

The Museum of Modern Art

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ADVANCE ONLY

A retrospective exhibition of the works of André Kertész, Budapest-born pioneer of modern photography, will be shown at The Museum of Modern Art from November 24, 1964, through January 24, 1965.

"Kertész' work," according to John Szarkowski, Director of the Department of Photography, "perhaps more than that of any other photographer, defined the direction in which modern European photography developed."

Kertész was born in 1894, graduated from the Academy of Commerce in Budapest in 1912 and took a job with the Hungarian Bourse. He purchased a camera with his first savings. During the next decade he experimented with photography, his interest stimulated by the occasional publication of his work in Hungarian magazines. By 1925, he had convinced himself -- and his family -- that he was not a financier, and was a photographer.

He went to Paris arriving at the moment when the picture magazine and illustrated newspaper were beginning to receive widespread attention. Soon, he was doing press photography for leading European newspapers and attracting attention with his unconventional method of covering assignments. One of his fellow Parisians recalls, "While other press cameramen bunched together, Kertész loitered on the sidelines filming the significant background of events."

He also used a small camera which he considered more discreet and more flexible; first a Goertz-Tenax, which most professionals considered a "toy" and, after 1928, a Leica. His fellow professionals scorned the small hand-held camera, until Kertész demonstrated the freedom it allowed.

In 1927, Kertész had his first one-man exhibition at the Sacre du Printemps Gallery in Paris; the following year the First Independent Salon of Photography was held and Kertész' work was included along with the photographs of Eugène Atget, Berenice Abbott, Germaine Krull, Nadar, Paul Outerbridge and Man Ray.

Kertész sold his work to Kölnische Illustrierte, the first of the pioneering

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German publications, and in the following years he was a major contributor to such outstanding French magazines as Vu, Art et Médecine, Uhu, Variétés and the shortlived but vital Bifur.

In 1936, Kertész agreed to make a two-year visit to the United States, to photograph for a commercial studio in New York; before the two years were up the approach of war made return impossible for the Hungarian national and the visit became permanent. In the twenty-five years that followed, Kertész made tasteful records of fashionable interiors, fashion shots, still-lives for Vogue, Harper's Bazaar, Town and Country, House and Garden. His most meaningful work was done when he had an occasional break in an assignment and could work on his own.

Kertész, one of the inventors of photo-journalism, did not work in this field in America. His arrival came at the time that marked the end of an era: the days of improvisation, the days of experimentation were over. The first issue of Life, in 1936, promised a new "mind-directed" photography and the material in the new picture magazines was determined more and more by an editorial team, and progressively less by the photographer. Kertész' greatest qualities -- his versatility, his responsiveness, his acceptance of all aspects of life, his childlike candor -- were antithetical to the needs of this new market.

By 1960, Kertész was able to find more time to make his own kind of picture, and in 1962, he cut all ties with the markets he had served for twenty-five years, and returned to his own work. The most recent pictures Kertész has made, says Mr. Szarkowski, "seem, in their freshness, to be the work of a greatly gifted beginner, discovering for the first time the beauty of photography. But in their economy and ease, in their abandonment to the uncomplicated pleasure of seeing, they are the work of a master."

ANDRÉ KERTÉSZ edited by John Szarkowski.
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