



# Peter Henry Emerson's Platinum Prints and Photogravures

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The British photographer Peter Henry Emerson (1856–1936) is acclaimed as one of the leading practitioners of both the platinum and the photogravure processes (figs. 1–3). His rich body of photographic work and teachings on these topics influenced and inspired a generation of art photographers.

Emerson was born in Cuba to an American father and English mother. After his father died in 1867, his mother brought Peter Henry home to England, where he studied medicine. Rather than pursuing a career as a physician, in 1882 he turned his full attention to photography and cultural anthropology.

Keenly aware of and embracing advances in photographic technology, Emerson explored fast exposure times, the use of halftone, the gelatin dry-plate negative, full-toned, matte platinum paper, and high-quality printing in photogravure.<sup>1</sup> Rather than imagining his photographs as works to be viewed individually, Emerson held as his main artistic objective to produce and publish limited edition books and portfolios illustrated with his photographs.

Emerson was an influential member of the Royal Photographic Society, which had been established in 1853 to communicate information on the art and science of photography. His involvement with the society began in 1882, and in 1895 he was awarded the status of Fellow and the Progress Medal, a prestigious honor in recognition of an important invention, research project, publication, or exhibition that, in the opinion of the society's council, advanced the science, art, or practice of photography. Emerson's medal was in recognition of his contribution to artistic photography.<sup>2</sup>

Emerson made his photographs in England, concentrating his efforts on farm laborers and fishermen on the Broads—freshwater lakes and marshes formed by flooded medieval peat digs—of Norfolk and Suffolk, whose way of life was threatened by agricultural depression, railways, and new forms of tourism. Emerson was fond of the local people—whom he called “peasants”—because he felt they were unspoiled by modern life; he described them as “quiet, witty, dignified and free from all vulgarity.”<sup>3</sup> He wanted to record their way of life in his anthropological essays and permanent platinum prints and photogravures. The following discussion explores some aspects of Emerson's aesthetic philosophy and the methods he used to achieve his artistic vision.

## Naturalistic Photography

Emerson had strong opinions about art photography and regularly engaged in heated debates with members of the photographic community through the photographic press.<sup>4</sup> His main contributions to photography as art were the introduction of “naturalistic photography” and the use of “differential focus,” which he believed made his images seem more realistic than the popular style at the time known as Pictorialism, an aesthetic movement that promoted painterly manipulation of the photographic record.<sup>5</sup>

Emerson's approach to artistic photography was in sharp contrast to that of his arch rival, the Pictorialist Henry Peach Robinson (1830–1901), who believed that natural eyesight brought one's entire field of view into sharp focus. Robinson printed sharply delineated images, sometimes combining multiple negatives to create a single print. Emerson argued that a more realistic, coherent, and visually comfortable effect could be created by using a single negative with his soft differential focus, which he believed approximated natural eyesight by bringing the central field of view into relatively sharp

Figure 1. Peter Henry Emerson and Thomas Frederick Goodall, *A Reed-Cutter at Work*, 1886. Platinum print, 28.2 × 20.8 cm. Plate XXV from P. H. Emerson and T. F. Goodall, *Life and Landscape on the Norfolk Broads* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1886). National Gallery of Art, Gift of Harvey S. Shipley Miller and J. Randall Plummer, in Honor of the 50th Anniversary of the National Gallery of Art, 1995.63.1.y.



Figure 2. Peter Henry Emerson and Thomas Frederick Goodall, *Rowing Home the Schoof-Stuff*, 1886. Platinum print, 13.7 × 27.7 cm. Plate XXI from P. H. Emerson and T. F. Goodall, *Life and Landscape on the Norfolk Broads* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1886). National Gallery of Art, Gift of Harvey S. Shipley Miller and J. Randall Plummer, in Honor of the 50th Anniversary of the National Gallery of Art, 1995.63.1.u.



Figure 3. Peter Henry Emerson, *Rime Crystals*, in or before 1895. Photogravure, 15.2 × 18.9 cm. Plate XIV from P. H. Emerson, *Marsh Leaves* (London: David Nutt, 1895). National Gallery of Art, Gift of Harvey S. Shipley Miller and J. Randall Plummer, in Honor of the 50th Anniversary of the National Gallery of Art, 1990.113.1.n.



focus while the periphery of vision became progressively less sharp. Emerson's method of differential focus intended the viewer to have the realistic visual experience of being present at the scene.

Differential focus and tone control are key elements to Emerson's claim that photography was a fine art, not a manufacturing technology. In 1889 Emerson published his teachings in *Naturalistic Photography for Students of the Art*, and in May 1890 he published a separate portfolio of ten photogravures, *Pictures of East Anglian Life*, which could be used as a companion volume to illustrate his principles of art photography. He explained in its preface and introduction, "To the Student," that it was too expensive to reproduce photogravures in *Naturalistic Photography*, so he reproduced them in this separate portfolio. Each plate was accompanied by Emerson's notes on focus and tone. For example, he stated that the plate, *A March Pastoral*, possessed "every naturalistic quality that I seek" (fig. 4).<sup>6</sup>

Nevertheless Emerson favored the platinum process above all others for its permanence, for he found that the tonal range of the platinum image provided great defini-

Figure 4. Peter Henry Emerson, *A March Pastoral*, 1888. Photogravure, 11.2 × 23.1 cm. Plate XII from P. H. Emerson, *Pictures of East Anglian Life* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1888). George Eastman Museum, Gift of Alden Scott Boyer.



