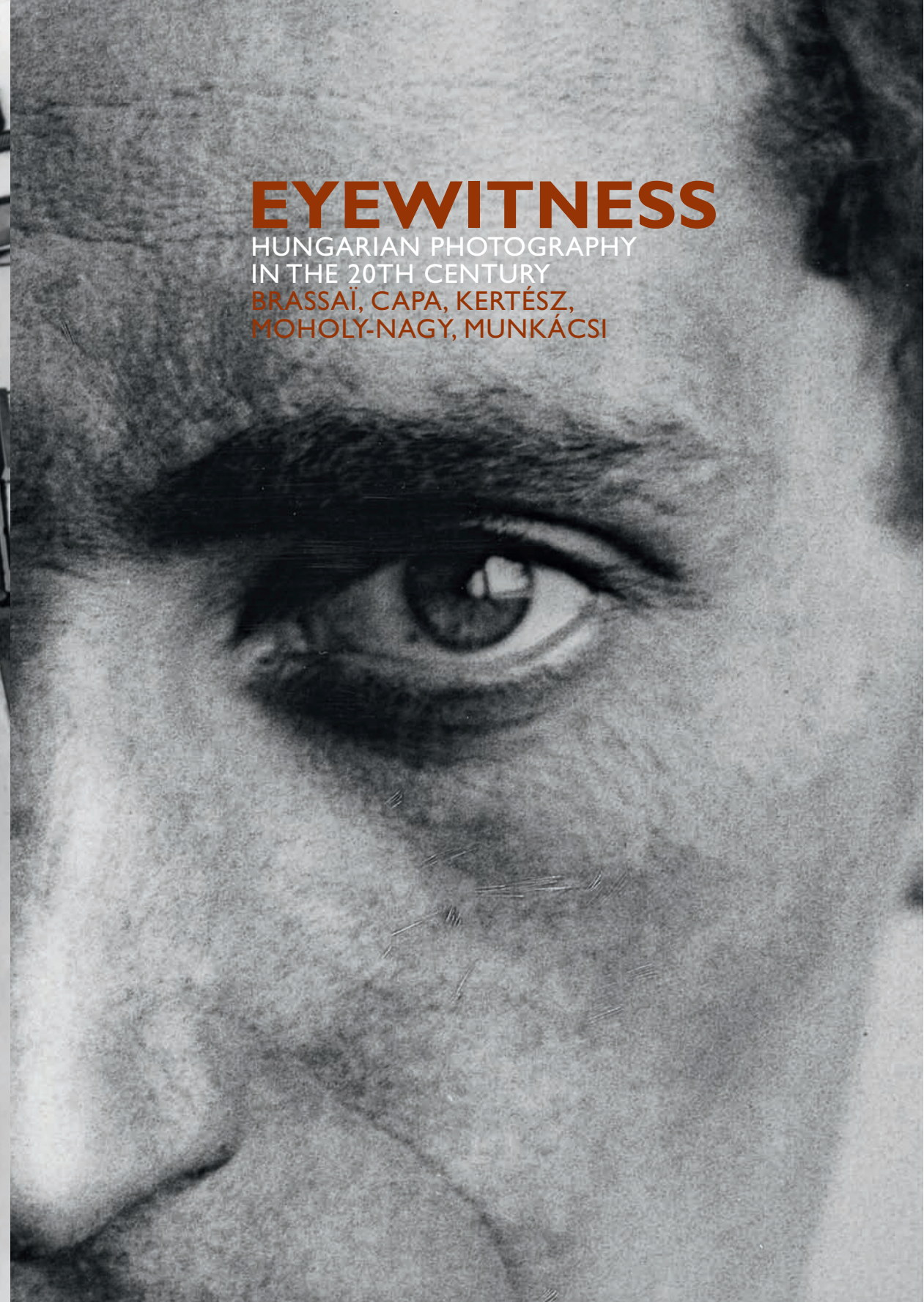


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EYEWITNESS

HUNGARIAN PHOTOGRAPHY
IN THE 20TH CENTURY
BRASSAI, CAPA, KERTÉSZ,
MOHOLY-NAGY, MUNKÁCSI

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HUNGARIAN PHOTOGRAPHY IN THE 20TH CENTURY BRASSAI, CAPA, KERTÉSZ, MOHOLY-NAGY, MUNKÁCSI

The Sackler Wing of Galleries
30 June – 2 October 2011

An Introduction to the Exhibition
for Teachers and Students

Written by Owen Hopkins
For the Education Department
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Front Cover Cat. 42, KATA KÁLMÁN, *Ernö Weisz, Factory Worker (detail)*
Back Cover Cat. 69, LÁSZLÓ MOHOLY-NAGY, *Berlin Radio Tower (detail)*

Royal
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INTRODUCTION

'It's not enough to have talent, you also have to be Hungarian.' ROBERT CAPA

This remark by Robert Capa (1913–1954), although perhaps partly made in jest, refers to the extraordinary prevalence of Hungarian photographers among the great names of twentieth-century photography. In 1938, while still only 25, Capa himself was described in London's *Picture Post* as 'The Greatest War-Photographer in the World'. Capa, along with his famous compatriots, Brassai (1899–1984), André Kertész (1894–1985), László Moholy-Nagy (1895–1946) and Martin Munkácsi (1896–1963), whose work together forms the largest part of this exhibition, are all universally recognised as being among the most innovative and influential photographers of the twentieth century.

