

## **ANNE BRIGMAN**

### **VISIONARY IN MODERN PHOTOGRAPHY**

Photographer, poet, critic, and mountaineer, Anne Brigman (1869-1950) is best known for her figurative landscape images made in the Sierra Nevada in the early 1900s. During her lifetime, Brigman's significance spanned both coasts of the United States. In Northern California, where she lived and worked, she was a leading Pictorialist photographer, a proponent of the Arts & Crafts movement, and a participant in the burgeoning Berkeley/Oakland Bohemian community. On the East Coast her work was promoted by Alfred Stieglitz, who elected her to the prestigious Photo-Secession and championed her as a Modern photographer. Her final years were spent in southern California, where she wrote poetry and published a book of photographs and poems, *Songs of a Pagan*, the year before she died.

This retrospective exhibition, with loans drawn from prestigious private and public collections around the world, is the largest presentation of Brigman's work to date.

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The exhibition is curated by Ann M. Wolfe, Andrea and John C. Deane Family Senior Curator and Deputy Director at the Nevada Museum of Art. We thank the following individuals for their scholarly contributions and curatorial guidance: Susan Ehrens, art historian and independent curator; Alexander Nemerov, Department Chair and Carl & Marilyn Thoma Provostial Professor in the Arts and Humanities at Stanford University; Kathleen Pyne, Professor Emerita of Art History at University of Notre Dame; and Heather Waldroup, Associate Director of the Honors College and Professor of Art History at Appalachian State University.

### **ENTRANCE QUOTE**

Close as the indrawn and outgoing breath are these songs  
Woven of faraway mountains ... and the planes of the sea ...  
Gleaned from the heights and the depths that a human must know  
As the glories of rainbows are spun from the tears of the storm.

—Anne Brigman

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## CHILD OF THE TROPICS

Anne Brigman's story begins on the Hawaiian Islands in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Born into a family of American missionaries on December 3, 1869, Anne Wardrope Nott (known as "Annie" from an early age) grew up in Nu'uaniu Pali, an area above Honolulu on the island of Oahu. She referred to herself as a "child of the tropics," recalling in vibrant detail the lush tropical landscapes of her youth.

The eldest of eight children, Anne was raised in an influential Protestant missionary family with ties to Hawaii's earliest Christian settlements. She attended Abigail Smith's Nu'uaniu School and Oahu College (later renamed Punahou School), which was founded in Honolulu for missionary children in 1841.

Although Brigman would reminisce later in life of "the ache in [her] legs for flight...[and]...the wild, wonderful need to stampede" from the trappings of her youth, her formative years were nevertheless influenced by the social customs of her upper-middle class world. These included obligatory daily prayer, a classical education, visits to her maternal grandmother's parlor, and the expectation that women's work was best suited to the domestic sphere.

For much of her youth and young adulthood, Brigman navigated between two worlds: one defined by the patriarchal values, belief systems, and conventions of her Victorian-era upbringing, and one that promised the freedom and independence of a new modern era. In 1885, at the age of sixteen, Anne Nott moved with her family to California, where her father purchased land in Los Gatos and San Miguel.

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## **VICTORIAN VALUES**

### **BRIGMAN'S FIRST PHOTOGRAPHS**

Anne Brigman emerged as a photographer during the cultural shift in values from the late-nineteenth century Victorian period to the modern era. She made her first photographs in 1901, at the age of thirty-two. There is speculation that she was initially encouraged by her younger sister Elizabeth Nott.

George Eastman introduced the small, handheld Kodak camera only a decade earlier in 1888. Early on, the Eastman Kodak Company began heavily promoting its products to women, encouraging them to document their families, homes, and gardens. To underscore the ease of their cameras, Eastman Kodak launched an advertising campaign targeting women and children with the slogan: "You press the button, we do the rest." Brigman was among this first wave of amateur women photographers to pick up the camera.

Engaging family and friends as her models, Brigman's earliest photographs depict pastoral and idyllic landscapes and reflect Victorian views of womanhood. Her subjects included traditional seated portraits, romantic silhouettes of young women surrounded by flowers, and depictions of mothers with children in bucolic gardens. When considered together, the images appear to celebrate and idealize motherhood, feminine beauty, and purity, while asserting the conventional social role of women in late nineteenth-century society.