Figure 5. Peter Henry Emerson and Thomas Frederick Goodall, *The Old Order and the New*, 1886. Platinum print, 11.9 × 23.1 cm. Plate XII from P. H. Emerson and T. F. Goodall, *Life and Landscape on the Norfolk Broads* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1886). National Gallery of Art, Gift of Harvey S. Shipley Miller and J. Randall Plummer, in Honor of the 50th Anniversary of the National Gallery of Art, 1995.63.1.1.

tion and depth to his scenes. The prints' soft, fibrous appearance is due to the paper in which the metallic platinum is embedded. Emerson preferred the matte surface offered by the platinotype of the period, which is very distinct from the gloss of albumen and gelatin prints. He considered the platinum process most suited to landscape, portraiture, and architectural studies, and he believed all processes that preceded the platinotype to be inartistic.

Emerson's platinum prints in *Life and Landscape on the Norfolk Broads* (1886) share an astonishingly rich tonality (fig. 5; compare fig. 2). Yet Emerson also acknowledged in *Naturalistic Photography for Students of the Art* that "the charcoal gray tint of the ordinary platinotypes is apt to become monotonous in book illustration, and it is as well to vary it occasionally by using the sepia tints; these are quite suitable for landscapes and some figure subjects" and he suggested that "there are different types of paper sold by the Platinotype Company for printing, and the printer will of course choose the texture of paper that suits his subject. Delicate landscapes and small portraits should be printed on smooth papers, while for strong effects, large figure subjects, and large portraits full of character, the rough papers are more suitable."<sup>7</sup>

The only book that Emerson produced using platinum prints was *Life and Landscape on the Norfolk Broads* (1886). After this he always used the photogravure process, as he did for the 1890 portfolio *Pictures of East*

*Anglian Life*. Thus Emerson's photographically illustrated publications embody the common characteristics of the platinum print and the capacity of the photogravure to translate its attributes to ink on paper. For example, the tones of the platinum prints in *Life and Landscape on the Norfolk Broads* are a fairly constant warm black, while the soft tonalities of the photogravure in *Pictures of East Anglian Life* range from neutral to warm black to sepia, all tones commonly seen in the platinum print.<sup>8</sup>

### **The Making of *Life and Landscape on the Norfolk Broads***

Beginning in 1884, Emerson spent years at a time traveling in order to pursue his photographic and literary projects, often with his good friend and naturalistic landscape artist Thomas Frederick Goodall (1857–1944), with whom he collaborated on a number of photographic publications. They toured the Norfolk Broads together, taking photographs and writing the text by day and developing the negatives by night.

The resulting book, *Life and Landscape on the Norfolk Broads* (1886) written and illustrated by Emerson and Goodall, is one of the greatest books of the nineteenth century to be illustrated by original platinum prints. The text, printed in a clear typeface with elaborately illustrated initials, provides descriptions, anecdotes, and information about folklore. Emerson wrote twelve of the chapters,

