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Ralph Steiner, The Cloud Series, 1981-82

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Ralph Steiner
American (1904-1986)
The Cloud Series, 1981-82
Photograph
20 x 16 in.
Gift of Richard Riebel, 97.10.9



photographer does not need the manual skills as those required of a painter. He merely presses a button and the camera does the rest. But some photographers are declared great artists. When a gallery or a museum displays their work, it always attracts large audiences.

A photograph produces a mirror image of the subject. But a creative photographer can add much more to it. Through composition and manipulation, time exposure, color and filters, he can accomplish artistic effects: dramatization, transfiguration, and interpretation.

Look at the work of Ralph Steiner in Marquette University's museum collection. Then read the poem below, entitled *A Thunder Cloud* by the famous German poet Johann Wolfgang Goethe (1749-1832), who was well known for his interests in clouds, weather, and nature. Don't both pieces complement each other and match perfectly?

Now downwards by the world's attraction driven, that tends to Earth, what had upris'n to
heaven; Threatening in the mad thunder-cloud, as when Fierce legions clash, and vanish
from the plain; Sad destiny of the troubled world! But see:

The mist is now dispersing gloriously:
And language fails us its vain endeavour
The spirit mounts above, and lives forever.

(from *Wolkengestalt nach Howard, Zur Naturwissenschaft überhaupt*, Stuttgart and Tübingen, 1817-23,
trans. by J. Ch. Huttner)

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