In January 1902, not long after Brigman took up photography, five of her prints were selected for exhibition in the Second San Francisco Photographic Salon held at the Mark Hopkins Institute of Art. Soon after she joined the ranks of fine art photographers seeking to break away from the amateur photography world. As her photographic awareness matured, Brigman turned to new subject matter—a decision that would come to define her reputation as an artist.

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## WILD AND FREE

### ANNE AND MARTIN BRIGMAN

At the age of twenty-four, Anne Nott married Martin Brigman, a Danish sea captain twenty years her senior. In 1894, the couple made their home in a quaint brown-shingled bungalow near the bustling port of Oakland, across the bay from San Francisco. The location offered Captain Brigman easy access to his sailing vessel.

Family members described the couple as “wild and free people,” and their marriage afforded Anne the opportunity to see the world while accompanying her husband at sea. Together they traveled to China, Australia, the South Pacific, and the Hawaiian Islands. While at home in Oakland, Anne assumed the chores and duties of the household—referring once to such responsibilities as “domestic drudgery.” Having had no children, the Brigmans began to live individual lives. In 1903, following the unexpected separation of her parents, Anne’s mother and sisters moved into the couple’s home. By 1908, Anne had started to refer to her photographs as her “picture children,” suggesting that her burgeoning career as an artist had supplanted traditional expectations for motherhood.

According to her friend and fellow photographer Imogen Cunningham, Brigman injured herself during one of her voyages when she fell while onboard her husband’s ship. The accident led to the surgical removal of her left breast and a permanent scar. One might assume that such disfigurement—which threatened Victorian-era definitions of idealized beauty—might deter an emerging woman photographer from photographing herself nude. On the contrary, Brigman defied social norms and began to make nude self-portraits in the years to come.



Left: Martin Brigman’s 200-foot-long ship, the *Willie R. Hume*, was originally built for the Simpson Lumber Company in San Francisco

Right: Anne Brigman’s sketch of her husband’s ship at sea, not dated

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## OAKLAND AND BERKELEY A COMMUNITY OF KINDRED SPIRITS

At the turn of the twentieth century, the San Francisco Bay Area was a vital center of creative expression. Oakland and Berkeley, where Anne Brigman lived and worked, were home to an intellectual and creative community of writers, poets, artists, and educators. California's mild climate and diverse landscapes—from oak-studded hills and foggy rugged coastline to the high elevations of the Sierra Nevada—fostered a collective admiration for nature and an emphasis on outdoor living. Living life in harmony with nature was a key concept of modernist thinking on the West Coast.

When Brigman's husband was away at sea, she forged friendships with a burgeoning bohemian community of artists, thinkers, and writers who shared her love for the outdoors. She was close to the painter William Keith (1838–1911), known for his sketching trips to the Sierra Nevada with his friend John Muir. The writer and social activist Jack London (1876–1916), as well as Berkeley naturalist and poet Charles Keeler (1871–1937), were also her friends. Brigman embraced the Arts & Crafts Movement's emphasis on living the "simple life," as well as the revival of classical Greek arts, literature, theater, and dance sweeping the San Francisco Bay Area at this time. Pictorial photographers were influenced by these trends as well, finding renewed inspiration in nature, literary allegory, and ancient mythology.

On April 18, 1906, San Francisco was rocked by an earthquake and fire that destroyed the homes, studios, and artworks of many of Brigman's friends. "By summer, many of us felt the need of a change of scene after the long strain," she wrote. Living across the Bay in Oakland, Brigman escaped the devastation, and with a small group of friends she departed for the Sierra later that summer. She made some of her most iconic images during this trip to the mountains.



Left: Arthur Mathews, *Girls Dancing in Spring*, not dated  
Center: Arthur F. Mathews, *The Wave (Marine)*, not dated  
Right: Gottardo Piazzoni, *Reflection*, 1904

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## **I WANTED TO GO AND BE FREE BRIGMAN IN THE MOUNTAINS**

Anne Brigman fashioned her Oakland home, studio, and garden as an urban oasis, but she also felt a “hunger for the clean, high, silent places, up near the sun and the stars,” where she could “eat and sleep with the earth.” The mountains offered her a freedom unlike any she had experienced elsewhere. “I wanted to go and be free,” she recalled of her ascent to the Sierra. “I wanted the rough granite flanks of the mountains and the sweet earth.... I wanted to forget everything except that I was going back to heaven, back to heaven in my high boots, and trousers, and mackinaw coat. That was all I wanted.”