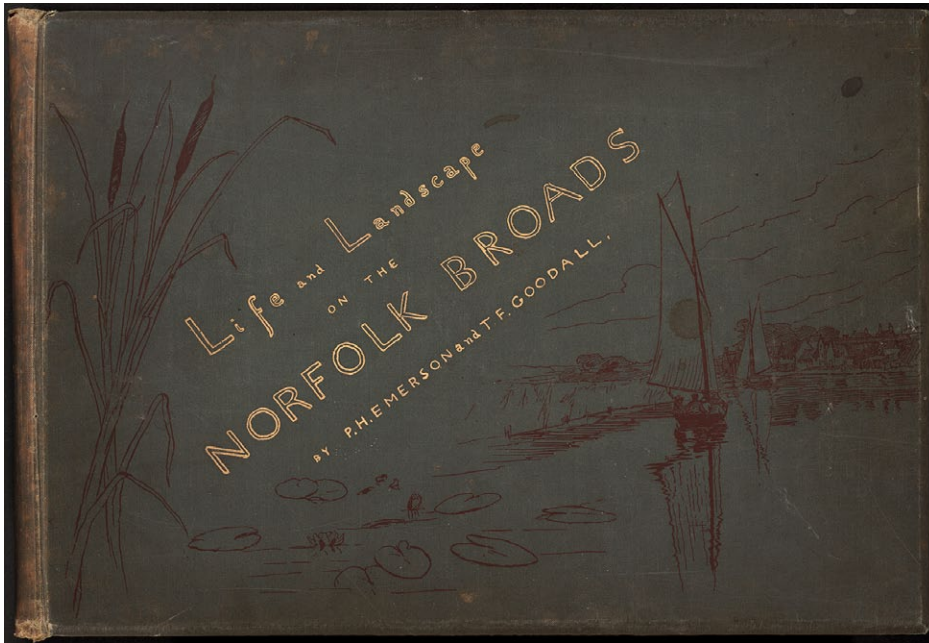


Figure 6. P. H. Emerson and T. F. Goodall, cover of *Life and Landscape on the Norfolk Broads* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1886). 28.5 × 41 cm. National Gallery of Art, Gift of Harvey S. Shipley Miller and J. Randall Plummer, in Honor of the 50th Anniversary of the National Gallery of Art, 1995.63.1.

and Goodall wrote nine. There are forty platinum prints, thirteen credited to Emerson and twenty-seven to both Emerson and Goodall. More than eight thousand photographs were taken in the course of the project, the vast majority of which did not meet Emerson's standards for inclusion in the volume. In the preface, Emerson made it clear that he was the senior partner, stating that he took all the photographs and was responsible for the technical aspects of all the work. He acknowledged Goodall's role by stating that determining the content of the majority of the photographs was the result of a "pleasant partnership" with Goodall.<sup>9</sup>

### ***The Presentation of the Platinum Prints***

Emerson went to great lengths to ensure that the prints in each bound volume were perfect in color, texture, and structure, for he trusted that platinum prints were capable of providing the subtle, silky, full-toned quality necessary in art photographs. For example, *Rowing Home the Schoof-Stuff* (see fig. 2) and *The Old Order and the New* (see fig. 5), share an astonishingly rich tonality. All were commercially printed by Valentine & Sons of Dundee.<sup>10</sup> To guarantee the creation of a high-quality edition, Emerson oversaw the production of the photographs, which were individually printed and mounted to the pages of each book by hand. Each photograph is protected by a guard sheet with letterpress titles. An edition of 175 "ordinary" volumes and 25 deluxe copies of *Life and Landscape* were published.<sup>11</sup> Goodall designed the cover of the volumes (fig. 6), which has a handcrafted feel. The drawing and title were pro-

duced in "line block," a letterpress photoengraving process made without the use of a halftone screen.

To promote *Life and Landscape on the Norfolk Broads*, Emerson printed favorable reviews of it in the back of *Pictures of East Anglian Life* (1888) under the heading, "Important Art Work." These give some indication of its reception:

"Life and Landscape on the Norfolk Broads" is a book of unique artistic interest. . . . The prevailing tone of the pictures is restful and subdued. . . . The claims of photography to rank among the true means of artistic production were never better exhibited than in this series of studies. . . . They leave no possible doubt of Dr. Emerson's manipulatory skill, nor of the tasteful discrimination of the fellow art-workers. — *The Globe*

"Life and Landscape on the Norfolk Broads" is an epoch-making book, because such perfection of photography, such perfection of reproductive process and such perfection of artistic feeling have never before been brought together. — *The Amateur Photographer*<sup>12</sup>

### ***The Platinotype Process and Choice of Paper***

Whether Emerson hand-sensitized the paper for his prints in *Life and Landscape on the Norfolk Broads* or used a commercial paper is unclear. However, the large scale of the project suggests that Valentine & Sons used a commercial platinum paper, most likely procured from William

Willis's (1841–1923) Platinotype Company of London.<sup>13</sup> Emerson mentions both Willis and the Platinotype Company in *Naturalistic Photography for Students of the Art*, stating that platinum and photogravure are the essential media for fulfilling his aesthetic theories.<sup>14</sup>

There is, then, in our opinion, for our student, but one process in which to print, and that is the platinotype process discovered by Mr. Willis. Every photographer who has the good and advancement of photography at heart, should feel indebted to Mr. Willis for placing within his power a process by which he is able to produce permanent and beautiful work. We have no hesitation in saying that the discovery and subsequent practice of this process has had an incalculable amount of influence in raising the standard of photography.<sup>15</sup>

Willis himself predicated that “the pure black colour of [platinum] images or pictures” and “their absolute permanence” would make them ideal for “the permanent reproduction of important documents . . . and for the illustrations of high class books.”<sup>16</sup>

Emerson later recommended that students seek advice on the platinotype printing process and always order “fresh paper” directly from the Platinotype Company,<sup>17</sup> and he may have given the printers at Valentine & Sons the same advice. Emerson was very confident of the high quality of the Platinotype Company paper and its ability to achieve a “soft image quality,” but was annoyed by the office clerk’s ignorance of the company’s product: “Their paper is as suitable and as beautiful for soft gray-day effects as for brilliant sunshiny effects, and it is to be hoped that they will soon have their eyes opened to this fact, and cease to encourage the false notion that good—ergo plucky, sparkling, snappy—negatives are those required for the use of the paper.”<sup>18</sup>