Although all born in Hungary, these five photographers mostly made their names outside their homeland. All were Jewish, but none strictly religious, and the fact that they changed their birth names – Gyula Halász (Brassai), Endre Friedmann (Capa), Andor Kohn (Kertész), László Weisz (Moholy-Nagy), Márton Mermelstein (Munkácsi) – is indicative of the anti-Semitism they encountered at various points in their lives. In the decades following the First World War (1914–18), in which Brassai, Kertész and Moholy-Nagy actually fought, worsening political and economic conditions led to the evaporation of the rich cultural and artistic climate in Hungary. Budapest was no longer conducive to the ambitions of these young men.

In 1914, Hungary entered the First World War as part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and, four years later, found itself on the losing side. The Austro-Hungarian monarchy collapsed and Hungary became an independent country, but at the same time lost 72% of its territory in the subsequent redrawing of the map, and saw its population drastically reduced. After a short-lived democratic government and an even briefer communist regime, Admiral Miklós Horthy seized power in 1919 and his conservative authoritarian government remained in control until 1944. Horthy's oppressive regime launched a two-year campaign known as the 'White Terror': a strategy of persecution and violence against communists, liberals, artists and intellectuals (and therefore large numbers of Jewish people). Restrictions were also put on the number of Jewish applicants to university, severely limiting their future prospects in Hungary. All this acted to hasten emigration, with many leaving for Europe and beyond.

Berlin, London, Vienna and Paris, hotbeds for the arts in the 1920s and '30s, were popular destinations for the Hungarian émigrés. Moholy-Nagy arrived in Vienna soon after the war and about a year later went to Germany where he taught and experimented in photography at the famous Bauhaus art school. Munkácsi achieved success in Berlin as a photojournalist, but with the growing threat of fascism looming over Europe in the 1930s, he, Capa, Moholy-Nagy and Kertész all left for America at different times. Only Brassai continued to live in Paris. Moholy-Nagy became director of the short-lived New Bauhaus

in Chicago, while Kertész and Munkácsi worked as commercial photographers in New York.

The wide recognition these five photographers achieved was in many ways dependent on them having left their homeland. Yet their contribution to twentieth-century photography was to some extent shaped by the vibrant photographic tradition in Hungary before the Second World War, which the first part of this exhibition documents. Following the war, Hungary fell behind the Iron Curtain and was largely isolated from Western artistic developments. The final part of the exhibition examines those photographers working in Hungary from this time until the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. The achievements and innovations of those celebrated five were to have a lasting impact on different aspects of photography in the twentieth century in Hungary and beyond, defining the modern genres of photojournalism, documentary, fashion, and art photography.

PHOTOGRAPHY IN HUNGARY 1914–1939

At the beginning of the twentieth century, photography was already well established in Hungary. Several amateur photography clubs were in existence, and the first years of the century saw the foundation of a number of photography journals, as well as the *Magyar Fényképészek Országos Szövetsége* (National Association of Hungarian Photographers), which sought to defend the professional interests of photographers.

At this time in Hungary, as elsewhere, most photographs were taken using plate cameras, which worked by recording the photographic image on a glass plate coated with an emulsion of light-sensitive silver salts. Plate cameras tended to be large and cumbersome and usually required the use of a tripod. As each plate had to be carefully removed and replaced with another before the next photograph could be taken, many early photographs were of staged or static scenes.

Cat. 12 Another consequence for the photographer of using a plate camera was that it made their activity conspicuous to those being photographed. In this early photograph by Kertész, we see five children fascinated by his camera in the rural village of Budafok. While the four boys are absorbed by the camera itself, and are actually looking through its viewfinder as it frames the surrounding area, the young girl looks directly at the viewer – and, therefore, at the photographer too.

The spontaneous, snapshot quality which Kertész achieved here was to become particularly prevalent in subsequent years. Photographers like Kertész took to the streets armed with the Leica, a new small and lightweight camera that used 35-mm film. First released in 1925, the

Leica's impact was revolutionary as photographers began to immerse themselves in their surroundings, waiting for what the great French photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson famously termed the 'decisive moment'. This, Cartier-Bresson wrote, was:

'[the] creative fraction of a second when you are taking a picture. Your eye must see a composition or an expression that life itself offers you, and you must know with intuition when to click the camera. That is the moment the photographer is creative.'

That Kertész and others were already striving for this quality before the Leica's advent, as revealed in this photograph, was something that he himself noted: 'I took photos with the Leica before the invention of the Leica.'

Rural locations were a popular subject in Hungary in the years following the First World War. In 1914, the photographer Rudolf Balogh first published *Fotóművészet* (Photo Art) in which he proclaimed that:

'There is no need to photograph the formulaic landscapes of international tastes. Let us stay here, searching for and finding subjects within our own country that will make us successful abroad; let us create a Hungarian photo art, with Hungarian air and a clear Hungarian sky!'

'We need photographs to communicate our particularities and our national character.'
RUDOLF BALOGH, 1914



Cat. 12
ANDRÉ KERTÉSZ
Children Admiring My Camera
Budafok, 1919

Silver gelatin print, 1967
20.4 x 25.3 cm

Hungarian Museum of Photography
© Estate of André Kertész/Higher Pictures

Cat.8

RUDOLF BALOGH

Stud

Hortobágy, 1930

Vintage silver gelatin print
38 x 28.3 cm

Hungarian Museum of Photography
© Hungarian Museum of Photography



'These photographs should be the weapons of the class struggle.'