In the early 1900s, the Sierra were still largely considered a place for men. Few women—and even fewer women artists—ventured to the higher elevations of the northern Sierra. The American public came to know places like Donner Pass and Lake Tahoe largely through the images of pioneer and government survey photographers like Timothy O’Sullivan and Carleton Watkins, whose work helped celebrate America’s frontier expansion. John Muir’s Sierra Club held its first summer outing to the Sierra in 1901, and although women were welcome to join the excursions, the group’s membership roster remained predominately male throughout the early 1900s. Historical snapshots of these excursions show women wearing conventional Victorian walking dresses and long-sleeved, button-down blouses—clothing that was not necessarily conducive to high altitude hiking.

This makes Brigman’s mountaineering and photography excursions to the Sierra, around this same time, all the more groundbreaking. Camping with her red dog Rory, or with her sisters and friends, Brigman made many of her now-iconic nude self-portraits among pines and ancient juniper trees at 8,000 feet elevation. Two of her favorite locations were Desolation Valley, which she described as “primeval, austere, forbidding, and sinister,” and Lake Angela near Donner Pass.

Many scholars speculate that Brigman was the first woman in America to photograph her own nude body.



Left: *Anne Brigman with family in the Sierra* [left to right: Anne Nott Brigman, Mary Nott, Clara Moore Nott, William Weaver Nott, Elizabeth Nott Hough, Sarah Nott]

Center: Snapshot of Brigman’s friends in a Sierra lake

Right: Anne Brigman hiking with her dog Rory in the Sierra

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## PERFORMING IN THE MOUNTAINS NATURE AND THE HUMAN BODY

By the time Anne Brigman was making photographs in the Sierra in the early 1900s, she was already immersed in the revival of classical literature, art, theater, and dance that was sweeping the San Francisco Bay Area. Around this same time, she also discovered the work of British poet and writer Edward Carpenter, who practiced a philosophy of nature mysticism. Committed to living in harmony with nature, Carpenter and his followers delved into pre-Christian myths and rituals as a source for understanding the unconscious.

Inspired by Carpenter's writings about the revival of an enchanted pagan world, Brigman embarked on photographic outings that could be described as performances. Her sisters and friends re-enacted the roles of divine spirits—such as nymphs, fauns, and dryads—in her outdoor pagan theater. “In all of my years of work with the lens, Brigman explained. “I’ve dreamed of and loved to work with the human figure— to embody it in rocks and trees, to make it part of the elements, not apart from them, even as Edward Carpenter writes:

*How the human body bathed in the sheen  
and wet, steeped in sun and air,  
Moving near and nude among the elements,  
Matches somehow and interprets the whole of nature.”*

More than any other element of nature, Brigman was drawn to trees because she found beauty in what she saw as their struggle to survive. She compared their endurance to the human struggle, which she believed was necessary for personal and creative growth. Brigman had first realized that the nude figure could be used to express personal struggle when she saw Robert Demachy's 1904 photograph titled *Struggle*. Shortly after this, she spoke of struggle—as both an image and an idea—as “wonderful.” It was a theme that would become central to her own life story.



Left: Brigman's unprinted negative reveals a performance unfolding outdoors

Right: Robert Demachy, *Struggle*, 1904

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## **THE PICTORIALIST IMPULSE BRIGMAN'S EAST AND WEST COAST CONTEMPORARIES**

By the time Anne Brigman picked up her camera in 1901, there were thousands of amateur photographers making images around the world. This popularity eventually led to a distinction between hobbyist photographers, commercial photographers, and serious art photographers. Among the latter group, a movement emerged called pictorialism. Pictorialist photographers believed that photographs, like paintings and drawings, should be considered fine art. They felt photography demanded more than a straightforward, scientific approach to making images, and that photographs should express feelings and emotion.

Among the favored subjects of pictorialists were pastoral landscapes, moody cityscapes, pictures celebrating motherhood, and studio portraits of nude women. Brigman held membership in many camera clubs and organizations, and she soaked up the steady stream of East and West Coast influences that arrived at her door via magazines and journals circulated by these professional groups. It is important to note that at this time, artistic photographs of nude women were exclusively made by male photographers. This was because men had access to female models in academic art schools and studio workshops—while women were still decades away from gaining equal access to these places.