To learn more about the paper used for photographs in *Life and Landscape on the Norfolk Broads*, x-ray fluorescence analysis (XRF) of loose prints was performed at the National Media Museum, Bradford, and the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. The amount of platinum in the densest areas of the same prints was found to be almost identical, suggesting either that they were printed on commercial papers or that, if they were hand-coated, they were remarkably consistent.<sup>19</sup> Most of Emerson’s platinum prints in *Life and Landscape on the Norfolk Broads* are essentially neutral gray-black in image hue, with wide and subtle tonalities, ranging from deep black to the color of the smooth white paper support.<sup>20</sup>

Comparison of the data collected showed that prints contained the blue pigment smalt.<sup>21</sup> This additive is not frequently observed in photographic prints,<sup>22</sup> but some examples of early prints made by William Willis were also found to contain smalt.<sup>23</sup> While not conclusive, this evidence supports the speculation made above that Platinotype Company paper was used to produce Emerson’s artistic photographs in *Life and Landscape on the Norfolk Broads*.

### The Turn to Photogravure

The production of *Life and Landscape on the Norfolk Broads* was very expensive and laborious. Emerson was aware of how the choice of reprographic system affected reputation, but he realized that his goal of illustrating all his books with hundreds of original platinum prints, individually pasted onto each leaf, was not commercially viable. Yet he was also aware that processes such as the relief halftone used by his rivals in East Anglia produced poor-quality reproductions that would not do justice to his photographs.

In 1886 Emerson wrote, “We must not forget that nine-tenths of photographs are no more works of Art than the chromos [chromolithographs], lithos [lithographs] and bad paintings which adorn the numerous shops and galleries.”<sup>24</sup> According to him, only three types of pictures were “worthy” of note: a good oil painting, a good photogravure, and finally, a good photograph, “one which is a picture, and which is printed in platinotype.”<sup>25</sup> He further explained:

The [platinum] process, however, is not perfect, the only perfect print, the only perfect printing process being photo-etching, as we shall show presently; but of all the processes for printing from the negative it is the best; of all the typographic processes it is the best; and it is better than many of the copperplate processes.<sup>26</sup>

Obsessed with the quality of his prints, Emerson turned to photogravure to achieve his aesthetic goals at a lower cost. In the 1880s, photogravure was embraced as the finest method for photomechanical reproductions in books but it was a relatively expensive choice; by the 1890s it was the ideal solution. Emerson understood the importance of creating a finely detailed image with a continuous tonal range, and he realized that, with expert craftsmanship, photogravure could render an image that was remarkably similar to the platinum print.



Figure 7. Peter Henry Emerson, *Gathering Water-Lilies*, 1886. Platinum print, 19.8 × 29.1 cm. Plate IX from P. H. Emerson and T. F. Goodall, *Life and Landscape on the Norfolk Broads* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1886). National Gallery of Art, Gift of Harvey S. Shipley Miller and J. Randall Plummer, in Honor of the 50th Anniversary of the National Gallery of Art, 1995.63.1.i.

7a. Detail.



7a

Emerson's photograph *Gathering Water-Lilies* provides an excellent example of Emerson's progression from platinum (1886) to photogravure (May 28, 1886), and it may be the only print Emerson published both in platinum and photogravure. This beautiful image depicts a woman collecting lilies as bait for fish.<sup>27</sup> The collapsed fishing net in the bottom of the boat indicates that the man and woman are working and preparing for the even harder work of fishing.<sup>28</sup>

The platinum print of *Gathering Water-Lilies* seen in *Life and Landscape on the Norfolk Broads* (fig. 7) was translated to photogravure by the Autotype Company in 1886 (fig. 8), several months before the published volume of platinum prints appeared.<sup>29</sup> The photogravure is heavily retouched, as the engraver drew details in the faces and on the water that conspicuously altered the original image. One reviewer commented that "If Mr. Emerson had never produced any other photograph, this alone would entitle him to rank as an artist of ability," adding "The Autotype Company by whom the engraving had been made have done their part most skillfully."<sup>30</sup> But these additions elicited criticism by other reviewers<sup>31</sup> and angered Emerson so that in 1889 he resolved to oversee the work of the photogravure printer to ensure that his high standards would be met. He learned the photogravure process for himself from the English copperplate engraver, amateur photographer, and Linked Ring Brotherhood member Walter L. Colls (1860–1942).

Colls, while working for the Typographic-Etching Company, was the first etcher to guarantee Emerson that the photogravures would be produced without retouching the plates. Emerson claimed, "Thus was instituted a new departure, negatives from nature were reproduced, through our battlings, with no visible retouching . . . we were the first to start the serious reproduction of negatives from landscapes and figure subjects which could be regarded as pictures *per se*, and not merely as topographical views."<sup>32</sup>

Unfortunately for today's scholars, however, Emerson never made his own photogravure of *Gathering Water-Lilies*, and so it is extremely difficult to judge how Emerson himself might have translated the platinum print into photogravure. Emerson was widely recognized for his superior command of both processes, and the aesthetic qualities of his photogravures do bear a remarkable resemblance to the appearance of platinum prints in tonal range, image hue, and surface quality.

