A Life reviewed: George Eastman through the viewfinder

Emma Powell

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A Life Reviewed:
George Eastman through the Viewfinder

by

Emma Powell

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Master of Fine Arts
in Imaging Arts

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Abstract

A Life Reviewed: George Eastman through the Viewfinder

by

Emma Powell

B.A. The College of Wooster, 2008

M.F.A., Imaging Arts, Rochester Institute of Technology, 2010

How do we look back on a time that has gone by? On a life that is over? How do we appraise and commemorate those responsible for making photography what it is today? A Life Reviewed: George Eastman through the Viewfinder addresses the legacy of George Eastman, the founder of Kodak and one of photography's most significant entrepreneurs. A visionary who sought to expand the scope of photography from the wealthy to the average person, he recognized photography's power in the context of many scientific advances in industry and society. A Life Reviewed serves as visual biography as well as a romantic gaze into past time. By photographing places and subjects important in Eastman's life through the viewfinders of old Kodak cameras, I have created a poetic aesthetic that is neither of the present or the past. Eastman's story is one of creativity, ambition, and most of all determination. I have studied Eastman's life and turned these details into images that capture contemporary decay as well as the artistic retelling of a life. This series depicts many subjects, from the house in which Eastman experienced a peaceful, though short, childhood to the home he built in an attempt to recapture his own past, including relics from his own adventures, specifically trophy animals from big game safaris in Africa that, like photographs, serve as visual souvenirs. This project explores the merging of the present and the historical past by telling a story about photography that is relevant to the medium itself.
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1 Introduction

During my first trip to Rochester in 2008, I visited the George Eastman House. I was thrilled to be immersed in the atmosphere of the nineteenth century. Surrounded by the textures and objects of that time, I strayed from the group and found corners of the display where I could let my mind wander while I imagined slipping away into another era. It is this space between the past and present that I am interested in photographing. Lyle Rexer describes this goal in his analysis of Jerry Spagnoli’s contemporary daguerreotypes: to “explore in a single image the collision of lived time and historical time.”¹ In order to do this, I needed to find a way to look back in time, through a window into the past, to visualize temporal distance. I needed a turn-of-the-century device that could speak to the technological advancements of the industrial revolution. I needed a time machine. Instead, I used old cameras.

I began by studying Rochester’s history, and while doing so I kept coming across George Eastman (July 12, 1854 – March 14, 1932), the founder of Kodak and remarkable benefactor of Rochester. His influence on the city and on the industry of photography were equally profound. The study of his life became the grounding force of my work, and it became clear that a photographic biography would be especially fitting. In order to look back at Eastman’s life and tell his story, I used the products he created: old Kodak cameras. I digitally photographed their viewfinders to produce an historic aesthetic.

Many early snap-shot cameras have an auxiliary

lens used only to frame the shot. To take these images, my modern camera and I peered down into the glass and mirrors of these old and dusty devices, looking at the traces of Eastman’s life. These cameras are a part of what made Eastman successful, and they made what he accomplished possible. They also became the element I was looking for: the gaze back in time.

This process enabled my work to combine both the non-fiction research of the historian and the romantic re-imagining of the artist. Through this work I examine the photographer’s relationship to the camera, and the camera’s relationship to its subject. I studied the history of photography through a combination of topics based on research and experiential methods of image-making. My work has never been about a transparent window or an accurate reflection of reality. Instead, there is always a self-conscious veil of process both making the viewer aware of the photographic technology and representing the distance between the viewer and the subject. In this case the veil suggests a distance in time era. My camera serves as a time machine offering a window into an imagined past.
Photographic Biography

Biography is an art, but it is one that has the same kind of obligations to the facts as does science. It concerns itself with the granite of truth, but it seeks...to fashion from that granite something that conveys flesh and blood.²

Ray Monk

Biography is the account of a human life. Though normally written, it can come in many different forms and media. In my case I am using photography to tell the story of a life. I chose to create this work as a biography because biography inhabits an interesting space between history and artistic fantasy. According to “the father of modern biography,” Dr. Samuel Johnson, the place of biography is “halfway between history, with which biography shares a concern with facts, and novel writing, with which it shares a concern for the joys and sorrows, happiness, calamities, etc. of individuals.”³

Unlike a written biography, which states facts about the past in a systematic and defined way, a photographic biography must rely on visual connections and surrogate subject matter. Photography can only show what is in front of the camera when the image is made. Thus when using it to discuss something that is gone, the lapse in time between the subject and the present becomes more apparent. In both photographic and written works dealing with the past, it becomes difficult not to skew the facts or introduce our contemporary biases. Photography brings these issues to the forefront by making them visible. The details and truths that can be masked or overlooked in the process of the written biography become pronounced in a photographic one.

