

**MAJOR RETROSPECTIVE OF INVENTIVE AND INFLUENTIAL PHOTOGRAPHER  
HENRI CARTIER-BRESSON TRACES A BODY OF WORK UNIQUE IN  
GEOGRAPHICAL SCOPE AND HISTORICAL BREADTH**

**300 Prints Spanning Six Decades Include a Selection Previously Unknown to the Public**

***Henri Cartier-Bresson: The Modern Century***

April 11—June 28, 2010

The International Council of The Museum of Modern Art Exhibition Gallery, sixth floor

**Press Preview:** Tuesday, April 6, 10:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.

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**NEW YORK, March 30, 2010**—The Museum of Modern Art presents ***Henri Cartier-Bresson: The Modern Century***, the first major retrospective in the U.S. in more than 30 years of one of photography's most original and influential masters, from April 11 through June 28, 2010. The exhibition comprises 300 photographs dating from 1929 to 1989, at least one fifth of them previously unknown to the public, and focuses on the photographer's most productive decades, the 1930s through the 1960s. Also included is a generous selection of original issues of *Life*, *Paris Match*, and other magazines in which many of the photographs first appeared. Cartier-Bresson's uncanny talent for seizing lasting images from the flux of experience, long identified with the title of his book *The Decisive Moment* (1952), made him a leading figure both in photography's experimental modernism of the 1930s and the very different realm of photojournalism after World War II. *Henri Cartier-Bresson: The Modern Century* offers a fresh overview of that complex achievement by drawing upon a great deal of previously inaccessible information and images from the Henri Cartier-Bresson Foundation in Paris, which was established in 2002, two years before the photographer's death at the age of 95, and which has generously lent 220 prints to the exhibition. *Henri Cartier-Bresson: The Modern Century* is organized by Peter Galassi, Chief Curator, Department of Photography, The Museum of Modern Art.

Peter Galassi states: "Cartier-Bresson's exhibition at MoMA in 1947—his first museum exhibition—was the beginning of a very fruitful relationship that we are now pleased to continue with the Cartier-Bresson Foundation, who have enabled MoMA to organize the first retrospective based on its extensive collection and archive."

*Henri Cartier-Bresson: The Modern Century* is organized into 13 sections, beginning with 34 prints drawn from Cartier-Bresson's work of the early 1930s, when the young Surrealist rebel used the quickness and mobility of his handheld Leica camera to invent a new brand of creative magic. Several of his early pictures celebrate motion by freezing it, such as *Behind the Gare Saint-Lazare, Paris* (1932), in which a leaping man is forever fixed just before his heel touches the water that reflects his silhouette. Other pictures utterly transform reality, reinventing the life of

the street as Surrealist theater, more mysterious and compelling than the world we know. In *Valencia, Spain* (1933), for example, a boy gazes upward at a ball he has tossed; because the ball is out of the picture's frame, the boy is transformed into a figure of rapture.

The 18 prints that constitute the following section introduce Cartier-Bresson's long career in photojournalism, focusing on the aftermath of World War II and profound political and social transformations in Asia, where he worked from 1947 to 1950. After the war, during which Cartier-Bresson spent nearly three years as a prisoner of the Nazis, he found in photojournalism a productive framework for his passionate engagement with the rapidly changing world. Instead of mystery and magic, he now sought clarity and completeness, forging a style that could sum up a story or situation by framing a small number of characters in a scene of stunning simplicity. In *Shanghai, China* (1948) the upheaval of the Chinese revolution is vividly evoked through the panic of a crowd desperate to retrieve gold from the bank before the city falls to the Communists. The accompanying display of magazines presents issues of *Life*, *Paris Match*, and *Illustrated* in which Cartier-Bresson's Shanghai bank panic photographs appeared, as well as his nine-page *Life* story on Beijing.

The remaining eleven sections are organized thematically rather than chronologically, with the third, fourth, and fifth chapters exploring the photographer's evocations of age-old patterns of life in Asia, throughout Europe and the West, and in his native France. Born at a time when the automobile and the airplane were in their infancy, Cartier-Bresson was deeply attached to social and cultural customs untouched by modern industry and commerce, and many of his best pictures could have been made hundreds of years prior, had photography existed. His alertness to concrete cultural particulars saves his work from the pitfalls of sentimental tourism, as he traveled around the globe observing such scenes as a polite exchange between old friends on the street in *Beijing* (1948), two women and a child scrubbing the sidewalk in a Dutch town (*Kampen, The Netherlands*, 1956), and a fishmonger selling her wares in *Market in the Rue Longue, Marseille* (1954). Instead of untouched nature, his landscapes always evoke the presence of man—in the carefully tended rice paddies of *Sumatra, Indonesia* (1950), the undulating farmland of *Castille, Spain* (1953), or an avenue of plane trees in his native country (*Brie, France*, 1968).