LAJOS GRÓ, *MUNKA-KÖR*, 1932

Cat.42

KATA KÁLMÁN

Ernö Weisz, Factory Worker
Budapest, 1932

Silver gelatin print, 1968
24 x 18.3 cm

Hungarian Museum of Photography
© DACS 2011

Cat.8 The pastoral scene of Balogh's photograph *Stud* is typical of the bucolic visions of Hungarian landscapes and villages that became known as the 'Magyar Style' or 'Hungarian Style'. As the title notes, the action takes place on a stud farm, with a figure on horseback rounding up several other horses or perhaps seeking a particular individual. The whiteness of the rider's smock draws our eye towards him as the principal figure. Yet the action remains confined to a comparatively small part of the frame, with the huge expanse of sky dominating the scene below it. This dramatic composition was not arrived at

by chance. Balogh combined two negatives – one of the stud farm and one of the sky – masking and printing part of each to create a combination image, which heightens the overall sense of drama and emphasises the unique beauty of the great Hungarian plains.

The nostalgic and romanticised approach of the 'Hungarian Style' photographers was not the only mode of photographic practice in Hungary between the wars. Other photographers worked in 'social-documentary': often politically inspired, this mode of photography sought to record the realities of life without allowing a sentimental approach to poverty.

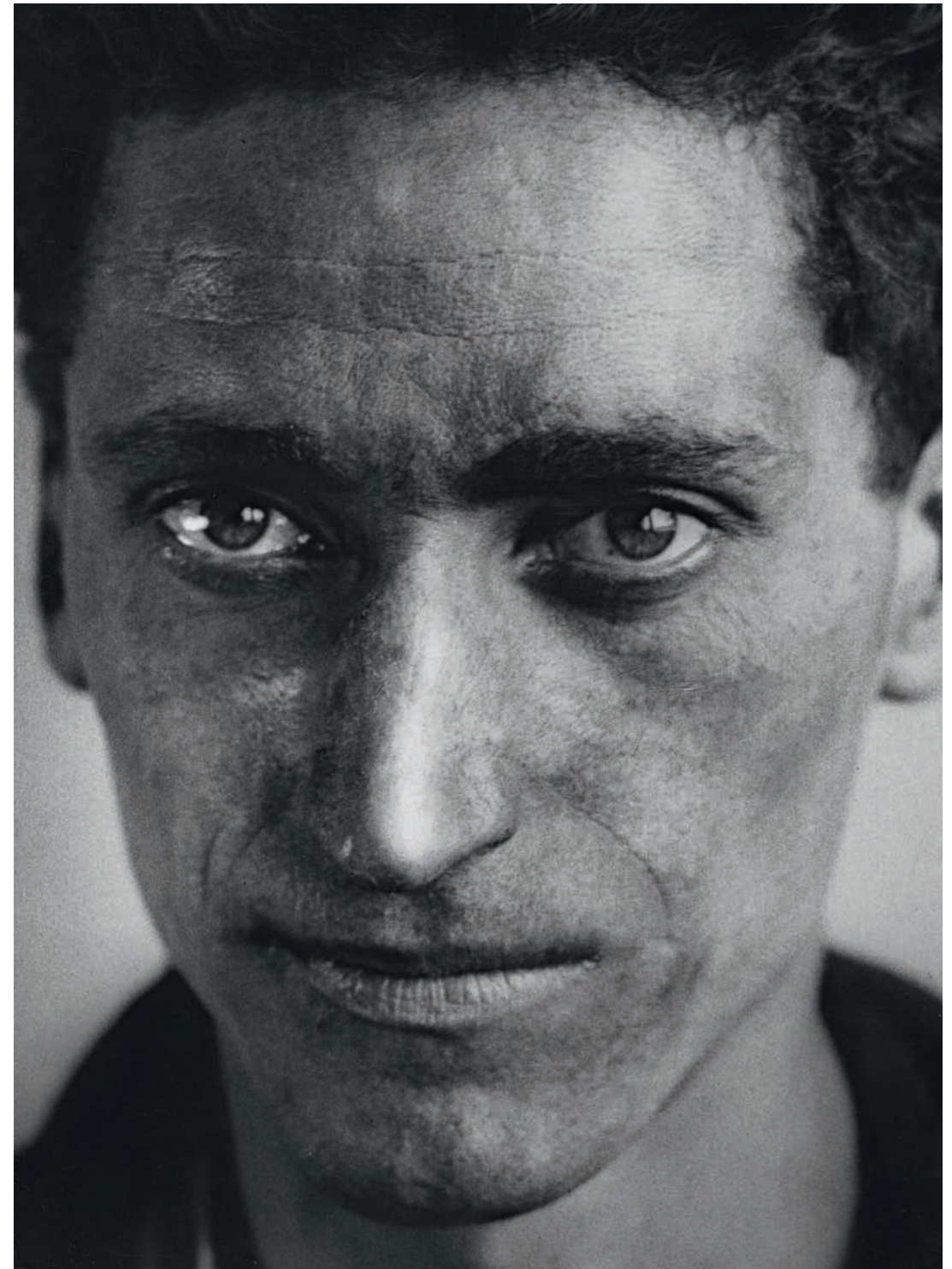
Cat.42 One of the best and most well known of these photographers was Kata Kálmán. In her photograph *Ernö Weisz, Factory Worker*, the subject gazes piercingly back at the viewer; his face tightly cropped by the photographic frame. In comparison to the soft focus of Balogh's *Stud*, here the focus is sharp, while the high contrast further adds to the image's raw, visceral quality. Although she gives the name of the subject in the title, the inclusion of 'Factory Worker' immediately situates the subject within a particular social group and the individual becomes the collective face of this sector

of society. Such subjects became increasingly frequent, especially for those photographers associated with the 'Work Circle' (*Munka-kör*) formed by Lajos Kassák in Budapest in the 1930s. For those in this group, photography presented a means of documenting reality in all its harshness, as a way of bringing attention to social injustices.