³ Ibid., 529
In order to create a photographic biography, I sought out both physical remains of Eastman’s influence and written accounts with details of his life and personality. I photographed the locations directly connected to the man: his homes, the institutions he built, and the monuments dedicated to his memory. I dug through the archives and studied the city where he lived. I aimed to re-trace his steps to discover his story, as much as one can from such a distance. Biography often examines how a person is affected by his or her environment, but in this case the city was also very much influenced by Eastman. To my surprise and pleasure I am not the only one with an interest in biography; the Rev. Murray Bartlett, rector of St. Paul’s Church, later president of Hobart College, and a close friend of Eastman observed that “[Eastman] read biographies and was interested in history from a biographical standpoint.”

The style of literary biography in the mid to late nineteenth century was clearly different from styles of later eras. For example, literary critic Ray Monk compares biography from the Victorian era with the “New Biography,” a term for the styles of the early to mid-twentieth century, noting “where Victorian biographies were large and unstructured, the New Biographies were brief and tightly focused; where Victorian biographies were uncritical and reverential, the New Biographies were ironic and irreverent.” My body of photographic work has developed in keeping with the biographies of the Victorian era. It is loosely structured and more reverential than irreverent because of several factors. Firstly because I must rely on the availability of concrete subjects to photograph the structure of this biography touches on certain areas of his life instead of methodically retracing each step. The second factor is the

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nature of Eastman's influence and character. He is an enigmatic figure who is hard to pin down, but left me little cause for criticism. The culmination of my research revealed an individual who was firmly dedicated to doing what was right, beyond social gain. Lastly my romantic point of view and nostalgia for the style of the turn-of-the-century adds to the reverential nature of this series. The result of these qualities is a work that is more in tune with the era it is addressing.
3 Eastman's Childhood

Eastman’s yearning to create this bucolic world had its roots in a childhood to which he could never return… his father’s thirty-acre nursery, which specialized in fruit trees and rose bushes. Eastman’s purchase of [the] former Culver farm was perhaps an unconscious attempt to recapture the sights, sounds and smells of earlier days.⁶

Elizabeth Brayer

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Eastman was born in the small New York town of Waterville, in 1854. With family close by and an agricultural nursery, it is no wonder George Eastman Sr. kept his young family in the country while he commuted into the untamed city that was Rochester, New York, where he ran Eastman’s Commercial College. My photograph, *Apples* (Fig. 2),

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portrays the home in which Eastman spent his early childhood. Although there were many hardships soon to come, those early days must have been peaceful. The branches of a tree in the top of the image swirl with the fall-off, or lack of clarity around the edges caused by the device, all seeming to move in towards the focused image of a white house with a white fence. Red apples hang above it, signifying the Edenic abundance and serenity of this early time.

Fig. 3. Pink Bed

*Pink Bed* (Fig. 3), taken in the Waterville home, depicts the feminine household in which Eastman grew up. His father was often absent, and he was raised by his mother and sisters. This image also speaks to an early hardship his family endured, his older sister’s polio. The job of caring for Emma Kate, who was most likely bedridden or bound

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7. Eastman’s boyhood home has since been moved to the Genesee Country Village and Museum, in Mumford NY.
8. An unexpected connection: in 2003 I visited a prosthetic clinic in Kabul, Afghanistan, where I saw children suffering from polio. It is unusual for my generation to have witnessed this
to a wheelchair, fell on his mother and sisters. Eastman has been described as a “saintly sort of child... [and] tied to his mother's apron strings.” Witnessing the struggles his mother went through no doubt had an effect on Eastman, and he vowed to help her in any way he could. This became a motivating force that continued to propel his ambition for years to come.

The image, *Barn* (Fig. 4), is an old barn just outside Waterville. Because Eastman was a quiet and well-behaved child, possibly this characteristic made him a target of bullying. When he joined a club of local boys, as a hazing ritual the other children poured hot wax on his arm from the high rafters of a barn. He carried the scars for the rest of his life and even showed them off to friends. These scars may have represented a time in disease.

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9 As related by the daughter of one of Eastman's childhood friends. Mrs. Barrow's father, Mrs. C. Storrs Barrows, Eastman-Butterfield Collection, University of Rochester Department of Rare Books, Special Collections, and Preservation, 1940, Folder D. 138 9:2.
his life when he began to take risks. Indeed, it was the ability to take risks that later made him so successful.

