See Naomi Rosenblum's discussion of Margaret Watkins in Rosenblum 1994, 159. Also see “Experiments” 1921, 60.
10. Outerbridge, diary, 1922–24, Outerbridge Papers, box 7.
11. Barnes 1985, 48.
12. Paul Outerbridge to George B. Wright, December 6, 1957, Outerbridge Papers, box 2, folder 10.
13. Outerbridge, diary, May 5, November 4, 13, 1924: “Mr. White arrived at 9:30 in the evening. Spent evening looking over German art books . . . and discussing things photographic. Showed new things. Mr. White left at around 1 am.” Outerbridge Papers, box 7.
14. Outerbridge, teaching notebook, c. 1922, Outerbridge Papers, box 5, folder 2.
15. Outerbridge, teaching notebook, c. 1922, Outerbridge Papers, box 5, folder 2.
16. Martineau 2009, 2.
17. Martineau 2009, 3.
18. Outerbridge's early mounting techniques are detailed in Paul Outerbridge to Alexander Wedderburn, September 1, 1958, Outerbridge Papers, box 1, folder 90.
19. Agha 1931, 42.
20. Thanks to Constance McCabe for providing me with these observations about the distinction between platinum and palladium prints by Outerbridge. While several prints by Outerbridge examined with x-ray fluorescence spectrometry indicate his use of platinum and palladium, additional analyses are needed to confirm these observations.
21. George P. Ide & Company had been in business for more than fifty years before going public in early 1920. See “Geo. P. Ide” 1920, 17. Troy had been a base for the collar and shirt industry since the 1840s, with several different collar manufacturers located there. See Rittner 2002.
22. This is technically Outerbridge's earliest commercial assignment. Previous scholarship on Outerbridge often misidentifies *Ide Collar*, which was not published until November 1922, as his first commercial work.
23. Outerbridge, diary, June 10, 1922, Outerbridge Papers, box 7.
24. Outerbridge, exposure calculator, handbook, and diary notebooks, June 10–11, 1922, 124–25, Outerbridge Papers, box 7. Also see “Clarence H. White School of Photography Photographic Problems” (1923), Margaret Watkins Fonds, McMaster University Libraries, Hamilton, Ontario. Thanks to Bonnie Yochelson and Constance McCabe for providing me with copies of these White School documents.
25. Outerbridge, exposure calculator, handbook, and diary notebooks, June 11–14, 1922, 89, 125, Outerbridge Papers, box 7.
26. Outerbridge, advertisement for Ide Collars, *Vanity Fair* 19, no. 3 (November 1922): 5.
27. Howe and Markham 1980, 11.
28. J. G. Berrien to C. F. Wood, August 23, 1922, Outerbridge Papers, box 1, folder 14.
29. Outerbridge to Wright, December 6, 1957.
30. Outerbridge, diary, October 26, 1922, Outerbridge Papers, box 7: “Saw Ide Collar poster for first time, Shuttle 42nd St.”
31. Outerbridge, advertisement for Ide Collars, *New York Evening Post*, November 4, 1922, pt. 4, 4.
32. Scott 1925, 172–76.
33. The original account of this story appears in a brief review of Outerbridge's photographs exhibited at the Art Center in 1924, “Notes and Impressions” 1924, 2B: “The arrangement is so just right, that Marcel Duchamp, the artist painter known to the world as the creator of ‘The Nude Descending the Stairs,’ tore it from a magazine and hung it on the walls of his studio as an inspiration.”
34. Christie's 2000, 48. The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, owns the only known 8 × 10 inch version of this image printed in gelatin silver, as well as the 4 × 5 inch version printed in platinum, as typically preferred by Outerbridge.
35. Outerbridge, typescript note affixed to tear sheet, Outerbridge Papers, box 12, folder 4.
36. Squire 1926, 137–39. Thanks to Helena E. Wright for calling my attention to this reference.
37. Benson 2008, 222.
38. *Process Engraver's Compendium* 1932, 30–35. Thanks to James M. Reilly for providing this reference.
39. Constance McCabe, personal communication, December 22, 2015.
40. Thanks to Helena E. Wright for confirming the photomechanical reproduction process as letterpress relief halftone. Constance McCabe, personal communication, October 21, 2015. See also Benson 2008, 222; Michel Frizot, personal communication, August 25, 2015. For examples of photographic reproduction in newspapers from the period, see Frizot and Veigy 2009; Zervigón 2015.
41. In a few instances, Outerbridge applies this term to certain cropped images of the female nude or city views and buildings photographed in an abstract manner.

42. Outerbridge 1923, 21.
43. Howe 1977, 52. Clarification regarding the dark slide made by Howe in communication with Constance McCabe, March 13, 2016.
44. Quoted in Howe 1977, 52. The quotation was taken from the verso of the same print in the Outerbridge estate.
45. Outerbridge 1924, 63–70.
46. This point is made in “American Aces” 1939, 80.
47. Outerbridge 1924, 63.
48. Outerbridge, diary, January 29, 1924, Outerbridge Papers, box 7.
49. Outerbridge, diary, February 29, 1924, Outerbridge Papers, box 7.
50. Outerbridge, diary, March 5, 1924, Outerbridge Papers, box 7.
51. See Yochelson 2014, 4.
52. Outerbridge 1922, 320, 372.
53. Outerbridge 1922, 320.
54. Outerbridge, diary, November 22–23, 1925, Outerbridge Papers, box 7. Man Ray suggested Outerbridge purchase Guillemot photographic paper (semigloss) and some Diamidophenol developer, so he purchased two dozen 24 × 30 inch semimatte sheets and one dozen glossy.
55. For a discussion of Brancusi and photography, see Marcoci 2010, 97–99.
56. Outerbridge’s portraits of Brancusi were most likely intended to accompany Clive Bell, “The Art of Brancusi,” *Vogue* 67, no. 11 (June 1, 1926): 82–83, 98. Instead of including a portrait of the artist, the illustrations were photographs of Brancusi’s sculptures and studio taken by Brancusi himself. One of the portraits from this session is in the collection of the Musée National d’Art Moderne-Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, gifted by Brancusi himself. See Lévy 2003, 236, plate 179.
57. Outerbridge, diary, July 17, 1925, Outerbridge Papers, box 7.
58. Outerbridge, diary, November 19, 1926, Outerbridge Papers, box 7.
59. Seeböhm 1982, 135–36; Polan and Tredre 2009, 55.
60. Outerbridge, diary, September 9, 1925, Outerbridge Papers, box 7.
61. Outerbridge, diary, November 10, 1925, Outerbridge Papers, box 7. The American *Vogue* version was published November 15, 1925, and the French *Vogue* version was published December 1, 1925. See Outerbridge, diary, November 4, 1925, Outerbridge Papers, box 7.
62. Outerbridge, diary, September 13, 1925, Outerbridge Papers, box 7.
63. Outerbridge, diary, August 29, 31, October 18, 1924, Outerbridge Papers, box 7.
64. Outerbridge, diary, September 9, 1926, Outerbridge Papers, box 7.
65. Outerbridge, diary, October 28, 1926, Outerbridge Papers, box 7.
66. Outerbridge, diary, October 28, 1926, Outerbridge Papers, box 7.

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