Do you think that a photographer should always include in a photograph's caption or title the name of the person or people they have captured? Why?

In what ways do you think photography can be used to advance a particular social or political agenda?

The development of the Leica gave photographers new freedom in how they operated, facilitating new subject matter and photographic styles. Do you think that modern digital photography has had an equivalent effect?



MOVING AWAY

'Hungarians are the only people in Europe without racial or linguistic relatives in Europe, therefore they are the loneliest on this continent. This ... perhaps explains the peculiar intensity of their existence ... Hopeless solitude feeds their creativity, their desire for achieving ... To be Hungarian is a collective neurosis.'

ARTHUR KOESTLER, QUOTED IN KATI MARTON, *THE GREAT ESCAPE: NINE JEWS WHO FLED HITLER AND CHANGED THE WORLD*, 2006

MOHOLY-NAGY

Second only to Paris as an artistic capital in the 1920s and '30s, Berlin attracted many Hungarians, with over 19,000 living in the city during this time. A large number worked in its thriving film and newspaper industries; Brassai and Capa had in fact both come to Berlin as newspaper correspondents before departing for Paris, and Munkácsi was based there between 1928 and 1934. However, it was Moholy-Nagy who made the greatest impact in Germany. There he produced arguably his best-known photographs while teaching at the Bauhaus between 1923 and 1928.

The Bauhaus was founded in 1919 by the architect Walter Gropius (1883–1969) and relocated to its famous premises in Dessau, designed by Gropius himself, in 1925. Strongly modernist in outlook, the Bauhaus philosophy sought to bring together all the arts and so dissolve the distinction between 'fine arts' (such as easel painting or sculpture) and 'applied arts' (such as textiles or interior design). Teaching at the Bauhaus encompassed art, typography, graphic and even industrial design, as well as architecture, prioritising industry and mass production over individual craftsmanship. For Moholy-Nagy this was the ideal environment for experimentation in photography, a medium that was inherently mass producible and could be used for advertising purposes in magazines, but that also opened up new possibilities for art.

Many of Moholy-Nagy's photographic experiments involved composite images. These included photograms (photographs produced without a camera), photomontages and photographs with multiple exposures and solarisation (an effect created by exposing a print to light during the developing process). In many ways these processes reflected his interest in Constructivism, a trend in Russian art and architecture that had emerged following the 1917 Russian Revolution. Exemplified in the work of Alexander Rodchenko and Vladimir Tatlin, Constructivism's highly abstract and fragmented forms in painting, sculpture and photography drew great inspiration (and sometimes appropriated materials) from the industrial world. Dissolving the boundaries between fine art and industrial design, Constructivism rejected the notion of autonomous art – that is 'art for art's sake' – in favour of creating a new visual language aligned with social ideals.

Cat.69 With its strong graphic force, *Berlin Radio Tower* illustrates well Moholy-Nagy's interest in Constructivism, rendering this stark scene almost wholly abstract. The photograph is taken looking down from the Berlin radio tower;

built between 1924 and 1926, at the buildings and surrounding snow-covered ground. Uncompromisingly modern, the tower's function and appearance strongly echo the radio tower in Moscow, designed by Vladimir Shukhov a few years earlier. The Berlin radio tower was of particular interest to Moholy-Nagy and he took several photographs of and from it. The viewpoint looking down from above was frequently used in modernist photography to create abstract compositions without compromising photography's apparently relentless realism. For Moholy-Nagy such images were indicative of what he called 'the New Vision': the conviction that photography could reveal a side of the world that was invisible to the naked eye, by presenting it in an unfamiliar image through the 'objective' lens of the camera. The fact that this photograph was taken from such an emblem of modernity as a radio tower adds further weight to the idea that photography was *the* medium for representing the modern age.

Although Moholy-Nagy's 'New Vision' could be seen as roughly equivalent to Constructivism conceptually and aesthetically, it differed markedly in its lack of ideological underpinning. Moholy-Nagy's work was not directed towards a particular social or political agenda. Instead, he was principally concerned with the modernist exploration of the possibilities of photography as a medium, and was not averse to the commercial application of his photographic and design work.

Moholy-Nagy resigned from the Bauhaus in 1928, and after spending time in Holland, Paris and London, he left for America in 1937. He served as director of the very short-lived New Bauhaus in Chicago before opening his own School of Design there in 1938. Shortly after the end of the Second World War, Moholy-Nagy died of leukaemia. His artistic legacy and dedication to teaching live on at the University of Art and Design in Budapest, now named after him, and in his School of Design, now part of Illinois Institute of Technology.

In what ways does the unusual viewpoint from which Moholy-Nagy took this photograph affect our understanding of how photography renders the three-dimensional world as a two-dimensional image?

Cat.69

LÁSZLÓ MOHOLY-NAGY
Berlin Radio Tower
1928

Silver gelatin print, 1973,
from original negative
26 x 20.4 cm

Hungarian Museum of Photography
© Hattula Moholy-Nagy/DACS 2011





Cat.91

BRASSAÏ
Bijou of Montparnasse
Paris, 1932

Silver gelatine print, 1973
23.5 x 25.5 cm

Victoria and Albert Museum
© Brassai Estate - RMN
Photo supplied © Victoria and Albert
Museum, London

'This ancient cocotte [fashionable prostitute], who has outlived her seventieth autumn, and looks as if she had stepped out of Baudelaire's most nightmarish pages, rejoices in the name of "Bijou" [jewel], and is a familiar figure in the Montmartre cabarets.'
PAUL MORAND, PARIS DE NUIT, 1932

BRASSAÏ

Brassaï spent four years in Berlin working as a journalist before leaving for Paris in 1924. Paris was to remain his home, and be the focus of his work, for the rest of his life. He recalled that, on arriving in Paris, 'I was not yet a photographer and gave no thought at all to photography about which I knew nothing and even despised, when in about 1926, I met André Kertész.' It was Kertész who introduced him to photography.