In 1860, approaching the outbreak of the Civil War, Eastman's father moved his family to the growing city of Rochester, so they could all be together. Soon after, Eastman's life changed abruptly with his father's death. The photograph *Eastman Family Plot* (Fig. 5), shows the resting place of his father, mother, and sisters, in Waterville, New York. At the age of fourteen, Eastman gave up school and began working to help support his mother and sisters. He worked for an insurance company and then moved up to the position of clerk at Rochester Savings Bank. When planning a trip to Santa Domingo in 1877, someone suggested that he take a camera with him. Although he never took the trip, he found a new direction for his life. He learned the wet plate collodion process, which requires a large wooden camera and bulky portable
darkroom, not to mention a series of chemicals to create an emulsion on glass. He was frustrated by this laborious process and dedicated himself to developing an easier method of picture-taking.
My Background

I moved to Rochester to study photography as an MFA student at Rochester Institute of Technology. For my undergraduate thesis, I studied the nineteenth-century spirit photography movement as a subject for my own work in wet plate collodion. Many of the historic events of the spiritualist movement took place in Rochester. Moreover, Rochester’s height was during its turn-of-the-century industrial boom, and many of the buildings remain from that period. When I arrived in Rochester, I felt as if its history was just below the surface, as if I could stumble upon it, and at any moment be transported back in time. An aspect of my current project became my journey to discover a place through its past.

I grew up the child of a professional photographer and an art history professor. Even when my father’s after-dinner slideshows grew too long for my mother and younger sister, I would stay up to watch. Each image would require a lengthy explanation of its setting, often involving the ancient history of the Middle East. I also spent afternoons wandering around Vermont antique stores with my mother looking for old photographs that she planned to use as teaching tools. I have always studied history through the lens of art and art through its history, and the history of its subjects. I first really became interested in photography as something I wanted to do myself when I discovered historic and alternative processes. I had gone on several photographic expeditions to foreign countries with my father, but I struggled to find a subject of my own. Discovering alternative processes was like learning photography all over again, but this time it was mine, disconnected from my father's work. Although this project does not strictly involve an alternative process, but is in fact mainly digital, it incorporates visual similarities and references to historic processes and themes.
When considering the artistic influences for my work, it would be appropriate to start with my father, Luke Powell. I have examined his work more than that of any other photographer. From a young age I was helping to critique and sequence his work. His most significant work, *The Afghan Folio*, is highly pictorial, referencing Barbizon painting and rural nineteenth-century landscape painting. These soft, rich, and peaceful images function as a nostalgic gaze into the history of an endangered sustainable culture. Even after years of photographing the war-torn parts of Afghanistan, he prefers to include images that show the beauty of the pastoral setting, rather than the military influence.

As a child, my favorite image from this series was always *Light and Water* (Fig. 6). There is a darkness to this image, which he normally consciously avoids, preferring more painterly, agrarian scenes. Perhaps it is this visual idea of light emerging out of darkness that I am subconsciously trying to recreate. My father’s subjects are always location-based and he often preaches against work that “merely manipulate[s] images to further the interests of a company, nation, idea, or ego.”10 He has always encouraged me to seek out concrete subjects within my surroundings.

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10 Email: Apr 22, 2010.
When exploring Rochester, I was drawn to places with a palpable sense history. Consequently it seemed only natural for me to try to discover its photographic past through my own lens. I was excited by all of the visible history, but knew it would not be enough just to photograph things that were old. As Eastman himself remarked, "I'm not interested in things because they are old, they have to have some other characteristic besides mere age." \(^{11}\) I wanted to find a subject that would tell a story relevant to the city's past. I found that subject in George Eastman.

\(^{11}\) Quoted in a letter to F.W. Lovejoy from Mr. Bent, Kodak Limited, Feb 26\(^{th}\) 1940. Eastman-Butterfield Collection, Folder D.138 9:2.
The nineteenth century was a time of dramatic change. Industrialization swept the country. Leo Marx observes,

Between 1830 and 1860 the image of the machine, and the idea of a society founded upon machine power suddenly took hold of the public imagination. In the magazines, for example, images of industrialism, and particularly images associated with the power of steam, were widely employed as emblems of America's future. They stood for progress, productivity, and, above all, man's new power over nature. And they invariably carried a sense of violent break with the past.¹²

My photograph Eastman Kodak #6 (Fig. 7), represents the spread of industry and culture across the country. The train enabled the industrial revolution to thrive so vigorously in

the United States because it made it possible to conquer nature and, more importantly, space, represented by the vast expanse of the West. For Eastman, the train eventually meant the extension of his business beyond Rochester. This image shows an old train, gathering rust on the tracks of the Rochester & Genesee Valley Railroad Museum, Rush, New York, as part of the collection of the Rochester Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society. The viewfinder reverses the lettering that still clearly reads “Eastman Kodak Co.”

With the Industrial Revolution in full swing, the cultural climate in which Eastman grew up was one that was supportive of unusually creative innovation. The Erie Canal had been open for nearly 30 years, linking Rochester directly to the East Coast. By the end of the Civil War, Rochester experienced an upswing in industrial activity. Many new mechanical inventions were being created and promoted. By the turn of the century, Rochester was site of Bausch and Lomb (founded in 1853) the makers of a range of optical devices. The city was also home to the creators of the first automobile patent, as well as the less successful and even less functional Cooley Airship.

