

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

11 WEST 53 STREET, NEW YORK 19, N. Y.

TELEPHONE: CIRCLE 5-8900
511213-77

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JOURNALIST PHOTOGRAPHY FROM FRANCE TO BE SHOWN IN "FIVE FRENCH PHOTOGRAPHERS"

Outstanding reportorial photography by contemporary Frenchmen Brassai, Cartier-Bresson, Doisneau, Ronis and Izis will be exhibited in the Auditorium Gallery of the Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, from December 19 through February 24. About 200 works by these photographers have been selected by Edward Steichen, Director of the Museum's Department of Photography.

Henri Cartier-Bresson is represented entirely by his Asiatic photographs taken in China, Indonesia, Burma, India, Bali and Ceylon. Most of these are being exhibited for the first time anywhere, and only a very few have ever been published in this country.

Brassai at 52 is the senior member of this group. Both he and Cartier-Bresson have exerted a considerable influence not only on French photography but on the best photography of all Europe. Work by both of these men has been published here in Harpers-Bazaar, and by Cartier-Bresson in Life magazine. Photographs by Robert Doisneau have appeared in Vogue. The work of Izis and Ronis is practically unknown in this country. Except for the Cartier-Bressons, all the photographs in the exhibition were taken in Paris or in the provinces of France.

This exhibition is part of the Department of Photography's plan to exhibit work by photographers of other countries and at a later date to include some of the new, younger photographers of France and other nations.

Mr. Steichen comments on the exhibition as follows:

It is a rare privilege to be able to present this stimulating and comprehensive exhibition by five outstanding photographers from France. They establish another island of strength in the realm of modern photography. There is a deep undercurrent of unity in their photography with its forthright emphasis on the human aspect of the things, moments, places portrayed. This is photography with a tender simplicity, a sly humor, a warm earthiness, the "everydayness" of the familiar and the convincing aliveness found only in the best of the folk arts. Here is the offering of a new sphere of influence and inspiration to amateur photographers. It supplies a threshold leading to a new folk art that waits to be given life by the millions now practicing photography.

Statements by each of the photographers represented will form wall labels accompanying the prints. These give an interesting insight to their approaches to their work.

Brassai has written: "The photographer has respect for his subject, amounting almost to religious veneration; keenness of powers of observation; patience and hawk-like speed in swooping on his prey; impulsiveness; preference for the human race and indifference to mere 'nature'; love of the transient; sense of the magic beneath the surface of reality; spurning of color and the enjoyment derived from the restraint and sobriety of black upon white; and, finally, desire to get beyond the anecdotal and to promote subjects to the dignity of types."

Henri Cartier-Bresson says in part: "I believe that, through the act of living, the discovery of one's self is made simultaneously with the discovery of the outside world; a proper relation has to be established, and there is a reciprocal reaction between both these worlds which, in the long run, form only one. Our actions can alter the world just as the world can change us. It would be a dangerous over-simplification to stress the importance of one at the expense of the other in this constant dialogue."

Robert Doisneau, who feels that his function as a photographer is to draw the public's attention to the little amusing things of daily life which usually go unobserved, states: "The photographer must not be content with easy and trite effects, such as exaggerated perspectives, backlighting for the sake of overgrown shadows; he should rather attempt to render what he sees with his own eyes and not what looks pretty on the viewfinder of the camera."

Izis says: "The good photographic portrait is one in which only the person photographed interests us, because the photographer has been able to make us completely unaware of his presence."

Willy Ronis: "All attention is concentrated on the specific moment, almost too good to be true, which can only vanish in the second that follows and which produces an impact impossible with any staged setting."