Paris and its artistic cultures fascinated and absorbed Brassaï. As described by his friend the writer Henry Miller, Brassaï was 'a wanderer ... who sets out on an exploration with no other aim but continual investigation'; he was 'the eye of Paris'. In 1930 Brassaï began taking the photographs that would become his celebrated book, *Paris de Nuit* (Paris after Dark). This early photo-book came to define the Paris of this era.

Paris de Nuit combined sixty of Brassaï's photographs with text by novelist, poet and playwright Paul Morand (1888–1976). Although Morand's name was bigger on the cover, it was Brassaï's photography that revealed the eerie world shrouded under the cover of darkness, yet simultaneously brought into focus under the glare of modern electric light. In his introduction to the book, Morand charted this contradictory world, narrating a nocturnal promenade through the streets and describing the strange and sometimes-menacing characters found there:

'Night is not the negative of the day; black surfaces and white are not merely transposed, as on a photographic plate, but another picture altogether emerges at nightfall. At that hour a twilight world comes into being, a world of shifting forms, of false perspectives, phantom planes. There is something eerie, even disconcerting, about the process ... a furtive menace pervades the Paris night; its darkness teems with unseen presences, the restless souls of the Parisians escaping through sleep-bound lips.'

Cat. 91 Although this particular image of the *Bijou of Montparnasse* was not actually included in *Paris de Nuit*, another of the same subject (with the same title and obviously taken at the same time) was printed. In this version, the woman sits at the table staring back at the viewer. She is expensively attired with hat and fur-trimmed coat. Her hands are, it seems, arranged so as to show off her jewellery and the string of pearls draped around her neck. The heavy makeup on her face does not conceal the toll of countless years of work.

Interestingly, in the photograph of the same subject included in *Paris de Nuit*, 'Bijou' looks away from the camera, across the room at some anonymous gentlemen whose partial reflections are shown in the mirrors behind her. Without her arresting gaze this is arguably the less striking image. Yet it fits much better into the sequence of images in the book, few of which show figures engaging with the camera. The photographs selected for the book are

carefully composed so as to portray the view of an outsider looking in, revealing with an unflinching gaze how familiar surroundings have become strange, an exotic underworld for potentially illicit activities. In Brassaï's hands, the camera was the perfect instrument for revealing and capturing this hidden and ephemeral world.

In *Paris de Nuit* Brassaï adopts the role of an observer; few, if any, of the subjects engage with the camera, and many of the photographs are taken from viewpoints looking across deserted streets and squares. Do you think it is possible for a photographer to act entirely as an observer? Or do they inescapably participate in and influence their subject?

KERTÉSZ

'Kertész had two qualities which were essential to a great photographer: an insatiable curiosity of the world of life and of people, and a precise sense of form ... But rarely are the two qualities found in the same person.'

BRASSAÏ, 'MY FRIEND ANDRÉ KERTÉSZ', *CAMERA*, APRIL 1963

Kertész had little formal training in photography. Before the First World War, he took his first amateur photographs of rural village scenes and everyday moments in the city of Budapest where he lived. Called up to the army in 1914, he took photographs (many now destroyed) of life in the trenches, before being seriously wounded in 1915. After the war, while working variously as a clerk and in agriculture, he frequently sent his work to photographic magazines. He left for Paris in 1925 and quickly found both critical and commercial success. Through fellow émigrés who had settled in Paris, Kertész was introduced and became close to the Paris artistic community, Hungarians and non-Hungarians alike, and took pictures of many artistic luminaries, among them Mondrian and Chagall.

Cat. 105 Kertész's photography is characterised by an overriding interest in and tenderness towards people going about their daily lives. One of his most evocative images is *Elizabeth and I*, taken in 1931, depicting him and his wife, Elizabeth. In this photograph, we see half of Elizabeth's face as she looks back at the camera. His hand clasps her right shoulder. The hand is a caring, protective one, there to offer reassurance rather than control. Interestingly, this photograph is a result of a deliberate decision (made three decades after the photograph was taken) to tightly crop the original negative, which showed more of the figures and the room in which they sit. However, in this version, by



Cat. 105
ANDRÉ KERTÉSZ
Elizabeth and I
 Paris, 1931

Silver gelatin print, 1967
 25.2 x 20.2 cm

Hungarian Museum of Photography
 © Estate of André Kertész/Higher Pictures

removing any specificity from the photograph through tight cropping, the dynamic of a whole relationship is seemingly distilled into a single image. A highly personal photograph becomes one with universal resonance.

With the spectre of Nazism looming over Europe during the 1930s, and finding it increasingly hard to secure commissions, Kertész and Elizabeth left Paris for New York in 1936. Kertész found life in America difficult. He had struggled with the French language while in Paris and his subsequent difficulties with English left him something of an outsider. Despite finding work for a variety of magazines he frequently found his creative freedom restricted by their editors. To compound matters, in 1941 Kertész and Elizabeth were designated as enemy aliens on account of Hungary entering the war against the Allies. For a time, his professional activities were curtailed, and he could not easily obtain photographic supplies.