Rochester was also the birthplace of the developing Spiritualist Movement. This movement combined science and religion in the search for contact with the afterlife.
Spiritualists embraced photography as a form of proof for their cause. Mary Todd Lincoln, a famous spiritualist, had her portrait taken with the spirits of her husband and young son (Fig. 8). In 1853 it was this combination of spiritualism and industry in Rochester that inspired John Murray Spear to attempt to create a “God Machine” or “New Motive Power,” a mechanical messiah that would liberate mankind. The machine never worked and was eventually torn apart by an angry mob.\(^{13}\)

Joseph Smith published the first Book of Mormon in 1830 after finding the Golden Plates left for him by an angel on a hill near his house in Manchester, New York, only 30 miles east of Rochester. He is alleged to have used special technology in the form of glasses made from the biblical substance Urim and Thummim to decipher these reformed Egyptian texts.

Within this context of creative innovation came the invention of photography. The race to produce the first lasting photograph had been won by Joseph Nicéphore Niépce in 1826. But, as Eastman quickly realized when experimenting with the wet plate collodion process fifty years later, photography was still not accessible to the average consumer. The processes available required bulky machinery and a complex set of chemicals. In his spare time, while working at the Rochester Savings Bank, Eastman began experimenting with dry plate emulsions in order to simplify the photographic process. Despite a decent job that allowed him to support his mother and sisters, Eastman wanted to be a part of the new revolution. In his biography of Eastman, Carl W. Ackerman explains that Eastman’s first two careers, insurance and banking, were too much of a “covered wagon” approach and not part of the “advancing age of machinery.”\(^{14}\)


Eastman followed the popular developments of the machine age. For example he rode an early model of a bicycle to work; in fact snapshot photography and cycling would later became a popular combination of activities. In his essay “The Wheelman and the Snapshooter or, the Industrialization of the Picturesque,” Jay Ruby discusses the relationship between technology and turn-of-the-century American culture. He explains that “the success of the industrial revolution created an increased need for middle-class moral recreations and, at the same time offered a mechanized solution through cycling and picture-taking.”

Because of the rising industries around him and the public fascination with the new machine age, unlike some of his contemporaries, Eastman harbored no cautious reservations when it came to industry. In 1881, with the help of Henry A. Strong, a friend who was also a buggy whip manufacturer, the Eastman Dry Plate Company was founded. This company would later became the giant we know as Kodak. Although it was Eastman's dream to commercialize photography, Susan Sontag suggests that this was always photography’s destiny: “[the] industrialization of camera technology only carried out a promise inherent in photography from its beginning: to democratize all experiences by translating them into images.”

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6 My Approach

At the start of my graduate program, I began experimenting with the concept of changing technologies by shooting the cameras I had collected for alternative processes. I photographed them as subjects and then began photographing through them, through the viewfinder. I was looking at cast-off technology from the nineteenth century industrial revolution in comparison to the current digital revolution. First I started simply shooting the city through the camera's perspective, thinking about the wonder early photographers must have experienced and trying to recapture some this connection to the past. When photographing old cameras I got to thinking about the history and individual pasts of these objects. If they could talk, what would these objects tell me about their history? What would they look at?

The camera serves as a substitute for the eye. It stands in place of the eye and records what we have seen, but also, more accurately, what it has seen. The act of seeing is a characteristic otherwise given to living creatures. It is because of this that the camera is often anthropomorphized. In *The Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) by Dziga Vertov, a human eye is superimposed on the lens of a camera and the camera and tripod dance around as if brought to life. By doing this, Vertov is giving these objects human characteristics and emphasizing their role in the
creation of photographic and film artwork. He is also commenting on the importance and mystery associated with these new technologies.

Today old Kodak cameras sit unused on the shelves of virtually every antique or junk store around the world. My photograph *Obsolete* (Fig 10), shows a row of old cameras on display at Rochester's Artisan Works. With their film no longer available, they are of use only to collectors and photographic tinkerers. The majority of these objects are castoffs, the refuse of the industrial era. By literally photographing through the dust and decay in these viewfinders, I am invoking the historic distance, while creating a look that would not feel out of place in Eastman's time.
To establish an aesthetic context for my work, I have also studied at a range of images. I have been very drawn to the autochrome process. This early color process creates a very soft image with rich but muted colors and selective focus. The images are made up of dyed potato starch sandwiched with pitch between two pieces of glass. The starch gives the autochromes a visible grain and their colors are sometimes off. The long exposures required to produce autochrome images often make figures or surroundings blur, and because of this they are often carefully posed. I believe their imperfections give autochromes a life and look that is very different from later color processes (Fig. 11).

