HENRI CARTIER-BRESSON
HENRI CARTIER-BRESSON (1908–2004) was one of the most important photographers of the twentieth century. He is widely known as originator of the idea of the decisive moment.

From the 1930s onwards, Henri Cartier-Bresson travelled extensively around the world, capturing landmark moments of world history with his camera. He has in fact been called the eyewitness of the century. After World War II, he photographed prisoners being released from concentration camps. He was in China when the troops of Mao Zedong marched into Peking. He photographed Mahatma Gandhi only a few hours before he was assassinated. In 1947, he co-founded the Magnum Photos agency which remains to this day a key player in photojournalism.

Photography – and the travelling it involved – was for Henri Cartier-Bresson a way of life. Taking photographs was a way to tell stories about the reality he witnessed and to capture on film groundbreaking events. In his view, the key to photography was perfect and exact timing. The photographer needed to be constantly on the alert. The camera was like a sketchbook, an instrument of intuition and spontaneity.

Cartier-Bresson had a phenomenal eye for composition, but he always gave room for chance as well: “I never make calculations. I perceive a structure and wait for something to happen. There are no rules. One should not try too hard to explain the mystery.”

This exhibition presents an overview of Henri Cartier-Bresson’s work throughout his long career. It features about 300 photographs as well as a wealth of other material about his personal history and life’s work as a photographer. Curated by Robert Delpire, the exhibition is organised in cooperation with Magnum Photos and Fondation HCB.
AMERICA

The United States are a favourite subject for many photographers in search of the spectacular. Cartier-Bresson’s America, which he photographed from 1946 until the late 1970s, is very different from the stereotyped images. Ignoring wide-open prairies and giant city skyscrapers to focus on the human element and the richness of personal encounters and experiences, Cartier-Bresson built up his vision of America around people, their ordinary gestures and their every day behaviour. From the affluent residents of New York’s smart downtown neighbourhoods to the farming communities of the Mid-West or the Black ghettos of South Carolina, Henri Cartier-Bresson’s subjects make up a chronicle of American life seen through the surprised, critical, amused and fascinated eye of a European photographer.
Travelling to Indonesia in 1949, Henri Cartier-Bresson returned with a photographic report, which soon became famous, on Balinese theatre – a combination of dance, singing and pantomime. His photographs reflect the exquisite grace and refinement of the actors’ costumes and jewellery, the precision of their gestures and the variety of their expressions. On the banks of capturing all the dramatic intensity of the performance – where delicacy confronts violence and fury – they also reveal the profound spirituality that pervades this eminently popular form of theatre.

“When you take a shot you’re halfway between a pickpocket and a tightrope walker. It’s a perpetual game, underscored by incredible nervous tension.”

HENRI CARTIER-BRESSON
Henri Cartier-Bresson’s photographic work during his eleven-month journey through China makes up a travel diary of inestimable historical importance. In July 1946, China had become prey to civil war between Mao Zedong’s communist forces and Chiang Kai-Chek’s nationalist army. Arriving in Beijing in December 1948, Henri Cartier-Bresson stayed for twelve days, until Mao’s troops took over the city. Hearing that the battle front was approaching the Yang Zi river, he immediately left for Nanjing, the Kuomintang’s stronghold, where he photographed the departure of Chiang Kai-Chek’s troops and the arrival of the People’s Army. He eventually left China for Hong Kong in July 1949.
Over thirty years, Henri Cartier-Bresson travelled the length and breadth of Europe and throughout France, Italy, Spain, England and Germany. What he has left us from these years of travel is much more than a collection of photographic records: his work, in revealing similarities and differences, individuals and their behaviour, rituals and crowds – in short, people – tells the story of our continent and everything that makes up its cultural, religious and social identity.
“For me photography is to place head, heart and eye along the same line of sight. It is a way of life.”

HENRI CARTIER-BRESSON
Henri Cartier-Bresson visited India many times. During his first journey there in 1948, it so happened that he was able to photograph Gandhi only hours before his death, and to capture the fervour that his funeral aroused among the population. Though the ceremonies and the religion, with which he became profoundly imbued, his photographs express the atmosphere, the reflectiveness, and the inner life of a whole society. The photographs taken during his later journeys, in 1966 and 1980, are even more deeply pervaded on the banks of a kind of abstraction, condensed and brought to life through his seeing eye. A privileged relationship seems to have developed between the photographer and the country. Henri Cartier-Bresson’s pictures of India bear eloquent witness to his fascination for Indian culture and philosophy.
Henri Cartier-Bresson visited Mexico twice, in 1934 and 1964. Strangely, the images remained so alike that time seems to have stood still over those thirty years. Landscapes, children, street scenes, prostitutes... As Carlos Fuentes wrote in his preface to the Mexican Notebooks: “How can we preserve the saving grace of the human eye and its vision of the world? What can we offer besides death, religion, indifference or fear, what other choice do we have than to bow our heads and move away, averting our gaze? The answer is here, and it is magnificent.” Henri Cartier-Bresson has given us a glimpse of the eternal Mexico, of what has made up its history and cultural identity.
“If, in making a portrait, we are trying to capture the inner silence of a consenting victim, it is very difficult to slip a camera between their clothes and their skin”.

Henri Cartier-Bresson made many portraits during his long career. These were often of unknown subjects, but also of celebrities. In each portrait – of Jean-Paul Sartre, Alberto Giacometti, Colette, Pierre Bonnard, Henri Matisse and many others- the photographer has captured a particular expression, an attitude briefly glimpsed during a tête-à-tête or an encounter, that subtly suggests his subject’s personality.