Cat. 128 Many of his photographs from this period, though frequently as imaginative and adventurous as his Paris work, are often tinged with melancholy and nostalgia. On one such work, *Lost Cloud*, taken shortly after he arrived in New York, Kertész commented: 'What I felt when making this photo was a feeling of solitude – the cloud didn't know which way to go.' The photograph speaks of the isolation Kertész felt in this unfamiliar city: the solitary cloud stands in stark contrast, both formally and tonally, to the colossal and characteristically New York building which ascends to the top of the frame of the photograph (and beyond).

By 1946 Kertész was beginning to feel more accepted in America. The cosmetics company Elizabeth had started was doing well and Kertész was revelling in the success of an exhibition of his work at the Art Institute of Chicago. He continued his commercial work, having signed a long-term exclusive contract with *House and Garden* magazine. While this provided financial security, he felt increasingly stifled and broke off the contract in 1961. By this time he was beginning to receive the kind of international recognition he felt his work had long deserved, and in 1964 John Szarkowski, the newly appointed Director of Photography at MoMA, staged a solo show of Kertész's work, confirming him as one of the greats of twentieth-century photography.

'The message a photograph conveys is entirely dependent on the content of the image.' Do you agree with this statement? Do you think it is possible to discern anything about a photographer's mental state from their photographs?

Cat. 128
ANDRÉ KERTÉSZ
Lost Cloud
 New York, 2 March, 1937

Silver gelatin print, 1970s
 25 x 20.3 cm

Estate of André Kertész. Courtesy Vintage Gallery, Budapest
 © Estate of André Kertész/Higher Pictures
 Photo Courtesy Vintage Gallery, Budapest



MUNKÁCSI

Munkácsi was perhaps the most accomplished photojournalist of the photographers who emerged from Hungary in the 1920s and '30s. He began as a journalist at the age of eighteen, taking photographs to illustrate his articles. For Munkácsi photojournalism was about:

'[seeing to] within a thousandth of a second the things that indifferent people blindly pass by – this is the theory of photo reportage. And the things we see within this thousandth of a second, we should then photograph during the next thousandth of a second – this is the practical side of photo reportage.'

Initially, Munkácsi specialised in sports photography but he soon branched out into other areas. Working for several publications, he always looked for unusual angles and the results were so successful that he was soon able to boast that he was the highest-paid photographer in Hungary. The fame he garnered from this helped him secure a job in Berlin working for *Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung* (*BIZ*) which had the highest circulation in Germany of any illustrated weekly paper.

Cat. 107 While working for *BIZ* Munkácsi travelled all over the world with his camera. In 1930, he took one of his most celebrated photographs: *Four Boys at Lake Tanganyika* (although despite its traditional title, this photograph was probably taken on Liberia's Atlantic coast). The high shutter speed, which captured the movement in sharp detail, renders an image of timeless energy and dynamism. The lack of any signifiers tying it to a particular time (the boys are naked) further heightens its raw and elemental charm. Its influence on subsequent photography was profound. Cartier-Bresson recalled:

'In 1932 I saw a photograph by Martin Munkácsi of three black children running into the sea, and I must say that it is that very photograph which was for me the spark that set fire to the fireworks ... and made me suddenly realise that photography could reach eternity through the moment.'

Back in Germany, Munkácsi recorded the rise of Nazism, most notably the fateful 'Day of Potsdam' in 1933, which saw Adolf Hitler assume power in Germany. Within months of this event, *BIZ*'s Jewish editor was removed from his post and Munkácsi himself left for America.

Such was his fame, Munkácsi was immediately hired by Carmel Snow, editor of *Harper's Bazaar*. Munkácsi, Snow recalled, 'had never taken a fashion picture in his life', but she commissioned him nonetheless. At the time most fashion photographs were meticulously staged studio-based tableaux. Munkácsi had other ideas, which drew on his experience in sports photography. For his first shoot, Snow took Munkácsi to Piping Rock Beach, where, she recounted, he 'made photographic history':

'It seemed that what Munkácsi wanted was for the model to run toward him. Such a 'pose' had never been attempted before for fashion ... The resulting picture of a typical American girl in action with her cape billowing out behind her, made photographic history ... Munkácsi's was the first action photograph made for fashion, and it started the trend that is climaxed in the work of [Richard] Avedon.'

CARMEL SNOW, QUOTED IN PENELOPE ROWLANDS, *A DASH OF DARING: CARMEL SNOW AND HER LIFE IN FASHION, ART, AND LETTERS*, 2005

Cat. 107

MARTIN MUNKÁCSI

Four Boys at Lake Tanganyika c. 1930

Silver gelatin print, 1994,
from original negative
35.5 x 27.5 cm

Hungarian Museum of Photography
© Estate of Martin Munkácsi, courtesy
Howard Greenberg Gallery, New York



Cat. 119

MARTIN MUNKÁCSI
The First Fashion Photo
for *Harper's Bazaar*
(*Lucile Brokaw*)
America, 1933

Silver gelatin print, 1994,
from original negative
35.5 x 27.5 cm

Hungarian Museum of Photography
© Estate of Martin Munkácsi, courtesy
Howard Greenberg Gallery, New York

Cat. 119 In the photograph we can clearly see what had excited Snow so much. The blurriness of the image introduces a real sense of movement and dynamism; it appears natural, completely unlike the highly formal fashion photography Munkácsi rejected. Clearly borrowing from his sports journalism work and using his experience of capturing the essence of movement, Munkácsi turned fashion photography into photojournalism. This was not using photography to present clothes as things to be acquired; instead, this was an image of the life you could achieve if you owned and wore those garments.

