



**"In all our photography, working in a two-dimensional medium, we try as much as we possibly can to light for a third dimensional result having roundness or stereoscopic effect."**

Karl Struss

Karl Struss was born in New York in 1886, the youngest of six children. Struss' grandfather, Henry had emigrated from Germany in 1851 but died in the American Civil War, when Struss' father, Henry Jr., was 12. Henry Jr. succeeded early as a textile manufacturer but was a victim of the depression of 1892. He had to sell the family house and move out of New York but worked hard and was again successful, buying back the family house in 1896.

Struss' father was extremely strict and their relationship was continually strained. It was, however, a stimulating childhood, in which varied pursuits were encouraged. In 1903 Struss contracted pneumonia and while he was recuperating in Long Island his father decided that Karl was not to return to his studies but instead would work in his bonnet wire factory, which he did for 11 years.

However, Struss had long been interested in photography and in 1908 he enrolled at Columbia University to study under Clarence White, a well respected photographer and member of the Photo-Secession; a movement established by Alfred Steiglitz to promote photography as a fine art.

In the summer of 1909 Struss traveled to Europe with two of his sisters, armed with 1,000 negatives, the Struss Pictorial lens (a single element soft-focus lens that he had invented and which was subsequently used by many photographers and a few cinematographers) and the knowledge gleaned in the previous year. The journey was a photographic success and on his return Struss spent any free time roaming New York with a camera or making prints in the darkroom.

By 1910 Struss had finessed his own vision of the Pictorialist style. He was influenced by both White and Stieglitz, whose studios were close together. Stieglitz was so impressed with Struss' technical and artistic acumen that when

shown platinum prints made using a multiple exposure technique that Struss invented, "He was so amazed at the richness of the print, the blacks that were so awfully black, yet with detail...that he wet his finger and touched the blacks and sort of shook his head."

Struss was the last member accepted into the Photo-Secession but the movement was becoming fragmented. However, the last exhibit of the Photo-Secession in 1910 at the Albright Art Gallery in Buffalo, New York was a success for Struss with 12 pictorial photographs accepted.

Struss first traveled to Bermuda in 1912, and said in a letter to Stieglitz that it was "probably the most beautiful, charming and quaint place I have ever visited, and as for color – there is nothing like it anywhere in Europe. I hope to go again someday and will not forget to take along a few autochromes." He did return - in November 1913 - and in 1914 he was asked to shoot for four months for the Bermuda Trade Development Board's illustrated booklet "*Bermuda: Nature's Fairyland*".

During the first week Struss ran out of film because he was enthusiastically experimenting with a movie camera that also took still images. Luckily for Struss there was a motion picture company in Bermuda at the same time. Struss went to the temporary South Shore headquarters of the company to try to procure some film. Charlie Rosher, a renowned London photographer, who had made the transition to motion pictures gave Struss some "short ends", left over footage, so that he could continue shooting until he could get more film from New York.

In 1913, White, Struss and Edward Dickson collaborated to publish Platinum Print magazine, which was fundamental in Struss making contacts on the West Coast, exhibiting in America and England and winning awards. The same collaboration formed the Pictorialist Photographers of America in 1916, which became responsible for promoting Pictorialism through traveling exhibitions, workshops, lectures and the encouragement of museums to purchase photographs.

In 1914 Struss was successful enough to finally break away from his father's control and took over Clarence White's space on West 31<sup>st</sup> Street. He established himself as a commercial photographer with clients such as Vogue, Vanity Fair and Harper's Bazaar. Due to limited supplies coming out of Germany during the First World War, Struss and Paul Anderson, his partner and friend, invented Kalogen as a replacement for Rodinal, the industry standard chemical for developing prints.

When the United States finally joined the war in 1917, Struss was keen to enlist and use his skills in the specialized Aerial Photography Division of the Signal Corps with Edward Steichen. But alas this was not to be as the Department of State was made aware of a few conversations at the outset of the war in which Struss voiced a pro-German sentiment. The damning information given to the authorities came from no less than other members of the PPA. Struss became aware of this, when in 1918 he was asked to resign from the PPA and was struck from their membership. It took until 1928 for his membership to be re-instated.