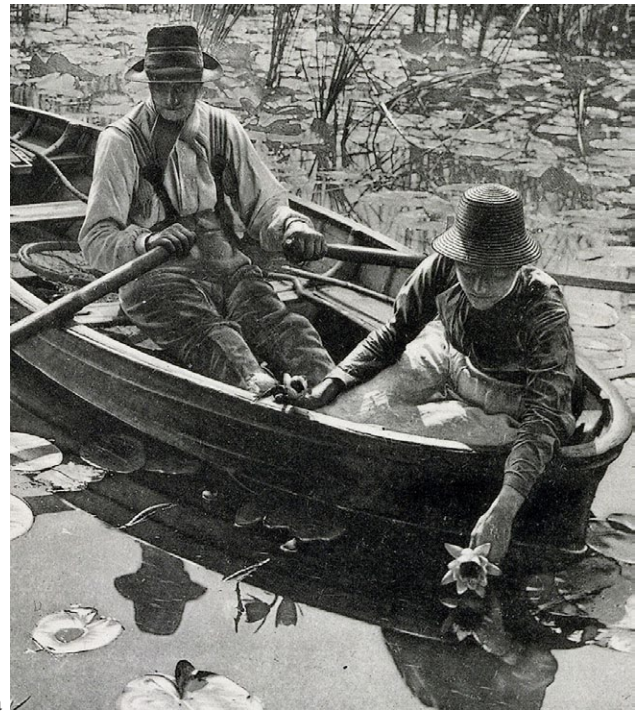
### *The Choice of Papers and Ink Colors*

Emerson was interested in the choice of papers and colors of ink available for photogravures, and he made very deliberate choices to suit his aesthetic requirements. He shared his opinions in *Naturalistic Photography for Students of the Art*:

Having, then, suggested his color and tint, he will receive proofs printed in them, and he finally decides upon the tint suitable for each plate, and these are



Figure 8. Peter Henry Emerson, *Gathering Water-Lilies*, 1886. Photogravure, Autotype Company, 20.3 cm × 29.9 cm. Courtesy V & A images, ©Victoria and Albert Museum, London. PH.2124-1896.  
8a. Detail.



8a

kept as standards on a file. The matter of printing papers, too, offers great variety and scope for artistic selection; but here the student will find he has not a free hand, the publisher often limiting his choice in that on financial grounds. The student must see, however, that if India paper be used, an unsuitable tint be not selected.<sup>33</sup>

Specimens of every possible printing paper were gathered together by Colls's printer for Emerson to carry out experiments using his own printing press.<sup>34</sup> He recognized that the initial proofs could be "splendid" but the final prints could be quite poor if printed with different inks and on different papers. In 1889 he recommended that a photographer, "When sending his plates, then, to be bitten, he should send a well-printed platinotype print with them, a print having just the effect he wishes for in the copper plate. If clouds are to be introduced, the cloud negatives should be sent as well. He will in due course receive a proof, which he must go carefully over, making any notes on the margin as to re-biting, etc."<sup>35</sup> Emerson's discussion with Colls about how the choice of the paper and inks affected the final quality and tonal range of the photogravure was published in the preface to *Wild Life on a Tidal Water* (1890) (fig. 9).<sup>36</sup>

Emerson went on to personally oversee the production of all the photogravures for his other published volumes, *On English Lagoons* (1893) and *Marsh Leaves* (1895). On

various occasions he claimed that the images were "taken and photo-etched by me, so that it is my work throughout."<sup>37</sup> When the plate for *A Way across the Marshes* (1888) became worn out, he replaced it with *Mending the Wherry in Pictures of East Anglian Life*.<sup>38</sup> To ensure that his work would be considered valuable and worthy of collecting, Emerson usually destroyed the plates and charged a high price for his books, tactics befitting a commercially minded artist.<sup>39</sup>



Figure 9. Peter Henry Emerson, *Great Yarmouth Harbour*, 1890. Photogravure, etched by Walter L. Colls, 17.6 × 22.1 cm. Frontispiece from P. H. Emerson, *Wild Life on a Tidal Water: The Adventures of a House-Boat and Her Crew* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1890). National Gallery of Art, Robert Menschel and the Vital Projects Fund, 2011.27.1.



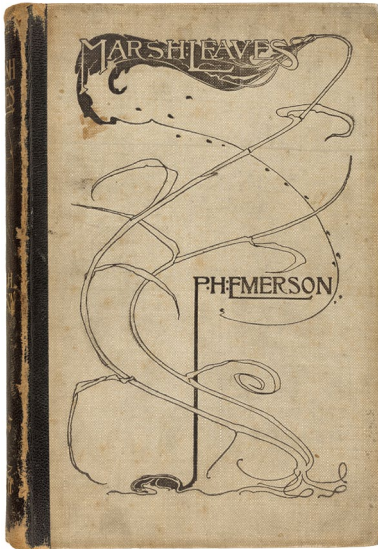


Figure 10. Peter Henry Emerson, cover of the deluxe edition of *Marsh Leaves* (London: David Nutt, 1895), 28.4 × 18.4 cm. National Gallery of Art, Gift of Harvey S. Shipley Miller and J. Randall Plummer, in Honor of the 50th Anniversary of the National Gallery of Art, 1990.113.1.