Munkácsi had transformed fashion photography overnight. As the famous fashion photographer Richard Avedon (1923–2004) observed, Munkácsi 'brought a taste for happiness and honesty and love of women to what was, before him, a joyless, lying art. He was the first ... and today the world of what is called fashion is peopled with Munkácsi's babies, his heirs.' For a time Munkácsi boasted about being New York's highest paid photojournalist, but his position was soon displaced by others who had subsumed and extended his advances in the genre, and after suffering ill health he died relatively unknown.



Unlike Munkácsi's 1933 photograph for *Harper's Bazaar*, many fashion photographs are manipulated, originally using darkroom effects and these days digitally. What do you think about these processes and the perception of photography as an apparently truthful medium? Do you think an altered image should be labelled as such?

CAPA

Born a year before the outbreak of the First World War, Capa was the youngest and the most politically engaged of the five photographers. War and the struggle against fascism defined his life and his photography. Capa documented the Spanish Civil War, the Second Sino-Japanese War, the Second World War all over Europe, the Arab-Israeli War of 1948 and the First Indo-China War. Regularly telling his friends, 'I'm not a photographer, I'm a journalist,' Capa was far less interested in the exploration of photography as a medium, than in its ability to record and transmit the horror and tragedy of war. He frequently worked embedded within military units, and was not averse to putting himself in the line of fire to get the perfect shot – a practice that continues to define war photography today.

Capa left Hungary at the age of eighteen for Vienna and then Berlin where, like many other Hungarians, he found work as a journalist. Working as a darkroom assistant, he soon began taking photographs himself. His first big commission came in 1932 when he was sent to photograph the Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky speaking in Copenhagen, Denmark. Unlike the other photographers with their cumbersome press cameras, Capa photographed in 35-mm film, which uniquely captured Trotsky's remarkable energy and inspiration.

A Berlin newspaper gave over a whole page to his photographs of Trotsky delivering his speech, winning Capa considerable attention. Capa soon left Berlin for Paris, where Kertész helped him with contacts and some early jobs, as he had done for Brassai a few years earlier. In Paris, he deliberately adopted the American-sounding name Robert Capa to make himself more attractive to editors. *Cápa*, meaning 'shark' in Hungarian, was his nickname in school; he purportedly chose this as a professional name because of its similarity to that of American film director, Frank Capra (1897–1991). The plan worked, and he was soon commanding some of the highest fees around.

In 1936, Lucien Vogel, the editor of *Vu*, a short-lived but innovative picture magazine modelled after those popular in Berlin, commissioned Capa to cover the Spanish Civil War which had just broken out. Capa remained in Spain until 1939, travelling with and photographing the Workers' Party of Marxist Unification (POUM), with whom the journalist and author George Orwell (1903–1950) served and was wounded. The civil war had started when a group of generals led by Francisco Franco (1892–1975) staged a *coup d'état* against the Republican government. Only partially successful, the *coup* led to a protracted civil war in which an alliance of conservatives, monarchists and

'If your picture isn't
good enough, you're
not close enough.'
ROBERT CAPA



Cat. 108

ROBERT CAPA

Death of a Loyalist Militiaman

Cerro Muriano, Cordoba

1936

Silver gelatin print, 1970,
from original negative
28 x 36 cm

Hungarian Museum of Photography
© ICP/Magnum Photos

'There seemed to be a loud bang and a blinding flash of light all around me, and I felt a tremendous shock – no pain, only a violent shock, such as you get from an electric terminal; with it a sense of utter weakness, a feeling of being stricken and shrivelled up to nothing. ... All this happened in a space of time much less than a second.'

GEORGE ORWELL, ON BEING SHOT IN THE NECK, *HOMAGE TO CATALONIA*, 1938

fascists – self-styled as ‘Nationalists’ – were opposed by an often uneasy agglomeration of liberals, socialists, communists and anarchists, including the POUM, fighting for the Republican cause.

Often regarded as the first ‘media war’, the Spanish Civil War was covered by numerous journalists and correspondents, including some, like Orwell, who actually engaged in the fighting. The reports and photographs coming back to Britain and France from correspondents in Spain galvanised public sentiment and led to many foreign volunteers leaving for Spain to join the Republican cause.

Cat. 108 The most famous photograph of the conflict is undoubtedly Capa’s *Death of a Loyalist Militiaman*. The photograph records the moment a POUM soldier falls to his death after being shot by an enemy bullet. It is a strikingly iconic image, in part because of its composition. The soldier’s tragic pose uncannily recalls those from religious history paintings. Yet, the image’s power derives from the innate characteristics of photography. The unbalanced pose with the figure falling away from the camera, his gun slipping from his hand, his head caught turning away from the camera as he falls, all serve to create a tangible sense of pathos as this tragic moment is caught in an instant by the camera. Channelled through the graininess and immediacy of the photographic image, the figure stands as an extraordinary index of the whole conflict, and indeed of war itself.

Capa returned to Paris when the war came to a close, his reputation as one of the world’s greatest war photographers assured. At the outbreak of the Second World War (1939) he left for New York, but despite his ‘enemy alien’ status (the same as Kertész) he was, with the help of influential friends, able to accompany and photograph several Allied military units during the European campaign. His most iconic photographs of the Second World War, perhaps the most famous by any photographer, recorded the D-Day landings by American troops on Omaha beach in Normandy, France.

By 1944, the Allies had been planning the invasion of mainland Europe for nearly two years, and in anticipation of the invasion, Capa flew to Britain to wait for events to unfold. On 6 June 1944 the invasion finally began. In a meticulously prepared operation, over 150,000 Allied troops crossed the Channel for Normandy while the Nazi troops waited along the heavily fortified beachfronts. Just after 4 am, Capa leapt ashore from a landing craft among American troops. A hail of bullets rained down from the German fortifications above. Capa himself was armed with two cameras and in the ensuing chaos over the next hour was able to take over 100 photographs, before jumping aboard a boat removing wounded soldiers from the beach.

