The Troubles of Arnold Genthe's Camera in Japan

By Lindsay Campbell

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In the days before the advent of the Leica and the Rolleiflex, photographers were at the mercy of their equipment. Arnold Genthe, a German-born photographer who lived and worked in San Francisco, was a master of his craft. But even the most skilled of photographers were not immune to the challenges of the trade.

The story begins when the photographer was commissioned to capture the scenes of Japan for a book that was to be published in the United States. Genthe was excited about the project, as he had always been fascinated by the culture and history of Japan.

He arrived in Tokyo, eager to get started, and was taken to the home of a wealthy collector who had commissioned the photographs. The collector, a man named Nakamura, was a great admirer of Genthe's work and had come to see for himself what the photographer had to offer.

Nakamura showed Genthe around his collection, which included works by some of the greatest artists of the East. He was particularly interested in Genthe's photographs of the traditional Japanese gardens, and he asked the photographer to take some pictures of them for his book.

Genthe was thrilled with the request, and he set to work with a passion. He spent days photographing the gardens, capturing their beauty and serenity in a way that no one else had ever done before.

But there was a catch. Nakamura had specified that Genthe should use a special camera that he had been given by the Japanese government. The camera was a marvel of engineering, with a lens that could capture images of incredible clarity and detail.

However, Genthe soon discovered that the camera was not without its problems. The shutter was temperamental, and it often failed to work properly. In addition, the light meter was unreliable, and it would often give incorrect readings.

Despite these challenges, Genthe pressed on, determined to complete the project. He worked long hours, often until well into the night, and he was constantly on the lookout for new ideas and techniques.

Finally, after weeks of hard work, Genthe had completed all the photographs he needed. He was ready to return to San Francisco, where he could edit the images and prepare them for publication.

But then disaster struck. On the return journey, the boat was caught in a storm and sunk. Genthe and his equipment were lost at sea.

The news was devastating for Nakamura, who had become a close friend to the photographer. He was grief-stricken, and he wrote to the German ambassador in Tokyo to express his grief and to request assistance in recovering the photographs.

The ambassador was sympathetic to Nakamura's plight, and he offered to do what he could to help. He arranged for a team of divers to search for the lost boat, and they worked tirelessly for weeks, searching the ocean floor for any sign of Genthe's camera.

Finally, after several weeks of searching, the divers located the lost boat. They were astonished to find that Genthe's camera was still intact, despite the harsh conditions of the sea. They brought it to the surface, and Nakamura was overjoyed to see it once again.

With the camera recovered, Nakamura was able to continue with the project. He hired a new photographer to take the photographs that Genthe had left unfinished, and he was pleased with the results.

The book was published to great acclaim, and it was a great success. Nakamura was pleased with the work, and he was grateful to the German ambassador for his help in recovering the camera. Genthe's legacy lived on, and his photographs continue to inspire generations of photographers to this day.