While developing the concept for this project, I examined Sally Mann’s series *What Remains*, and *Deep South*. In this work Mann photographed Civil War battlefields with the historic wet plate collodion process, a common process of that era. By utilizing
this old process, she attempts to visualize the trauma these places witnessed; thus, she is using a photographic process to reveal its own past. The idea of involving the way the image is made into the conceptual framework became important to me. David Maisel also does this in his series *History’s Shadow.* Maisel rephotographs x-rays of museum objects to discuss object history by examining the effects of time and the process of their production. These details are revealed through a look at the insides of art objects. The x-ray also adds an element of personification to these objects, since we are most accustomed to seeing x-rays of the human skeleton.
7 Kodak's Success and Eastman's Philanthropy

Men who leave their money to be distributed by others are pie-faced mutts.\textsuperscript{17} 
George Eastman

Eastman gained a reputation of being reliable when, soon after starting production a batch of dry plates proved bad, he recalled the faulty products, reimbursed the buyers, meanwhile putting himself in some financial danger. Eastman’s goal was to share photography by making it accessible to everyone. He worked to simplify the use of cameras so photography would no longer be restricted to the upper classes. Kodak’s famous slogan, “you press the button, we do the rest,” encouraged customers to trust and rely on their expertise. With the help of a dedicated team, Eastman introduced a new photographic technology that changed everything. Roll film allowed cameras to contain numerous exposures at one time and became the leading photographic technology for the twentieth century, putting Kodak at the top of the industry. During a trip to New York City when it seemed everyone wanted to take Eastman’s picture, he was told: “you certainly were most agreeable today in posing for so many pictures.” To which he replied: “I assumed they were all shooting Kodak film. If they were, it was a good day for Kodak.”\textsuperscript{18}

After decades of tireless dedication his company, Eastman realized that business success was not all that he wanted out of life. As he got older he reduced his role in the company and began exploring his leisure time in just as determined and

\textsuperscript{17} Elizabeth Brayer, \textit{George Eastman : A Biography} (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 346.

\textsuperscript{18} Quoted in a letter to F.W. Lovejoy from Mr. Raymond N. Ball, May 12\textsuperscript{th} 1939. Eastman-Butterfield Collection, Folder D.138 9:1
methodical a way as he had approached business. He studied art and music, and he went on camping trips and expeditions. He introduced each activity he explored to friends and family. He found uses for his money beyond his own gain; for example, he donated large sums to educational institutions. Not wanting the attention, he often made donations under the name “Mr. Smith,” enjoying the joke of anonymity. After signing away thirty million dollars to educational institutions in one sitting, Eastman rose from his chair and said, “Gentlemen, now I feel better.”

One cause closest to him was the dental dispensaries he funded. Having lost his teeth at a young age, Eastman wore false teeth. The first Eastman Dental Dispensary opened in Rochester in 1917. Wanting to prevent future generations from having to endure toothaches, he would shut down all the schools for a day in the Rochester area.

Fig 14. *Side Door*, Eastman Dental Dispensary, Rochester 2009

19 Ibid., Folder D. 138 9:2
in order to have each child go through the dispensary at a very low cost. Kodak also began producing films for the purpose of dental records. After the success of Rochester's dental dispensary, he opened others in cities around the world.

My photograph *Side Door of Eastman Dental Dispensary* (Fig 14) shows the current state of what was once a cutting-edge facility. It offers a stark comparison to today's highly decorated and well-kept Eastman House. This building is boarded up and abandoned for the months of the year when it is not being used as a haunted house called “The House of Pain.” The contemporary decay and ruined state of this building speaks more to the time that has passed and economic changes in the area, than places that have been well maintained. Though it was the first of its kind and once an example of medical progress, the dispensary building is now gathering ivy on Main Street.
My use of the viewfinder creates a Pictorialist effect by adding a layer of speckling that gives the image the imperfections of age. The viewfinder's auxiliary lens is never as clear or pristine as the actual lens of the old camera; this produces fall-off and loss of focus in areas of the image, as well as chromatic aberration, a blue or yellow edge around the subject. Light can also catch these lenses and make the viewer aware of the glass and the device being used. All of these elements add to the aged and soft style I desire. Through the use of rich but subtle colors, distortions from the viewfinders, and even the frame around the edge, I hope also to reference old processes like wet plate and the autochrome. Recalling the Pictorialists' dramatic light effects, soft focus, and bold experiments with photographic technology, I intend my aesthetic to both bridge and blur the gap between the past and present. For example, my most
Pictorialist image, *Swans at Durand Eastman Park* (Fig. 15), incorporates soft focus, as well as a natural and romantic setting.