On the West Coast, many pictorialist photographers participated in the activities of the California Camera Club and the Southern California Camera Club. Among Brigman's regional peers were Laura Adams Armer, Francis Brugiere, Arnold Genthe, Adelaide Hanscom, Emily Pitchford, and William Dassonville. She became acquainted with the work of her East Coast and European contemporaries via New York photographer Alfred Stieglitz's quarterly publication *Camera Work*. In 1903, she attended a notable exhibition (held alongside the Third San Francisco Photographic Salon), which brought the work of East Coast pictorialist photographers Clarence White, Gertrude Kasebier, Edward Steichen, and Alfred Stieglitz to the West Coast for the first time.

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## ALFRED STIEGLITZ

### THE PHOTO-SECESSION, EAST COAST MODERNISM, AND THE FEMALE BODY

In 1902, New York-based Alfred Stieglitz founded a photography group called the “Photo-Secession” with the intention of elevating photography to the status of fine art. He modeled the group on earlier Secessionist art movements in Paris, Vienna, and Munich. Through his quarterly publication, *Camera Work*, and exhibitions at his Little Galleries, located at 291 Fifth Avenue, New York (nicknamed “291”), Stieglitz shaped photography’s modern canon in the early twentieth century.

In 1903, the same year Stieglitz elected Brigman to membership in the Photo-Secession, they began corresponding regularly. He also published her photographs in *Camera Work*, and in 1906 promoted her to the rank of “Fellow,” (a term used to refer to the core members of the group). Brigman was the only photographer west of the Mississippi to achieve such status. Stieglitz championed the idea that artists offered a vision beyond that of the everyday world. In the early years of the Photo-Secession, this was epitomized by Gertrude Kasebier, whose softly-focused, atmospheric photographs of women and children, according to Stieglitz, incited a soulful, bodiless experience. Stieglitz promoted Kasebier as a key member of the Photo-Secession and described her as “beyond dispute the leading portrait artist” in America.

After Stieglitz discovered Brigman’s female nudes, however, he adopted a more radical social program at 291 that was grounded in the writings of sexologists Havelock Ellis and Sigmund Freud. Based on their theories, Stieglitz asserted that an artist’s erotic life and sexual drive was the source of his or her creative energy. Brigman’s images of the nude female body (especially her nude self portraits) offered Stieglitz an authentic and powerful example of the fearlessness and freedom to which women could aspire in an increasingly modern world. Stieglitz’s beliefs, however, were at odds with what Brigman felt her photographs represented. Nevertheless, her images exemplified Stieglitz’s new definition of East Coast modernism ground in the sexologists theories. Stieglitz was so taken by Brigman’s work that his interest in Kasebier began to wane, and he soon replaced Kasebier with Brigman as the Photo-Secession’s female figurehead.



Left: Alfred Stieglitz photographed by Gertrude Kasebier

Right: Interior photograph of Stieglitz’s Gallery 291 in New York

## **BRIGMAN IN NEW YORK: “STORM CENTRE” OF HER LIFE**

Early in 1910, Anne Brigman embarked on an eight-month trip to the East Coast. Alfred Stieglitz had promised her a solo exhibition at Gallery 291. The trip also offered her a chance for camaraderie with members of the Photo-Secession, and an opportunity to improve her technical skills in platinum printing. There are also rumblings in her letters that she was being held back by the burdens of her domestic life. As these pressures built, Brigman broke free of her West Coast responsibilities and left for New York. She would eventually describe her time there as “one of the greatest storm centres” of her life.

Upon Brigman’s arrival in Manhattan, she found herself jarred by a frenzied, mechanized modern world. She described it “as stepping to a new planet with almost absolute change of food and air.” However, this was only the first instance of culture shock she experienced during her visit. By 1910 Stieglitz had embraced an exhibition program that focused almost exclusively on depictions of the female nude. Among the male artists she interacted with at Gallery 291, Brigman witnessed a rampant sexual liberalism she found disrespectful and at odds with her personal philosophies about the human body and nature. She later wrote to Stieglitz that the raw discussions of sexuality had “staggered her,” and that as the lone woman at the gallery, she had suffered while the men delighted in looking together at erotica and other images of the female body. These same peers asked Brigman to sit as a model for their photographs. Relying on conventional feminine props, they represented her as a Victorian woman rather than as she saw herself—a brave, new, modern woman.