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES:

Brassai

Brassai was born in 1899 in Brassó, an old town of Transylvania. Brassai means "from Brassó"; his real name is Gyula Halász. At first he wanted to be a painter and studied art in Budapest and Berlin. Journalism, in 1924 in Paris, led him eventually to photography. In 1933, two and a half years after first buying a camera, his book of pictures, "Paris de Nuit," was reviewed and admired all over the world. In London, the Batsford Gallery organized an exhibition of his photographs. During the Occupation, encouraged by Picasso, Brassai took up drawing again, and a limited edition of his drawings was published in 1946 accompanied by a poem by Jacques Prévert. At this time he also executed photographic decors for the ballet, "Le Rendez-Vous," and for the play, "En Passant." (From Camera in Paris, Brassai, New York, London, The Focal Press, 1949)

Henri Cartier-Bresson

Born in 1908 in Chanteloup, France. Studied painting with André Lhote in 1928, then spent 8 months in Cambridge, England. Continued painting in spare time during military service and began to photograph. In 1931, traveled to Africa where he contracted blackwater fever. Following year to eastern Europe and Italy, then to Marseilles where he first began serious photography with Leica. Never studied technique, used camera to record what he saw. Prints first shown in New York in 1933 at Julien Levy Gallery, where he again exhibited, with Walker Evans, in 1935. First films for Jean Renoir, 1936. Married Ratna Mohini, Javanese dancer, 1937. Coronation pictures in London, 1938. In 1939, in French army, captured in 1940, 36 months in German prisoner of war camps; escaped on third attempt in 1943 and worked for Paris underground organization. In 1946, to U.S. to prepare his one-man exhibition held at the Museum of Modern Art. Then to Far East, covering fall of Shanghai to Communists, death and funeral of Gandhi, etc. Now in France.

Robert Doisneau

Born in 1912 in Paris, Robert Doisneau began as an engraver, switched soon to photography and became in 1935 an industrial photographer for the great Renault automobile works. As he grew more conscious of what he should try to accomplish as a photographer, his job gave him less and less satisfaction. He left the plant and, in 1938, became a free-lance photographer accepting almost every kind of photographic assignment. Served as a foot soldier in the war. After the liberation of Paris which he covered as a member of the resistance, Doisneau achieved recognition. His pictures have appeared in many leading publications in various countries, including the U.S., particularly in Life and Vogue. He published in 1950 a book of photographs under the title "Banlieue de Paris." He married in 1939 and has two daughters.

Izis

Izis Bidermanas - professionally he uses his first name only - was born in 1911 in Lithuania. At the age of 19 he came to Paris with the dream of becoming a painter. To earn a living he worked as a retouch-man and darkroom printer while attending night art school in Montparnasse. It was only after the liberation of France in 1944 that Izis found his true vocation as a photographer. He was at that time with other resistance fighters in the military barracks in Limoges. Trying to portray them as the heroes they were, Izis realized that he could not use the approach and technique he had learned in a commercial portrait studio. He had to make a new start, which became a turning point in his life. Back in Paris he started doing scenic photographs and portraits in his own way. His first exhibition, in 1946, was well received by the critics, but no assignment followed in its wake. Hard times continued until his second exhibition in March 1950. He was discovered and hired by Match, a leading French picture magazine, as a reporter photographer. A selection of photographs by Izis appeared in a book entitled "Paris des Rêves"; the first edition of 10,000 sold out in five months. A second picture book by Izis - again devoted to Paris - entitled "Grand Bal de Printemps" is his latest achievement. His next big project is a book of photographs on London.

Willy Ronis

Born in 1912 in Paris, Willy Ronis studied art and for a short time law, graduated as a Bachelor of Arts, and went on to study music. In 1932 the depression forced him to abandon his studies and to enter into his father's photographic studio taking weddings, making postcards, photographing portraits for identity cards and doing finishing work for amateurs. After the death of his father in 1936, he decided to follow in the footsteps of such well-known photographers as Brassai, Kertesz, Man Ray, Germaine Krull, Eli Lotar, whose work had greatly impressed him. As a freelance photographer he began with scenics and wintersport photos; he did his first picture story in 1937 on Edward G. Robinson in Paris with a 6/9 amateur camera. During the war, Ronis served in the French army; discharged in August 1940, he took a part-time job in a mill photographing in his spare time. For reasons of personal security - the country was under German occupation - he moved in June 1941 to the south of France where he made a living as a jewelry painter and as director of theatrical plays. After the liberation, Ronis again took up photography, specializing in reportage which he considers as the most difficult but also the most exciting photographic job. Ronis is married; his wife is a painter.