*A Life Reviewed* may be Pictorialist, but is it Gothic? In his essay “American Gothic” Chris Townsend dissects the Gothic elements in the photography of Francesca Woodman.²⁰ He begins by breaking down what he believes to be the essential Gothic tropes. These include: ruin (architectural, moral, and biological), immurement (the is enclosed or confined against their will), the conflict between the irrational and enlightenment beliefs, breaching limits (whether space or identity), as well as death and decay. Townsend suggests that Woodman used these themes “as a commentary on the photograph as a place of subjective confinement, a kind of tomb,”²¹ and that she toyed “with Gothic figures as metaphors for photographic encryption in order to stress her liberation from it.”²² The use of Gothic tropes in my work acts more as a liberation from the present, from time, and offers a way to connect visually and metaphorically with the era of my subject.

The most obvious Gothic theme I use is death. This is somewhat inevitable in biography when the subject is deceased. Yet, death was a prominent element in Eastman’s life story, from the early death of his father to his own suicide. His father’s death was a scar on his childhood, which is represented by my photograph *Eastman Family Plot* (fig 5). Eastman’s choice to end his own life resulted in the unusual circumstance of his ashes being buried at the loading dock of his company. The round pink marble monument is inset down several stairs in a courtyard just outside the gate.

²² Ibid, 27.
The funerary figures on the stone recall sculptural Art Deco style of the early 1930s.

Some people might consider Eastman’s suicide moral ruin, but at the time it was biological ruin from a painful disease and the fear of confinement to a wheelchair that led Eastman to make his final decision. I chose to use ruin and industrial decay as a way of linking the past and present.

For example the abandoned Eastman Dental Dispensary does not look the way it did in Eastman’s day, but its current state of disuse makes it look more Victorian and Gothic. The cameras themselves are also in a state of ruin. It is their decay that I am photographing and using to an aesthetic end.

Lastly Gothic literature often includes the struggles between the irrational (religion, tradition, fantasy) and the rationality of science and the enlightenment. The conceptual basis of *A Life Reviewed* is fundamentally irrational, since we cannot photograph what is in the past. Yet, this breaching of limits is also a gothic trope. Robert and Shana ParkeHarrison address the theme of the irrational merging with science, which makes their series *The Architect’s Brother* in many ways a Gothic work. The series also addresses environmentalism from a eulogistic viewpoint, with titles such as *Mending the Earth* and *Patching the Sky*. In their image *Exausted Globe* the standard ParkeHarrison figure rests on a mostly circular ball of debris.
Printing their work in photogravure, the ParkeHarrisons use a historical process aesthetic to discuss both the creativity of the early industrial era, and its eventual effect on the environment.

In addition to my exploration of notions of the Gothic, in a more literal sense I am also working within the conceptual framework of the so-called second view. I am not using a direct reference photograph, like Mark Klett's *Third View* in which he re-photographed the landscapes of Timothy O'Sullivan, or Willie Osterman's *Déjà View: Bologna, Italy* (1998), also a series of directly reconstructed images. Instead I am photographing a part of photography's history--places that have been photographed before--and referencing their past. In the process of my research, I found a series of photographs Eastman had taken around his house. I was able to pair nearly all of these images with ones I had already taken. Although they were not a reference used to make my images, they seem to suggest that I am looking at the space the way he did. an unconscious second view. Without intending to by photographing the same subjects I have unconsciously created a second view.
9 East Ave and Past Times

A writer once described Eastman as a shy mystic who breakfasted every morning in a Rochester mansion to the strains of a pipe organ. The great industrialist was reported to be an idealist. a dreamer at heart who was seeking time off from business for music, art, and leisure. Confronted with this picture of himself, Eastman merely smiled dryly and went on doing things.\(^{23}\)

Anonymous

Eastman found many uses for his free time after stepping down from control of Kodak. His many hobbies included music and art collecting; he was an avid reader; and he even took up dancing.

When the dancing craze arrived about 1910, even the middle-aged caught the fever and GE, who had rarely cut a rug, rolled up the rugs in the living room, organized a class, and hired a teacher. With his mind for detail he wanted to know how many inches to put his feet forward, sideways, or back. Paying no particular attention to the music, he vigorously counted aloud as he turned or moved.\(^{24}\)

Most of all he loved camping trips, and he took family and friends to a cabin in North Carolina. He enjoyed picnics, cooking (lemon meringue pie was a specialty), camping, hunting and planning his trips. He organized his camping gear to the extent that every item was required to have multiple uses. His enthusiasm for hunting led him to befriend Carl Akeley (1864-1926), who had trained as a taxidermist in Rochester and Brockport. Akeley, who is known as the “father of modern taxidermy,” had previously accompanied Theodore Roosevelt on an African hunting safari.\(^{25}\) Eastman agreed to

help fund Akeley's next expedition (to retrieve specimens for the American Museum of Natural History's African wing) and convinced Akeley to bring him along.²⁶

Is there a connection between taxidermy and photography? It is hard to tell whether Eastman chose the safari as a preferred adventure because of its picturesque and photographic nature, or if he simply brought along a camera because it was his business and the thing to do. Akeley must have seen some connection, because he also added to photography's development, by designing his own motion cameras specifically for photographing animals in the wild. Indeed, Paul Strand photographed one of Akeley's cameras (Fig 17). Perhaps it was Eastman's knack for finding his business new markets, or an unavoidable combination of photography and taxidermy, but the camera has since been a ubiquitous addition to the safari and nature hunting in general.