Brigman never received the solo exhibition Stieglitz had promised her. Further, she struggled to understand how she and her work fit into his broader modernist program. She later described her life-changing experiences in New York as the “wonderful terrible,” alluding to her personal belief that suffering and struggle would aid and enable her personal and professional growth.

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## MAINE: BRIGMAN'S COASTAL RESPITE

In July 1910 Anne Brigman left New York for the tranquility of photographer Clarence White's inaugural summer school class at Five Islands, Maine. She was among a group of eight students who paid forty dollars for the three-week course in photography, which promised technical instruction in a remote coastal setting described as "fifteen hundred acres of storm-beaten cliffs, bold headlands, islands and reefs, hard, clean sand beaches, salt rivers and lagoons, lakes, brooks and wood."

Brigman wrote Stieglitz a cheery letter about her time in Maine, filled with descriptions of herself swimming, posing for her classmates, and having a wonderful time. Her correspondence suggests that Maine offered the respite she so desperately needed after her unsettling experience in New York. Gertrude Kasebier and F. Holland Day, both members of the Photo-Secession, were on hand to critique student work, and it seems Brigman enjoyed the informal camaraderie of the group. She wrote to Stieglitz that in Maine she was "beginning to feel like myself again," having gotten "a new vision of things."

Evidence suggests, however, that her experience there may not have been fully nurturing. Again, she agreed to sit as a model for her teacher and fellow students, who depicted her as a conventional Victorian woman. And in the images she made in Maine, like *The Mood, Infinitude, and Grief*, a tiny, female figure appears dwarfed against a vast landscape, suggesting isolation and melancholy. *Sanctuary*, which she made at the Grand Canyon on her return trip to California, exudes a similar loneliness.



Left: Clarence H. White's First Summer School, Five Islands, Maine, 1910

Center: Anne Brigman at Five Islands Maine, photographed by Clarence H. White, 1910

Right: Anne Brigman photographed by Clarence H. White, 1910

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**FINDING FREEDOM:  
BRIGMAN'S PERSONAL CRISIS**

Anne Brigman's time in New York forced her to address many of the issues set into motion on her trip to the East Coast in early 1910. Not only did she begin to reassess her relationship with Stieglitz and his East Coast brand of modernism, she also started to question the domestic obligations of her marriage to Martin Brigman. Upon her return to Oakland, she decided to live apart from her husband.

Brigman's "reading along the sociological lines" during the previous year gave her this new understanding of her situation. "I woke to the fact that I was a human being struggling against conditions I had sworn to live by in peace." Leading to this epiphany were insights she found in the book *Love and Marriage* by Swedish marriage reformer Ellen Key. By 1912, Brigman had converted a structure on the rear of her Oakland property to a living-working space. It served to support the independent lifestyle and identity she desired, and she referred to it as "the Cave."

Brigman made some of her most dramatic and violent images along the northern California coast during this period of personal crisis from 1911-1913. She wrote to Stieglitz of the significant changes in her life, describing her new weekly regimen of exercise—walking the hills or swimming in the sea—which began to "steady her nerves." She wrote to him of her newfound walking therapy, which aided her recovery. "Scarcely a Sunday through the past year has been missed from the trail," she explained. "It gives back a sanity and a peace and a new hold on the good life that is ours for the taking."

By 1913, Brigman was ready to take her experiences public. An article in a San Francisco newspaper related Brigman's story of separation from her husband and her new independent life. "Three years ago we separated. He had his way of thinking and I had mine and we developed along different lines. So now I am here, working out my destiny," Brigman explained to the press. She went on to explain that photography offered her a newfound freedom: "My pictures," she declared, "tell of my freedom of soul, of my emancipation from fear."

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## ON STIEGLITZ, BRIGMAN, AND GEORGIA O'KEEFFE

Although Anne Brigman's work encompassed a range of genres, Stieglitz only promoted her nudes for exhibition and publication. His New York modernist agenda was grounded in the idea that an artist's erotic life was his or her source of creative energy. Brigman's pictures demonstrated, for Stieglitz, how women artists could shape the female body to represent the deep self and restore an authentic condition of healthy sexuality. But Brigman regarded her images of nudes as something different: a story of personal feminist struggle and a symbol of her deep reverence for nature.