Struss and his family vigorously defended his patriotism but he still spent time at Fort Leavenworth, as a guard. He used any spare time watching movies and he saw that many of the cinematographers or "crank-turners" lacked a photographic and artistic sensibility. His studio closed, clients vanished and his reputation damaged, Struss was disillusioned with New York and realized that it would be difficult to re-establish himself as a photographer. He therefore decided to go straight to Los Angeles in 1919 as soon as he was discharged from the army and set out to start a new career as a cinematographer.



He wrote to his mother asking her to send his remaining prints to Los Angeles. Primed with these and a few prints that he made from a detour to the Grand Canyon, Struss made the rounds of the studios using connections he had established while in New York. At the time directors were instructed by the studios to look out for good photographers as still images were vital in promoting the embryonic industry.

He landed a temporary job as a stills photographer with the legendary director Cecille B. De Mille but within three days he was behind a motion camera. This led to a two-year contract with De Mille and although it was not subsequently renewed Struss thrived as a freelance cinematographer no doubt initially using De Mille's letter of recommendation. "There are few better photographers, his still work is more than excellent," wrote De Mille. "He is highly artistic, and I cannot too highly recommend him."

In 1926, as a result of his Bermuda encounter with Struss, Rosher suggested Struss as a co-cameraman for director F.W.Murnau's *Sparrows*, which then led to the making of the still-fresh *Sunrise* in 1927 by the same team. Rosher and Struss became the first cinematographers to win an Academy award for the movie. Significantly, Struss was one of the founding members of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences representing cinematography.

Struss also received Oscar nominations for his cinematography in *Drums of Love* (1928), *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1932), *The Sign of the Cross* (1932) and *Aloma of the South Seas* (1941). He shot many of Bing Crosby and Mae West's movies and other notable titles including *Ben Hur* (1925), *The Taming of the Shrew* (1929), *Go West, Young Man* (1936), *Some Like It Hot* (1939), *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1943), *Wonder Man* (1945), *Lady Possessed* (1952), *Face to Face* (1952), *Attila* (1954) and *The Fly* (1958). After a career spanning a half-century and more than 100 films, Struss retired in 1970, widely acknowledged as one of "the" cinematographers.

Struss always journeyed with Ethel, his wife and life-long muse, whom he met at a fellow Pictorialist photographer's Valentine's Day party in 1920. Ethel Wall had discovered that Struss was living in Los Angeles and a friend, whose studio she was working in, needed help with the Struss Pictorial lens, so they went to the party with that intent. Struss' intent was slightly different however and his luck was to find someone who shared and understood his passion; his wisdom was not to let her go!

Karl and Ethel journeyed to Bermuda one winter in the late Fifties. The Bermudiana Hotel (page 50) was destroyed by fire in 1958 and the Casuarina trees planted after the Cedar blight of the early 1940s are well established, which suggests the late 1950s. Transportation had greatly improved since Karl's early visits and the Strusses traveled to both ends of the island. Struss photographed some familiar and unfamiliar places with his finely honed eye, 3-D or stereoscopic camera and colour film. These images, which have a soft-focus quality due to the 3-D camera, hark back to his days as a Pictorialist and give the images a more artistic effect. Struss was no stranger to colour and had used autochromes, when they first appeared in 1907. He had also shot a few movies in Technicolor, Ferraniacolor and DeLuxe Color.

Struss' Bermuda time capsule creates an important and interesting perspective. Bermuda in the late 1950s was at a pivotal point in its history, the Civil Rights movement was gaining momentum, the old order was being forced to change and tourism was about to enter a stage of massive construction. Struss was conscious of many changes, having visited early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His awareness is apparent in the images and the disparities in Bermuda's society are sensitively captured. These hidden treasures, now presented in this book, are extraordinary because they span the island at one time and are in rare fifties' colour. Karl Struss' consistency and artistic vision provides Bermuda with a great cultural record.