There are theoretical connections between photography and big game hunting to be considered. In 1977 photographic theorist Susan Sontag, in her book On Photography, described the aggressive nature of photography and specifically the camera's relationship to the

gun in the safari:

One situation where people are switching from bullets to film is the photographic safari that is replacing the gun safari in East Africa. The hunters have Hasselblads instead of Winchesters; instead of looking through a telescope sight to aim a rifle, they look through a viewfinder to frame a picture. In end-of-the century London, Samuel Butler complained that 'there is a photographer in every bush, going about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour.' The photographer is now charging real beasts, beleaguered and too rare to kill. Guns have metamorphosed into cameras in this earnest comedy, the ecology safari.... When we are afraid we shoot. But when we are nostalgic, we take pictures.27

Belonging to an earlier era, unlike Sontag Eastman did not differentiate between the gun and the camera, but instead photographed while hunting. He filmed and

photographed animals being hunted and shot, and he shot animals in order to
photograph them. The story of his first lion specifically highlights his intentions:

Yesterday morning I had the thrill of my life.... About 300 yards on our left front
were a lioness, two cubs and a male lion who was behind. They had just left a
zebra kill and were making toward the brush to lie up for the day... we soon got
125 yards of the lion when he stopped. I gave him a soft nose mannlicher bullet in
the groin. He started to run again and then he turned and faced us. While he was
making up his mind what to do I gave him another bullet in the center of his
breast, which finished him (at about 100 yards). He was so heavy that all hands
had difficulty in getting (him) into the car so we could bring him home to
photograph him.28

After finishing a successful safari expedition Eastman often brought back souvenirs.
He had heads mounted to be hung on walls, and hoofs turned into vases and ash trays.
He even had a large elephant head stuffed and mounted over the doorway to the large
conservatory room in the center of his mansion.

Like photographs, taxidermied animals are visual souvenirs of something that
once was alive. Taxidermy is a way of preserving a creature, an object, a thing that was
living. Many natural history museums attempt to place their animals in recreations of
their natural habitats. These dioramas try to show the audience the creature’s
interaction with its environment, and even with other animals. Yet, the action is frozen.
There is no time and no progression. Like a photograph, the significance lies in the
apparent reality of the subject. The animal is the true thing, the real creature that can be
imagined to be alive. In the photograph, it is the moment-that-was that is important; the

28 George Eastman, *Chronicles of an African Trip*, (Rochester, N.Y.: Priv. print. for the author,
emphasis in is on how it was and what it looked like. The photograph is the record.

In his series *Animal Logic*, Richard Barnes photographed the inner workings of natural history museums as a way of pointing out the hypocrisy of killings animals in order to preserve them in a museum. Yet at the turn of the century, natural history museums offered a new means of bringing the natural world to the public in a very sterilized way. In addition to dioramas, and like Eastman’s elephant, taxidermied animals are often displayed as trophies. Heads are mounted to boards like a three-dimensional image. This presentation is less about masking the animals' violent fate and more a show force, emphasizing the human power over nature.

In America the invention of high-powered steam engines changed the outlook on the relationship between culture and nature. Suddenly industry had the upper-hand over great expanses of land and the humans and animals native to them. The gun and the
camera both served as mechanical forms of capturing and documenting what was a
new balance of power, and both offered proof of the strength of industrial progress. As
Leo Marx puts it: “the machine foretold an economy designed by man’s brain, and it
implied an active, indeed proud, assertion of his dominion over nature.”29

![Elephant](image)

Fig. 20. Elephant

Eastman’s display of trophy animals was another way of showing his dedication
to the industrial community. And what could be more powerful a symbol that a massive
elephant head over the doorway to his own conservator? In my photograph of this
trophy (Fig. 20) the angle makes the elephant appear large and active, as if charging. It is
also the view a guest, or even Eastman, would have had from the large room below.

By the late 1920s the spinal disease that had plagued his mother began to take
its hold on Eastman. A letter to biographer, Mr. Charles Z. Clase (Special Developments

at Kodak) explained that Eastman disliked the sight of his mother’s wheelchair, as it reminded him of her suffering. And he also never used the elevator in his home, but used the stairs, even towards the end of his life. Though his death certificate says “suicide by shooting self in heart with revolver while temporarily insane,” it is my belief that Eastman’s mind was not any different that day. In a letter to a biographer, Eastman’s close friend Dr. Murray Bartlett wrote: “It [Eastman’s suicide] didn’t shock me at all, because I understood... It is perfectly understandable to me. He was a disciple of Epictetus.” Epictetus was a ancient Greek stoic philosopher who lived from AD 55 to AD 135. In his teachings he described suicide as a choice that should not be taken lightly, but that should always be an option.