During World War I, Stieglitz left Brigman behind as he searched for a woman artist whose work would speak to his imaginings of a woman's undiscovered erotic life. In 1916, Georgia O'Keeffe was a young painter in West Texas, eager to transcend her poor economic conditions. She cooperated, sometimes unhappily, in Stieglitz's project to examine the sexologists' ideas about the female body. In early 1918, Stieglitz wrote to Brigman that he was reviewing the photographs of hers he had kept. "I'm so glad to have them," he wrote. "They are a real pleasure." A few months later, he was photographing O'Keeffe nude, arranging her bare arms twisting through space. He wrote Brigman again in 1919, describing his photographic sessions with O'Keeffe, and admitting that he was reinventing Brigman's nudes with O'Keeffe as a model, her poses twisting through space like trees: "Clean cut sharp heartfelt mentally digested bits of universality in the shape of Woman—head—torso—feet—hands—Even some trees too—just human trees—new ideas all." Brigman's photographs taught Stieglitz how to stage O'Keeffe's body, and in doing so, he imagined that he had revealed O'Keeffe's sexuality and secret, inner life as a woman.

Stieglitz had introduced O'Keeffe to Brigman's nudes and trees through *Camera Work*, even before he brought her to New York. O'Keeffe wrote to him that she was "absurdly excited" upon seeing the photographs: "Anne Bridgeman [sic] almost took me through the roof—" was her response. Stieglitz continued to look to Brigman as source of inspiration, for example in a series of tree pictures he made in upstate New York in the 1920s. O'Keeffe (who Stieglitz married in 1924), would later project her own voice into tree forms, once she began to paint the New Mexico landscape in the 1930s.



Left: Anne Brigman, *The Dying Cedar*, 1906/printed circa 1907

Center left: Alfred Stieglitz, *Photograph of Georgia O'Keeffe*, 1918

Center right: Alfred Stieglitz, *The Dying Chestnut Tree*, 1927

Right: Georgia O'Keeffe, *Autumn Trees—The Maple*, 1924

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## INWARD AND ONWARD

By 1915, Anne Brigman's colleagues and friends considered her a leader in the San Francisco Bay Area artistic community. She wrote art criticism and openly shared her opinions about current art exhibitions and issues in photography. In 1914, she was selected as one of four Bay Area photographers to serve on the selection committee for the pictorial gallery of the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition (PPIE). The PPIE was organized to commemorate the completion of the Panama Canal and to demonstrate that San Francisco had recovered from the devastating 1906 earthquake and fire.

By the time of the PPIE, however, pictorialist photography was on the wane. Stieglitz would dissolve the Photo-Secession, close Gallery 291, and cease publication of *Camera Work* by 1917. After World War I, many photographers shifted their focus away from romantic and impressionistic subject matter to more objective views of urban and industrial landscapes and close-up nature studies. Brigman assimilated some of these new directions into her own photography, which are evident in her landscapes, still lifes, and architectural studies from this period. She made excursions to Yosemite and Carmel during these years, and revisited and made prints from some of her earliest negatives. Brigman also chose to look inward, creating a series of meditative and introspective portraits suggesting a heightened awareness of her modern "self."

In 1929, Brigman left Oakland for Southern California, agreeing to rent her home at 683 Brockhurst Street to a young photographer named Willard Van Dyke. On November 8, 1932, a group of his Bay Area photographer friends (including Ansel Adams, Imogen Cunningham, John Paul Edwards, Sonya Noskowiak, Henry Swift, and Edward Weston) formed a loose association they referred to as Group f/64. The name referred to a lens aperture on a camera used to create sharply focused images. In time, Van Dyke established an informal gallery he named 683 Brockhurst—a direct reference to Stieglitz's Gallery 291. One of the great ironies associated with Brigman's legacy is that her Oakland home and studio—long considered the Bay Area's pictorialist epicenter—became known as the birthplace of hard-edged modern photography.

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## **SONGS OF THE SEA**

### **BRIGMAN IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA**

In 1929, at the age of sixty, Anne Brigman moved to southern California, where she lived for the final twenty-one years of her life. While her move was precipitated by the need to care for her elderly mother, it also signaled a pivotal turning point in her life and creative work.

While living in Long Beach, a few blocks from the Pacific Ocean, Brigman renewed her deep connection to the sea, a source of countless childhood memories. She frequented the beaches of the Pacific Ocean, turning her attention—and her camera—to the shoreline, the sand, and the ocean.