“What is there more fugitive and transitory than the expression on a human face?”

HENRI CARTIER-BRESSON
Henri Cartier-Bresson visited the USSR for the first time in 1954. Travelling with an interpreter, he focused his eye on people, on their work and leisure, on every aspect of their daily lives. Nineteen years later, he decided to return because, as he said: “Nothing is more revealing than comparing a country with itself, capturing differences and trying to take continuity on the banks of surprise”. Here, Henri Cartier-Bresson’s camera takes us to Moscow, to the Russian Federal Republic, to Estonia, the Caucasus and the republics of Central Asia.

“We photographers deal in things that are continually vanishing, and when they have vanished, there is no contrivance on earth that can make them come back again.”

HENRI CARTIER-BRESSON
BIOGRAPHY (1908–2004)

EARLY LIFE


1926: Studies painting under André Lhote. Takes his first photographs.

1930: Spends almost one year in Ivory Coast.

1931: Discovers a photograph by Martin Munkacsi in the arts magazine Arts et Métiers Graphiques and decides to focus on photography.

FIRST PHOTOGRAPHIC EXPERIMENTS

1932: Buys his first Leica and travels across Europe with his friends Leonor Fini and Pieyre de Mandiargues. First publications in Voilà and Photographies.

1933: First exhibition at the Julien Levy Gallery, New York. His photographs are subsequently shown at the Ateneo Club in Madrid.

1934: Goes to Mexico with an ethnographic expedition team. The mission fails but he decides to stay.

CINEMA

1935: Exhibits with Manuel Alvarez Bravo at the Palacio de Bellas Artes, Mexico and one month later at the Julien Levy Gallery with Walker Evans and Manuel Alvarez-Bravo. Spends some time in the USA, where he discovers filmmaking with Paul Strand and Nykino Group.

1936: Works as second assistant to Jean Renoir on Une partie de campagne (A Day in the Country) and La vie est à nous.
1937: Directs two documentaries; *Victoire de la vie (Return to Life)* on the medical care of Republican Spain and *With the Abraham Lincoln Brigade*, on the American soldiers’ life during Second World War. Photographic report on the coronation of George VI published in the newspaper *Ce Soir*.

1938: Directs, upon request by the Spanish Secours Populaire, a documentary about the Spanish Civil War, *L’Espagne vivra*.

1939: Joins Jacques Becker and André Zvoboda as an assistant on Jean Renoir’s *La Règle du jeu (The Rules of the Game)*.

**DURING THE WAR**

1940: Joins the “Film and Photography” unit of the Third Army. Taken prisoner by the Germans on June 23rd.

1943: After two failed attempts, successfully escapes on his third attempt in February 1943. Works for MNPGD, a secret organization created to help prisoners and escapees.


1945: Directs *Le Retour (The Return)*, a documentary on the repatriation of prisoners of war and detainees.

**PROFESSIONAL PHOTOGRAPHER**

1946–47: Spends over a year in the USA. Upon Harper’s Bazaar’s request, he travels for a few months with John Malcolm Brinnin to photograph artists and writers.

1947: Exhibition *Photographs by Henri Cartier-Bresson* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Creates the
cooperative agency Magnum Photos with Robert Capa, David Seymour (Chim), William Vandiver and George Rodger.

1948–50: In the Far East for three years, in India for the death of Gandhi, China for the last six months of the Kuomintang and the first six months of the People's Republic and in Indonesia for independence. His photographs are published all over the world.


1953: Travels throughout Europe on holiday.

1954: Publication by Robert Delpire of his books *Les Danses à Bali* and *D'une Chine à l'autre*, marking the beginning of a long collaboration with Delpire. He is the first photographer allowed in the USSR from the beginning of the Cold War.

1955: First exhibition in France at the Pavillon de Marsan in the Louvre. Tériade publishes *Les Européens* (cover illustrated by Miró).

1958: Returns to China for three months for the tenth anniversary of the People's Republic of China.

1961: Realizes a set of portraits for the magazine Queen.


1965: Spends several months travelling in Japan.

1966: Returns to India.

1967: Commissioned by IBM to create *Man and Machine*. This project becomes an exhibition and a book.

1970–71: In the USA directs two documentaries for CBS News; Southern Exposures and Impressions de Californie.

1972–73: Returns to the USSR.

**BACK TO DRAWING**

1974: Terminates his active working relationship with Magnum Photos, although the agency distribution retains his archives. Concentrates on drawing.


1988: The Centre National de la Photographie celebrates his 80th anniversary. Creation of the HCB Award.

2000: Makes plans to set up the Henri Cartier-Bresson Foundation with his wife, Martine Franck, and daughter, Mélanie. The idea is to provide a permanent home for his collected works as well as an exhibition space open to other artists.

2002: The Henri Cartier-Bresson Foundation is recognised as being of public interest by French State.


2004: Henri Cartier-Bresson dies peacefully in Montjustin, Provence on August 3rd.
Ateneum brings to Finland an exhibition of work by probably the world’s best-known sculptor, Auguste Rodin (1840–1917). Rodin, who lived and worked in Paris, brought whole new character to sculpture with his robust expression that emphasised physicality. The exhibition covers Rodin’s production from early works to his later creations.
The opening up of Japan to the rest of the world in the 1860s created great interest in Japanese culture, and collecting Japanese art and objects was in vogue. This left a strong mark in arts, design, crafts and fashion. Oriental artistry arrived in the Nordic countries and made an indelible impression on artists of all fields.
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