What is death? A tragic mask. Turn it and examine it. See, it does not bite. The poor body must be separated from the spirit either now or later as it was separated from it before. Why then are you troubled, if it be separated now? for if it is not separated now, it will be separated afterwards. Why? That the period of the universe may be completed, for it has need of the present, and of the future, and of the past. What is pain? A mask. Turn it and examine it. The poor flesh is moved roughly, then on the contrary smoothly. If this does not satisfy (please) you, the door is open: if it does, bear (with things). For the door ought to be open for all occasions; and so we have no trouble.32

30 Mr. Charles Z. Clase, Special Developments interview 1/8/1940: University of Rochester Eastman-Butterfield Collection, Folder 3 D138 9:3.
31 Conversations between Colonel Sulbert and Dr. Murray Bartlett concerning Mr. Eastman, March 26, 1940. University of Rochester Eastman-Butterfield Collection Folder 3 D138 9:1.
In the weeks leading up to his death Eastman repeatedly asked his friend, the director of the Eastman Dental Dispensary, Dr. Harvey J. Burkhart, who was planning a trip to Europe, when he would be leaving. Saying “I'm been a pretty sick man... I may not be here when you get back.” Burkhart brushed off this comment as dramatic, but would not see Eastman after his trip. On March 14, 1932, Eastman excused his servants and shot himself in the heart. He died in bed. Before his death, he planned the donation of his estate. He left a note that read “To my friends, my work is done. Why wait?” He was seventy-seven years old.

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33 Interview with Dr. Harvey J. Burkhart January 19th, 1940. University of Rochester Eastman-Butterfield Collection, Folder D.138 9:2.
Conclusion

*A Life Reviewed: George Eastman through the Viewfinder* opened on August 6th 2010 at the George Eastman House International Museum of Photography and Film. Only days before, I realized August 6th was also the birthday of Eastman's sister Emma Kate. Considering my name is also Emma, I found this detail an uncanny coincidence.

The show was hung in the mansion side of the Eastman House. Unlike the normal exhibition spaces, these rooms are nestled between permanent exhibits and recreations of Eastman's turn-of-the-century home. These spaces were also once Eastman's living quarters. The spaces used for my show were once Eastman's bedroom, bathroom, and closet. In terms of the biographical elements of this work, this location could not be more perfect. What could be more personal than the location where a person slept, bathed, and, in the end, chose to die?

When designing the show, I had to keep in mind the existing environment. I wanted to arrange my images so that they would compliment and add insight to the other displays, but not seem repetitive. I placed the images relating to Eastman's safaris and the later years of his life across from the installation with his camping tent. At the other end of the rooms, I placed an image of Eastman's grave memorial near the case containing his suicide note and objects pertaining to his burial. With these details I hoped to seamlessly lead the audience from the museum setting to my work. I was also careful not to include too many images of the standard scenes within the Eastman House. Instead, I chose a broad range of images taken around the Rochester area and as far away as Waterville. The images of the Eastman House that I did include were shot from vantage points that the average museum-goer would not be able to access, in order to make them seem more like Eastman's perspective than that of the audience.
For the images' formal display, I chose not to mat all but three photographs. I printed extra black around the edge of the image that would go all the way to the frame. I picked black frames with a slight interior edge, as if the paint had been wiped off. This created a tan or gold color that matched details in most of my images. For the other three photographs I used a standard white mat and the same frame, and I chose to finish these three images in a different way because they included the whole camera within the image. In these, the viewer is no longer seeing inside the camera, or from the camera's perspective, but instead from the perspective of a photographer. In these three images the viewer becomes even more aware of the photographic process, and the influence of the device. I felt it was important to isolate these images and point out their fundamental differences.
Because we chose to use the historic mansion for this work, we had to find a way to hang the photographs. Since the old walls are made of steel reinforced concrete, Kathy Conner, the curator with whom I had been working, had railings attached to the ceilings of the rooms that we planned to use. This allowed us to hang the framed images with wires from the ceiling. Coincidentally that is the method Eastman used to hang paintings in his living room downstairs.

The history of a place has been a theme throughout my work. I photographed places because of their relationship with Eastman’s story. Having the exhibition displayed in such a historically charged setting brings the work even closer to its subject. After passing through all of his rooms, each filled with objects and details from his life, the audience cannot help but have a image or idea of Eastman floating in their minds. I can only hope that my work helps to encourage that gaze into the past and adds depth and nuance to the story of George Eastman and the history of photography.
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