Emerson was also shrewd in protecting his commercial and intellectual interests by obtaining copyright for the majority of his images, which would be crucial to establishing his future reputation.<sup>40</sup> The copyright deposits, which are accompanied by original photographs, provide a unique opportunity to view Emerson's work in three processes: rare extant prints in albumen, platinum, and photogravure. Some copyright images were made in processes different from that of the final published image.<sup>41</sup> Although from the same negatives, these utilitarian platinum prints provide a poor comparison to the photogravures, as they served only the purpose of copyright and do not illustrate the silky appearance and nuanced tonal range of a perfect platinum print.

### The Making of *Marsh Leaves*

*Marsh Leaves* (1895) is Emerson's last publication and demonstrates how much effort he put into its appearance.<sup>42</sup> Its sixteen photogravures of wintry landscapes are printed on a high-quality rough-textured laid paper. The deluxe edition photogravures were mounted on India paper and *Chine collé*; the "ordinary" edition images were printed directly on single sheets of paper. John Taylor describes the photogravures as accompanied by sixty-five short prose "sketches on nature, various characters he knew, and his dreams and visions concerning the ugliness or monstrosity of so-called modern civilization."<sup>43</sup>

The cover is a printed design in Art Nouveau style (fig. 10). The deckled edges of the text pages have been left intact, emphasizing the individual handmade style of presentation. For *Marsh Leaves* Emerson selected a traditional typeface that was spaced out to make it readily legible.

Taylor sums up *Marsh Leaves* by suggesting, "It is likely Emerson's opponents, and enemies in the photographic circles, took some satisfaction in the apparent slightness of *Marsh Leaves* because, unlike the crusading books of earlier years, *Marsh Leaves* seems not to have any serious ambition."<sup>44</sup> It has small photographs that an anonymous critic described in 1897 as no more than "gems of photography," thus dismissing the publication as nothing but "a charming collection of literary and artistic trifles."<sup>45</sup> Another review comments that the photographs in *Marsh Leaves* were "mere slight camera sketches, suggestions rather than finished works," though of course they remained "delightful."<sup>46</sup> *The Lone Lagoon* (fig. 11) presents minimal subject matter—just shades and tones of light and

Figure 11. Peter Henry Emerson, *The Lone Lagoon*, in or before 1895. Photogravure, 8.6 × 13.8 cm. Plate II from P. H. Emerson, *Marsh Leaves* (London: David Nutt, 1895). National Gallery of Art, Gift of Harvey S. Shipley Miller and J. Randall Plummer, in Honor of the 50th Anniversary of the National Gallery of Art, 1990.113.1.b.

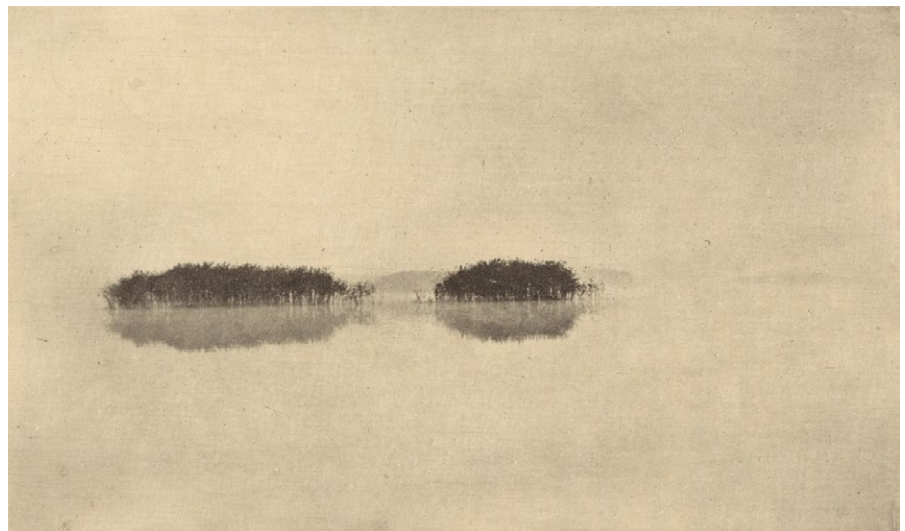




Figure 12. Peter Henry Emerson, *The Last Gate*, in or before 1895. Photogravure, 8.6 × 13.8 cm. Plate XVI from P. H. Emerson, *Marsh Leaves* (London: David Nutt, 1895). National Gallery of Art, Gift of Harvey S. Shipley Miller and J. Randall Plummer, in Honor of the 50th Anniversary of the National Gallery of Art, 1990.113.1.b.

