



GERTRUDE KASEBIER - PROFESSIONAL PHOTOGRAPHER

An authority recently summed up Mrs. Käsebier as the best portrait photographer in the world. This is a sweeping characterization, entirely just, but to my mind it does not go quite far enough.

Mrs Käsebier is great as an artist and as such her unrivaled ability is everywhere conceded, but she is greater still as a professional photographer in that she is putting the whole force of her individuality into the uplifting and dignifying of her work, which with her is both art and profession. Even the most unobservant must appreciate the fact that a new movement is stirring professional portrait-photography from one end of this country to the other.

It is plain evident on all sides, from the modest show-case of the humblest village photographer to the most pretentious of the lavish metropolitan establishments. Everywhere the professional photographer is breaking away from hide-bound tradition; the top-light, the head-rest, the papier-maché accessories are been thrown out of the junk-heap along with the stilted pose and other affectations of former years.

Not that the photographic millennium has arrived by any means, but the professional everywhere is reaching out for something new — something different; something blindly because it is “done” elsewhere, sometimes with a glimmer of true insight, and again with sincere appreciation of what they are really striving for. There are undoubtedly many causes at work to produce this revolution, but the frankest among the professionals admit that the chief factor in the movement is the amateur. Now the epitome of all that is best in the amateur as a class lies not only in Mrs. Käsebier’s work, but through it, in her influence on others workers and on public opinion as well. With all the force of her wonderful personality she has struck the keynote of great achievement in photographic portraiture, and that keynote is absolute sincerity.

Mrs. Käsebier portraits are not always great and they are not always pleasing, but they are never insincere and she likewise never fails to place the stamp of her own individuality upon even the most commonplace and uninteresting of her sitters. A genius may evolve an occasional masterpiece and in this respect Mrs. Käsebier fully lives up to the term; but to portray with artistic insight “all sort and condition of men”, the unwearing succession of the tall and the short, the stout and the lean, who fill the hours of the professional photographer, requires not only genius but a rare combination of other qualities — intuition, tact, sympathy and infinite patience. Gifted with such a temperament, this is what Mrs. Käsebier is doing and this is why her influence is extending in ever-widening circles to professionals everywhere, many of whom may not even know her name.

FRANCES BENJAMIN JOHNSTONE

CAMERA WORK 1, 1903



Gertrude Käsebier