The exhibition next turns to the new worlds of the United States and the Soviet Union. Cartier-Bresson photographed more extensively in the United States than in any other country except his native France, but his American pictures are among his least well known. In principle, the clarity and balance of Cartier-Bresson's postwar style went hand in hand with a posture of neutral observation. But his image of the United States incorporates a distinctly critical thread, alert to American vulgarity, greed, and racism. Following the death of Josef Stalin in 1953, Cartier-Bresson was the first Western photographer to be admitted to the Soviet Union. The pictures he made in the summer of 1954 were news in themselves and were published widely in magazines. When he returned nearly two decades later, in 1972 and 1973, he added a new dimension—grim, barren, and bleak—to his images of Soviet life.

The photo-essay—a group of pictures about a single subject, usually accompanied by captions—was a staple of photojournalism throughout Cartier-Bresson's career, and the next two sections of the exhibition feature two such essays in abbreviated form. In 1958, Cartier-Bresson undertook an ambitious campaign to photograph China's "Great Leap Forward," Mao Tse-tung's intensive program of forced industrialization. Beginning in mid-June, he worked steadily for four months in China, and although he was closely monitored by the authorities, he returned with a very substantial body of work. *Life's* version of the story (on view in this section) was typical of many other versions around the globe, for it devoted nearly half of its 17 pages to splashy color images at the expense of the quieter but more informative black-and-white. Apart from a small paperback published in 1964, *China as seen by Henri Cartier-Bresson*, this exhibition is the first in-depth presentation of the black-and-white pictures.

The second photo-essay on view arose from a commission to illustrate the 1960 annual report of Bankers Trust Company in New York. At the time, the informal, small-camera style of photography that had been popularized by the magazines began to appear regularly in the annual reports of American corporations, and the assignment granted Cartier-Bresson access to the inner workings of the bank, which otherwise would have been hard to penetrate. Neither Chinese communism nor American capitalism conformed to Cartier-Bresson's idea of a just society; yet he carefully studied the specific activities of individuals, and described them patiently without resorting to rhetorical effect. Only the bosses are regarded with a skeptical eye.

The exhibition continues with a selection of 34 portraits that reveal Cartier-Bresson as one of the great portraitists of the twentieth century. Throughout his far-flung travels he was alert to every opportunity to add to his pantheon of notable people—mostly artists and writers—which eventually numbered nearly 1,000. He preferred to picture his sitters at home, and when asked how long the session would take, he liked to answer, "Longer than the dentist, but shorter than the psychoanalyst." Sitters photographed in France just before and after World War II include Pierre Bonnard, Henri Matisse, Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, and Albert Camus. Cartier-Bresson's tour of the United States in 1947 yielded lasting portraits of William Faulkner and Truman Capote, among others. Later portraits that evoke a keen alertness to telling gestures include *George Balanchine, New York City* (1959), *Louis Kahn, Philadelphia* (1961), and *Coco Chanel, Paris* (1964).

A brief section of 10 photographs that feature Cartier-Bresson's eye for beauty and his talent for transforming the most banal subjects into elegant images includes photographs made at The Museum of Modern Art and at an Easter Parade in Harlem, both in 1947. The subsequent section samples Cartier-Bresson's sensitive observations of encounters and gatherings of all kinds in the lively theater of the street, beginning with simple groups such as two friends chatting beside a newsstand (*Naples, Italy*, 1960); a pair of French farmers in a heated argument (*Mende, Lozère, France*, 1968); and a young couple asleep on a train (*Romania*, 1975). A 1937 photograph of eccentric Londoners at the coronation of King George VI is drawn from one of Cartier-Bresson's

earliest assignments, on which he inaugurated a lifelong strategy of ignoring the main event to study the spectators. A horserace in Cairo in 1950, a football game in Michigan in 1960, and the inauguration of French President François Mitterand in 1981 are among other scenes to which he applied the strategy.

The exhibition concludes with a section devoted to Cartier-Bresson's explorations of the often unlovely rise of modernity—mechanization, commerce, consumerism, and leisure—around the globe. Despite his affection for preindustrial cultures, Cartier-Bresson did not shrink from observing the rapidly changing world, and as a consequence his work as a whole embodies a historical panorama as broad as the geographical range of his travels. Among the final images of the exhibition are scenes of contemporary relaxation (*Country Club, Aguascalientes, Mexico*, 1963), a Club Med gathering in Corsica, France in 1963, a picnic in Japan during a reenactment of a Samurai scene (*Nikko, Japan*, 1965), and a rodeo in Los Angeles in 1960, at which an American cowboy—once the symbol of grit and pioneering independence—finds himself playing his guitar in a parking lot. The pictures suggest that comfort and convenience may have made things easier, but perhaps not better.

#### **SPONSORSHIP:**

The exhibition is supported by The William Randolph Hearst Endowment Fund.

Additional funding is provided by The Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation, Robert B. Menschel, and Marie-Josée and Henry Kravis.

