

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Museum of Modern Art

EXHIBITION EXPLORES CARTIER-BRESSON'S POSTWAR VISION

The Observer: Cartier-Bresson after the War

April 30–September 26, 2000

Third Floor

In 1947, Henri Cartier-Bresson, born in France in 1908, helped to found Magnum Photos, a photographers' cooperative created to enable its members to photograph as they chose, independently of particular assignments. Thus Cartier-Bresson could travel widely and explore his own curiosities for extended periods of time, while relying on Magnum to distribute his work to magazines and newspapers. *The Observer: Cartier-Bresson after the War* presents some 20 photographs made between 1947 and 1966 that together evoke both the international scope of his travels and the depth of his attentiveness to human behavior. The exhibition is organized by Sarah Hermanson, Assistant Curator, Department of Photography, and is part of *Making Choices*, the second cycle of MoMA2000, which focuses on the years 1920 to 1960.

Cartier-Bresson's vast range as a traveler was matched by the acuteness of his observations of all forms of social life, and his responsiveness to timely daily rituals was as agile as his grasp of global politics. For example, the photograph *Peking, China*, made in 1958, a decade after the triumph of the Communist Revolution, shows a small band of peasant soldiers gathered in the enormous Tiananmen Square. The nearby presence of an older man and a young boy holding hands invites reflection upon the relationship between China's imperial past and its ambitious future.

The Decisive Moment--the title of the American edition of the influential book of Cartier-Bresson photographs that was published in 1952--became a catch phrase for his mastery of the hand-held camera. His aesthetic is exemplified by pictures such as *Tehran, Iran (1966)*, in which a single animated conversation embodies the liveliness of an entire thriving market, while the image of the American-supported Shah, appearing on the cheap prayer mats for sale, deftly sets the everyday human exchange in a telling political context. Like *Peking, China*, the photograph signals that Cartier-Bresson's focus on the local and ordinary, far from inviting an escape from the great social struggles of the postwar world, was a demonstration of why they mattered. In his introduction to *The Decisive Moment*, Cartier-Bresson wrote: "in photography, the smallest thing can be a great subject. The little, human detail can become a leitmotiv."

SPONSORSHIP

Making Choices is part of MoMA2000, which is made possible by The Starr Foundation. Generous support is provided by Agnes Gund and Daniel Shapiro in memory of Louise Reinhardt Smith. The Museum gratefully acknowledges the assistance of the Contemporary Exhibition Fund of The Museum of Modern Art, established with gifts from Lily Auchincloss, Agnes Gund and Daniel Shapiro, and Jo Carole and Ronald S. Lauder. Additional funding is provided by the National Endowment for the Arts, Jerry I. Speyer and Katherine G. Farley, and by The Contemporary Arts Council and The Junior Associates of The Museum of Modern Art. Education programs accompanying

MoMA2000 are made possible by Paribas. The publication *Making Choices: 1929, 1939, 1948, 1955* is made possible by The International Council of The Museum of Modern Art. The interactive environment of *Making Choices* is supported by the Rockefeller Brothers Fund. Web/kiosk content management software is provided by SohoNet.

No. 51

[press office](#)[menu](#)

[©1998](#) The Museum of Modern Art, New York