dark that Taylor describes as “Deliquescence of light—and mystery of dark.”<sup>47</sup>

The last plate, *The Last Gate*, is different in content and may be interpreted as Emerson closing the door on his photography (fig. 12). The print is made from a plate that was cut down from the plate used to print *The Wealth of Marshland* in *Idyls of the Norfolk Broads* (1887). While Emerson had claimed that he always destroyed his plates after each publication to be sure his work would be desirable and collectable, this print provides evidence to the contrary.<sup>48</sup>

The photogravures in *Marsh Leaves* are less about subject matter than the effects of light and shadow. When compared with some of the rather staged storytelling in his early works, these images are now seen as a forerunner to modernism, but the fact that Emerson had a popular unlimited edition of *Marsh Leaves* published in 1898, which was not illustrated, suggests that he had become increasingly less interested in photography and more interested in his writing.

## Conclusion: Photography Is Not Art

While taking the photographs for his 1893 publication, *On English Lagoons*, Emerson was reading Ferdinand Hurter (1844–1898) and Vero Charles Driffield’s (1848–1915) article on “Photochemical Investigations and a New Method of Determination of the Sensitiveness of Photographic Plates,”<sup>49</sup> which proved that the relationship among exposure time, density of impression, and development was fixed and calculable; this calculation, therefore confirmed in Emerson’s mind that photography was a predictable and limited mechanical exercise.<sup>50</sup> In 1890 he had retracted his earlier claim that photography was art, declaring in a black-bordered pamphlet, *The Death of Naturalistic Photography: A Renunciation*, that photography could never be art after all.<sup>51</sup> In 1895 Emerson gave up photography altogether.

Like Emerson, post-1890 platinum photographers experimented with photogravure, and, as they continued to expand the pictorial qualities of photogravure, they achieved aesthetic results that rivaled platinum prints. Emerson’s advocacy of photogravure was advanced by turn-of-the-century art photographers Alfred Stieglitz (1864–1946), Alvin Langdon Coburn (1882–1966),<sup>52</sup> and Edward Steichen (1879–1973), and they helped to ensure that the photogravure, like the platinum print itself, has remained highly valued.

## Acknowledgments

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## Notes

1. Haworth-Booth 1997, 90–93.
2. “Progress Medal” 1895, 117.
3. Emerson and Goodall 1886, 47.
4. Newhall 1975, 57; “Our Views” 1886, 134.
5. Taylor 2008, 2:1126–31.
6. Emerson 1890b, n.p. Emerson published three editions of *Naturalistic Photography for Students of the Art*, in 1889, 1890, and 1899, and in 1973 Arno Press produced a facsimile of the 1899 edition.
7. Emerson (1889, 1899) 1973, bk. II, 138–39.
8. See Constance McCabe, “Distinguishing Platinum Prints from Photogravures,” in this volume.