#### **PUBLICATION:**

The publication *Henri Cartier-Bresson: The Modern Century* includes duotone reproductions of all of the photographs in the exhibition and a rich variety of supplementary illustrations. Peter Galassi's wide-ranging essay offers both a great deal of new information and a comprehensive new interpretation of Cartier-Bresson's photography by considering the many different and often conflicting frames of reference that helped to shape it, from avant-garde art of the 1920s and 1930s to the business of photojournalism. The supporting material—including a detailed chronology of the photographer's ceaseless travels, illustrated by maps of his travel routes, and a thorough list of his picture stories as they appeared in magazines, illustrated by reproductions of dozens of spreads, including several complete stories—will revolutionize the study and appreciation of Cartier-Bresson's work. *Henri Cartier-Bresson: The Modern Century* is published by The Museum of Modern Art and is distributed to the trade by D.A.P./Distributed Art Publishers in the United States and Canada. It is published and distributed by Thames & Hudson outside North America. It is available at the MoMA Stores and online at MoMAstore.org. 9 1/2 x 12 in.; 376 pp.; 435 ill. (75 color). Clothbound: 978-0-87070-778-0, \$75.00. Paperback (exclusive to MoMA stores): 978-0-87070-777-3, \$50.00. Foreign language editions are available through the following publishers: Schirmer/Mosel (German); Cosac Naify (Portuguese); Constrato (Italian); La Fabrica Editorial (Spanish); and Editions Hazan (French).

#### **PUBLIC PROGRAMS:**

##### **The Legacy of Henri Cartier-Bresson**

Thursday, April 15, 6:30 p.m., The Celeste Bartos Theater

Magnum photographer **Gilles Peress** and art historian **Jean-Francois Chevrier** discuss the work and legacy of Henri Cartier-Bresson. The program is moderated by **Peter Galassi**, Chief Curator, Department of Photography. Held in conjunction with *Henri Cartier-Bresson: The Modern Century*.

Tickets (\$10; members \$8; students, seniors, and staff of other museums \$5) can be purchased at the lobby information desk, the film desk, or online at [moma.org/thinkmodern](http://moma.org/thinkmodern).

**Brown Bag Lunch Lectures**

April 19 and 22, 2010, 12:30 p.m., Classroom B

*Henri Cartier-Bresson: The Modern Century*

This lecture examines Henri Cartier-Bresson, one of the most original, accomplished, influential, and beloved figures in the history of photography. For more than 25 years, he was the keenest observer of the global theater of human affairs—and one of the great portraitists of the twentieth century. Dan Leers, the Beaumont and Nancy Newhall Curatorial Fellow, Department of Photography at MoMA, will conduct the lectures. Participants may bring their own lunch. An induction loop sound-amplification system is available for all sessions. Tickets (\$5; members, students, seniors, and staff of other museums \$3) can be purchased at the lobby information desk, at the film desk, or in the Education and Research Building lobby.

**FILM PROGRAM:**

In conjunction with the exhibition *Henri Cartier-Bresson: The Modern Century*, the Museum will screen four of the photographer's six documentary films: *Return to Life* (1937), *The Return* (1944-45), *California Impressions* (1969-70), and *Southern Exposures* (1969-70). The series will run from April 8-11, 2010 in MoMA's Titus Theaters. Screening times are available via MoMA's website, [www.moma.org](http://www.moma.org).

**AUDIO GUIDE:**

The accompanying audio guide features extensive commentary by Peter Galassi. MoMA Audio is also available for download on MoMA.org, on [www.moma.org/wifi](http://www.moma.org/wifi), and as a podcast on iTunes. MoMA Audio is available free of charge courtesy of Bloomberg.

**WEBSITE:**

The exhibition will be accompanied by an original interactive website that enables visitors to explore the 300 photographs included in the exhibition, together with detailed maps of Cartier-Bresson's travels, audio from the Acoustiguide tour, interpretive texts, and biographical information. The site is produced by Second Story and will launch on April 11, 2010. [MoMA.org/cartierbresson](http://MoMA.org/cartierbresson).

**TRAVEL:**

*Henri Cartier-Bresson: The Modern Century* will travel to The Art Institute of Chicago (July 24-October 3, 2010); the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (October 30, 2010-January 30, 2011); and the High Museum of Art, Atlanta (February 19-May 15, 2011).

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**For downloadable high-resolution images, register at [www.moma.org/press](http://www.moma.org/press).**

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**Public Information:**

**The Museum of Modern Art**, 11 West 53rd Street, New York, NY 10019, (212) 708-9400

**Website:** [www.moma.org](http://www.moma.org)

**Blog:** [www.moma.org/insideout](http://www.moma.org/insideout)

**Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/MuseumofModernArt](http://www.facebook.com/MuseumofModernArt)

**Twitter:** [www.twitter.com/MuseumModernArt](http://www.twitter.com/MuseumModernArt)

**Videos:** [www.youtube.com/momavideos](http://www.youtube.com/momavideos)

**Flickr:** [www.flickr.com/groups/themuseumofmodernart/](http://www.flickr.com/groups/themuseumofmodernart/)

**Hours:** Wednesday through Monday: 10:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Friday: 10:30 a.m.-8:00 p.m.  
Closed Tuesday

**Museum Admission:** \$20 adults; \$16 seniors, 65 years and over with I.D.; \$12 full-time students with current I.D. Free, members and children 16 and under. (Includes admittance to Museum galleries and film programs). Target Free Friday Nights 4:00-8:00 p.m.

**Film Admission:** \$10 adults; \$8 seniors, 65 years and over with I.D. \$6 full-time students with current I.D. (For admittance to film programs only)