



Edward Steichen

J.P. Morgan, 1903

Gelatin silver print (black & white)

9 1/2 x 7 1/4 inches

Printed 1925-1935

In a memoir, Edward Steichen's third wife Joanna records:

Steichen's fierce, richly shadowed portrait of J. P. Morgan was commissioned merely as an aid to the memory of a portrait painter, Frederick Encke, who found the financier--probably the most powerful financier America has ever known--an impossibly impatient sitter. In order to complete the photographic sitting in just three minutes, Steichen had the janitor of his building sit in the portrait position while he arranged the chair in exactly the right light. Morgan arrived and sat down in the portrait pose. Steichen snapped the shutter, then put in another plate and asked the financier to shift his position. Morgan was irritated, moved, returned spontaneously to the requested position, and Steichen, having engineered a moment of real emotion, snapped again. *He always claimed that the chair arm's resemblance to a dagger was purely accidental.*

Joanna Steichen adds:

Morgan had a hideously diseased nose that was never shown in painted portraits. When Steichen brought the finished prints to Morgan, he completely retouched the nose, as the painters did, in the official pose, but he left the other very close to its natural state. Morgan, incensed, tore up the unretouched print. Later, when Morgan's librarian, Belle Greene, saw a print of the rejected photograph, she declared it the best portrait of Morgan that ever had been made, and Morgan ordered some prints. In revenge, Steichen kept him waiting three years.