Cat. 137 Before the advent of television, photographs were the first images audiences back home would have seen of the invasion. As soon as he arrived back in Britain, Capa had the films sent to the London office of *Life* magazine to be developed, hoping to make the magazine’s next issue in New York. Unfortunately, in the haste to get the photographs developed, the negatives were placed in a drying cabinet with the temperature set too high. Just eleven



photographs survived, and even these were quite blurred. Nevertheless, Capa’s photographs present a remarkable record of this scarcely imaginable scene, and their emotional impact is for many only heightened by their blurred and grainy appearance, which testifies to the extreme conditions in which they were made.

Capa died in 1954 after stepping on a landmine while photographing the First Indo-China War in Vietnam. The next year American forces became engaged in the conflict, and the ensuing, deeply controversial Vietnam War lasted for the best part of twenty years. The American public’s perception of the conflict was greatly influenced by the work of numerous war photographers, who often risked their lives to capture images that brought home the sheer brutality of war. Capa’s pioneering example paved the way for many of these and other war photographers, and his legacy continues to be a great source of inspiration for photographers today.

In 1955 *Life* magazine and the Overseas Press Club of America established the Robert Capa Gold Medal Award to honour ‘the best photograph taken overseas with a courageous and adventurous spirit’. What responsibilities does a photographer have to the documentation of human conflicts?

What characteristics of photography do you think allow it to be such a powerful medium, both politically and emotionally?

Cat. 137

ROBERT CAPA
American Soldier Landing on
Omaha Beach, D-Day
Normandy, 6 June 1944

Silver gelatin print, 1970, from
original negative
28 x 36 cm

Hungarian Museum of Photography
© ICP/Magnum Photos

‘The war correspondent has his stake – his life – in his own hands, and he can put it on this horse or that horse, or he can put it back in his pocket at the very last minute. I am a gambler. I decided to go in with Company E in the first wave.’
ROBERT CAPA RECALLING THE EVENTS OF D-DAY IN HIS MEMOIR SLIGHTLY OUT OF FOCUS, 1947



PHOTOGRAPHY IN HUNGARY 1945–1989

After trying unsuccessfully to pull out of the Second World War, Miklós Horthy's regime ended in 1944 when Hungary was invaded by Germany, its previous ally. In the final months the bridges of Budapest were destroyed and many Jewish people deported to concentration camps. In the aftermath of the war, under the influence of the Soviet Union, a communist government took charge in 1949 and like so many eastern European states, Hungary fell behind the Iron Curtain separating East from West.

The communist authorities worked hard to ensure there was little, if any, cultural exchange with the capitalist West. Photography, a medium uniquely appropriate for the dissemination of propaganda, was co-opted into the service of furthering the communist cause. By the 1950s, avant-garde artistic practices and modernist approaches that had previously been connected with the communist revolution in Russia were outlawed, following the edict of the Soviet leader Joseph Stalin. Socialist Realism was strictly enforced as the official artistic style, and was taken up as such by the authorities in the years to follow.

Socialist Realism prescribed images of common workers going about their everyday activities, as heroes of the communist cause. Interestingly, though its ideological content differed decidedly, in appearance Socialist Realism had much in common with the pre-war Hungarian Style in its idealisation of rural labour. During the early Soviet period when Socialist Realism was at its zenith in Hungary, Kata Kálmán was involved in organising a series of monographs on some of the stars of the Hungarian Style. She herself revisited its subject matter in her own photography but in a mode now infused with irony, an implicit critique of the oppressive regime.

The fact that no Hungarian photographs were published of the actual events of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, when a popular uprising was brutally suppressed by Soviet military forces, is indicative of the hold the communist authorities had over photography. While on the margins some interesting work was produced, especially in the realms of social documentary, isolated from the rapid and significant developments happening in the West, the quality of Hungarian photography lost the vigour it had had earlier in the century. The political climate was less conducive to artistic expression; photographers who had previously run independent studios were now regulated by the state. Yet, although they lacked the outlet of galleries and publications, they continued to experiment. In the 1960s and '70s there was a growing interest in conceptual photography, coupled with a continuation of the tradition of social documentary projects. With the loosening of restrictions on the flow of information into Hungary during the 1980s, together with improvements in higher education opportunities, Hungarian photography gradually regained momentum, and some recognition abroad.

Cat. 180 In 1989 Hungary's borders were once again opened up to the West. Imre Benkő's photograph of *Russian Soldiers Leaving* records the withdrawal of

Cat. 180

IMRE BENKŐ
Russian Soldiers Leaving
Hajmáskér, 1990

Vintage silver gelatin print
23.8 x 16.4 cm

Hungarian National Museum, Budapest
© DACS 2011

Soviet troops. In a curiously timeless image, the downcast soldier gazes wistfully out of the window as he strums quietly on his guitar. Yet, despite the rather sombre downplaying of the occasion, the very fact that Benkó was able to take the photograph at all is a vivid illustration of the new freedom from Soviet control, for photography and society more broadly.

With the opening up of its borders to the West, Hungarian photography was no longer isolated from the international mainstream. Subsuming Western photographic developments, Hungarian photography lost much of the distinctiveness it possessed earlier in the twentieth century. Yet the Hungarian contribution to shaping and redefining twentieth-century photography, especially through the examples of Brassai, Capa, Kertész, Moholy-Nagy and Munkácsi, endures and continues to be felt to the present day.

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Cat.8 detail
RUDOLF BALOGH
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