

ISOTANI, Yusuke

The Topology of Photography in 1930s France: Focusing on the Graphic Arts Magazine

Arts et Métiers Graphiques

Through its examination of *Photographie*, the annual special issue published from 1930 to 1939 by the interwar period French graphic arts magazine *Arts et Métiers Graphiques* (1927-1939, hereinafter referred to as AMG), this article reexamines the "conservatism of photography" that has been neglected by the progressive research methodology, which has focused on modernist photography.

Isotani has positioned the activities of AMG and *Photographie* at the heart of the development of photography in 1930s France. He notes that from the mid 1930s onwards *Photographie*, which was the first publication to introduce a comprehensive selection of typical modernist photographs and thus stimulated French photographic circles, included both conservative and modernist photographic methods, as it changed to an all the more eclectic approach.

Previously, the increasing number of conservative photographs during this period has been understood as representing the return to order, the resurgence of classicism that was part of the heightened nationalism of France during the interwar period. In this regard Isotani cleverly indicates the aspects that can be overlooked in an overly contextualistic consideration based on the political and social situation of the time. In other words, in the background of the critique of modernist photography that appeared in AMG texts in the mid 1930s, the growing obsolescence of modernist photography methods linked to the explosive spread of mass media, the resistance to the lowering of the tone of photography and a dependence on the media meant the trend turned to qualitatively refined or autonomous artworks. This article provides an accurate analysis of individual photographs, a careful analysis of relevant critiques, thus providing a firm grasp of art historical methods and resulting in an article that is both clearly argued and a highly refined argument. His indications regarding the changes in the handling of the photograph selected as the cover design for *Photographie 1935* (published in 1934), clearly convey his scrupulous attention to detail.

Isotani further indicates that *Photographie 1935* presents a mixture of works that use a diverse array of styles and expressive methods, including soft focus and solarization effects, and criticism of modernist photography is nothing more than comments on the overuse of such techniques and lowering of quality. They were not critiquing the methods themselves. He advanced the argument that this coexistence of diverse photographic techniques can be seen as "maniérisme" in photography, one divorced from the original meaning or ideology attached to those methods. Moving beyond the linear argument of a simple return from modernism to classicism, Isotani makes important suggestions about the complex situation in photography at the time.

It is probably also essential to reexamine the artistic nature, individual artist nature and modernist phenomenon in mid 1930s French photography, not only in terms of AMG and *Photographie*, but also within the broader range of issues of the period. If that is the case, then this article is all the more important for the future study of photography for both its important observations and raising of issues. As noted in his conclusion, Isotani indicates that we will have a clearer understanding of the history of photography in France during this period by using this article as a starting point and continuing to produce case studies in the field.

For these reasons we hereby present the Bijutsushi Prize to Isotani Yusuke in recognition of his achievements.