9. Emerson and Goodall 1886, preface, n.p.
10. The preface to *Life and Landscape on the Norfolk Broads* reads, “To Messrs. Valentine & Sons of Dundee, too, our thanks are due for the care and trouble they have taken in executing the prints to our satisfaction.” Emerson and Goodall 1886, n.p. No information about this project exists today in the Valentine & Sons Archives, and that is surprising, considering the scale of the job. For more on Valentine & Sons, see “Visit to Messrs. Valentine & Sons” 1886, 162–63.
11. An advertisement for “Important Art Work” in *Pictures of East Anglian Life* (1888), n.p., states that the platinotypes in the deluxe volumes of *Life and Landscape on the Norfolk Broads* were printed on India paper. The deluxe editions cost £10 10s; and the ordinary editions cost £6 6s. To put this cost into perspective, in the 1880s a laborer would earn about £30 per year, and an upper-middle-class lawyer or doctor on average £1000 a year. *Life and Landscape on the Norfolk Broads* was aimed at the wealthier upper middle class; it is not in the category of the cheap guide and travel books that were being produced to promote tourism in the region.
12. Advertisement for “Important Art Work” 1888.
13. On Willis, see Newhall 1975, 132–33. Emerson had a degree of self-belief that bordered on arrogance. In 1908 he commissioned James Harvard Thomas (1854–1921) to design a medal that he could then award to other photographers, some posthumously, who, he felt, had achieved merit in any branch of photographic practice. He awarded bronze medals to William Willis for inventing the platinotype process and to Walter L. Colls for the excellence of his photo-aquatint prints (photogravure).
14. Emerson (1889, 1899) 1973, bk. II, 135–37.
15. Emerson (1889, 1899) 1973, bk. II, 135.
16. Willis 1878, 400.
17. Emerson (1889, 1899) 1973, bk. II, 137. For those interested in the chemistry of the process, Emerson mentions *Platinotype* by Baron Arthur von Hübl and Captain Giuseppe Pizzighelli, which had been recently translated by J. F. Iselin and edited by W. de W. Abney, and published in London.
18. Emerson (1889, 1899) 1973, bk. II, 137.
19. Dusan Stulik and Art Kaplan, analysis report, April 11, 2007, Science Department, Getty Conservation Institute and National Media Museum Registry files; Matthew L. Clarke, analysis report, November 28, 2011, Photograph Conservation Department, National Gallery of Art.
20. Hafey and Shillea 1979, 5.
21. Clarke, analysis report, 2011; visual observations at the National Gallery of Art, 2015. Smalt is a common whitening agent that imparted a subtle blue tint to counteract the natural yellow tinge of rag paper.
22. Sarah S. Wagner and Matthew L. Clarke, National Gallery of Art, personal communication, June 2015; Brückle 1993.
23. Several early platinum prints prepared by William Willis were donated to the Photograph Conservation Department Study Collection, National Gallery of Art, by Hans Kraus Jr. Five prints labeled as “lead process / early specimens” were found to contain smalt as determined by XRF analysis and microscopic examination. See also Cyntia Karnes, “The Art and Science of Papermaking for Platinum Photographs,” in this volume.
24. Emerson 1886b, 139.
25. Emerson 1886a, cited in Taylor 1986, 74.
26. Emerson (1889, 1899) 1973, bk. II, 137.
27. Object details for *Gathering Water-Lilies*, J. Paul Getty Museum website, [www.getty.edu/art/collections](http://www.getty.edu/art/collections). John Taylor’s comments, posted following the publication of Taylor 2006, offer a new interpretation: “The book features images of laborers, and this peaceful scene is no exception: as the man rows, the woman gathers flowers to use as bait for fishing. Water-lilies were placed in a large bow net, like the one behind the oarsman in this image. The bow net was then sunk to trap tench, a fish common to these waters. Emerson sought a moment of tender beauty as the woman reaches into the water to collect a blossom.”
28. Taylor 2006, 40–44.
29. Edition of 250 on India proofs, image: 20.3 × 29.9 cm (11 × 14½ in.), mounted on plate paper, sheet: 37.2 × 46.3 cm (17 × 23¼ in.), or edition of 750 proofed directly on the same size plate paper, costing 10s 6d and 7s 6d respectively. The photogravure in the Victoria and Albert Museum is on India paper (inv. no. PH2124-1896).
30. “Our Editorial Table” 1886, 389. Emerson presented a copy of the Autotype photogravure to the Victoria and Albert Museum; the entry in the Engraving Accession Registry (1888) states, “Probably the first photogravure negative from nature ever published separately as a work of art. May 14 1886.” This information was provided by Federica Chiochetti from her research for the 2015–16 exhibition *P. H. Emerson: Presented by the Author* at Nottingham Castle Museum and Art Gallery, in partnership with the Victoria and Albert Museum and supported by the Art Fund.
31. McWilliam and Sekules 1986, 34.
32. Emerson (1889, 1899) 1973, bk. II, 157.
33. Emerson (1889, 1899) 1973, bk. II, 161.
34. Emerson 1890c, viii.
35. Emerson (1889, 1899) 1973, bk. II, 160.
36. In the preface to *Wild Life on a Tidal Water* (1890), Emerson published his discussion with Colls, “Since my last publication I have been making several experiments with printing papers, and the results are given here. . . . When I first asked Colls to submit proofs on various papers, he replied that ‘photo-etchings’ were best on plate paper, and would not print on the harder papers.’ Mr. Alfred Dawson [another etcher], too, has written: . . . ‘Then the paper admired for etchings is quite unable to print photogravures; it is harder in texture and rough, so that it cannot enter into the tiny pits of the process plates.’ I hired Mr. Colls’ printer for some days, and he obtained for me specimens of every possible printing paper, and I set to work to experiment—Mr. Colls having to acknowledge finally he was wrong.” Emerson 1890c, viii.
37. For example, Emerson 1890b, n.p.
38. Emerson 1888, n.p.
39. Taylor 1994, 90–119.
40. From 1884 to 1895 Emerson registered 172 photographs now preserved in the National Archives, Kew, UK.
41. For example, *Hay Maker with Rake* (in *Pictures of East Anglian Life*, 1888) was copyrighted in platinum but published as a photogravure.
42. Emerson 1895. One hundred copies of the limited deluxe edition were published in 1895. Priced at £1 1s, it was relatively inexpensive. Two hundred copies of the “ordinary” edition were published and sold for 10s 6d.
43. Taylor 2006, 60.
44. Taylor 2006, 60.
45. “Work of the Year” 1897, 40.

46. "Photograms of '96" 1896, 18.
47. Taylor 2006, 62.
48. Taylor 2006, 47.
49. Hurter and Driffield 1890.
50. Callender 2004, 315–22. "The Driffield Bequest" is held in the Royal Photographic Society Collection, at the Victoria & Albert Museum, London.
51. Emerson 1890a.
52. In 1930 the American photographer Alvin Langdon Coburn donated nine copies of Emerson's books to the Royal Photographic Society. These are listed in the Royal Photographic Society Gift Books and in "Coburn Collection" 1930, 241–42.

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