During the final decades of her life, poetry became Brigman’s dominant form of self-expression. She attended creative writing classes taught by Helen Mathews and filled notebooks with her typewritten poems. Eventually she compiled two complete manuscripts for poetry books that were to be paired with her photographs. *Wild Flute Songs* remains unpublished, and *Songs of a Pagan* was published in 1949. *Songs of a Pagan* ends with fifteen consecutive poems about the sea—a testament to her enduring passion for its songs.

Brigman died in 1950 at the age of eighty.

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### **[MINI TEXT ON LABEL RAIL]**

#### ***SONGS OF A PAGAN***

#### **BRIGMAN’S BOOK OF POETRY**

In her book of poetry, *Songs of a Pagan*, Brigman expressed passion, mourned loss, dreamed of freedom, and welcomed death. Written, designed, and edited entirely by Brigman, the publication paired thirty-eight poems with thirty-eight photographs and was supposed to be published in 1941 by the Caxton Press in Idaho. World War II delayed the book’s publication, but it was eventually printed in 1949—one year before Brigman’s death.

Stieglitz penned a special frontispiece for *Songs of a Pagan* in the form of a letter emphatically declaring Brigman’s important contribution to the field of photography. “The photographers of distinction are rarer than ever,” he wrote. “One who has achieved deserved distinction amongst camera workers is Anne Brigman.”

The title *Songs of a Pagan* likely referred Walt Whitman’s 1892 poem, “Song of Myself,” published in *Leaves of Grass*, as well as to Alfred Stieglitz’s series of cloud photographs, *Songs of the Sky*.



## [Songs of the Sea—subtext panels]

### **SAND EROSIONS**

While living in southern California, Brigman began to photograph the Pacific Ocean shoreline, emphasizing expansive beaches and spacious skies. One morning she discovered what she called “sand erosions,” recounting, “here on the shining sand ... I saw for the first time the patterns cut by the drainage of the outgoing tide.” Brigman photographed the close-up details and abstract geometric patterns she saw in the sand.

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### **PRINTS**

Shortly after her move to Southern California, Brigman began to experiment with printmaking, producing a series of stylized linoleum-block prints inspired by motifs of the sea. Brigman’s brief foray into block printing could be attributed to her association with the Arts & Crafts movement and her lifelong interest in printmaking techniques. These influences span from her early exposure to her grandfather’s engraving legacy in Hawaii, to her studies in the San Francisco Bay Area with the noted art educator and printmaker Rudolph Schaeffer.

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### **AWARDS**

Throughout her lifetime, Anne Brigman remained grateful to Alfred Stieglitz for his support and encouragement. More than anyone else, Stieglitz offered Brigman guidance, promoted her photographs, and acted as her agent to negotiate reproduction permissions and licensing fees. Stieglitz submitted Brigman’s photographs to juried competitions throughout the United States and internationally. Thanks in large part to his efforts, she won many awards and became widely celebrated in pictorialist photography circles.

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## **POEM FOR SO CAL ROOM:**

### **Nirvana**

I have left my mountains  
I have come to the sea  
Gone are my peaks and granite wilds  
And the glorious twist of the juniper tree.

My heart cries back for the sheer, wild heights  
For the rocky trails and the starry nights  
For the campfire's glow and the icy stream  
For the whisper of winds and the cougar's scream. ... ..

I have come to the shore  
With its age-old song  
Its endless horizons and terrible deeps ...  
I have come to the ocean ... and I belong.

—Anne Brigman

## **POEM FOR EXIT WALL:**

### **Pyre Song**

Bury my body  
In the clean flame ... ..  
No need for epitaph ...  
No need for name ... ..  
It has known tenderness  
Drunk deep of grief  
Climbed toward the heavens  
Seeking its Star ...  
Blundering, hoping,  
Traveling far.

Yea ... give the fire  
This slender husk  
With a wild spray  
Of cedar and musk.  
Clothe it but lightly ...  
Let it go free  
Back to the elements  
Quiet and clean.  
No words or tears  
No vain regrets ...  
Glad I have lived in it

Glad of deliverance  
Vivid ... serene.

No need of requiems  
Hummed by a choir ...  
Wind songs and flame songs  
Are my desire  
For this blessed body  
Transmuted by fire.

—Anne Brigman