

**HENRI CARTIER-BRESSON**  
**FROM JUNE 28 THROUGH SEPTEMBER 7, 2014**

The Culture Area of FUNDACIÓN MAPFRE is pleased to invite you to the press conference that on the occasion of the **HENRI CARTIER-BRESSON** exhibition will be held on **June 26, 2014** at **noon** at the **FUNDACIÓN MAPFRE AUDITORIUM** (Paseo de Recoletos, 23). The press conference will include the participation of the Director of the Culture Area of FUNDACIÓN MAPFRE, Pablo Jiménez Burillo, and the exhibition curator Clément Chéroux, curator of the Centre Pompidou de Paris

INAUGURATION	<b>June 27 from 5 to 9 pm</b>
PRESS CONFERENCE	<b>June 26 at noon</b>
DATES	<b>From June 28 through September 7, 2014</b>
VENUE	<b>FUNDACIÓN MAPFRE Auditorium</b> Paseo de Recoletos, 23
CURATOR	Clément Chéroux
WEBSITE:	<a href="http://www.exposicionesmapfrearte.com/cartierbresson">http://www.exposicionesmapfrearte.com/cartierbresson</a>

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**HENRI CARTIER-BRESSON**

The HENRI CARTIER-BRESSON exhibition can be seen from June 28 through September 7, 2014 at the exhibition hall of FUNDACIÓN MAPFRE (Paseo de Recoletos, 23, 28004, Madrid). It covers the long career of this great photographer, one of the most important of the 20th century. This is the first major retrospective exhibition to be held in Europe since the artist's death. It includes over five hundred photographs, drawings, paintings, films and documents that cover over seventy years of one of the most important figures of modern times.

The exhibition has been organized by the Centre Pompidou de Paris, in collaboration with FUNDACIÓN MAPFRE, with the participation of the Cartier-Bresson Foundation. The works come from over twenty international collections, including the Cartier-Bresson Foundation of Paris, the Musée d'art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, the Cinémathèque Française, The Art Institute of Chicago, The Metropolitan Museum of Art of New York, MOMA of New York and the Philadelphia Museum of Art.



*Rue de Vaugirard, Paris, France, May 1968*  
Silver gelatin print, printed in 1984  
Fondation Henri Cartier-Bresson Collection,  
Paris  
© Henri Cartier-Bresson/Magnum Photos,  
courtesy Fondation Henri Cartier-Bresson

The exhibition invites us to rethink the work of Cartier-Bresson, known as the "eye of the century" for being a key eyewitness of 20th century history. For the first time, the richness of his work and the diversity of his career as a photographer is on display: from surrealist esthetics to photojournalism or his intimate style of later years. In this way, the work on display goes beyond the "decisive moment" concept that made him famous.

The journey, both chronological and thematic, revolves around three central points: the period from 1926 to 1935, which was marked by his relationship with the surrealist movement, his early years as a photographer and his travels throughout the world. The second section is dedicated to the political

commitment of Henri Cartier-Bresson from his return from the United States in 1936 until his visit to New York in 1946. The third sequence starts with the creation of the Magnum Photos agency in 1947 and extends to the early 1970s, when the artist stopped working in photojournalism.

## JOURNEY

### Introduction

Cartier-Bresson wrote: "I have always been passionate about painting. When I was a boy, I would paint on Thursdays and Sundays, and the rest of the days of the week I dreamed of painting." He started drawing at an early age, decorating his letters with small drawings and filling up sketch pads. During this period he also became interested in photography. From the mid 1920s he painted regularly with Jacques Émile Blanche and Jean Cottenet, before enrolling in the André Lhote academy. His oldest paintings preserved date back to 1924, and clearly show Paul Cézanne's influence. At the André Lhote workshop, the young Cartier-Bresson gained knowledge of geometry: the canvases that he painted between 1926 and 1928 show a painstaking composition, following the principles of the golden number. At the same time he befriended the surrealists and began making *collages* in the style of his friend Max Ernst.

### Signs of rise

The photographic work of Henri Cartier-Bresson is the result of a combination of multiple factors: a certain artistic predisposition, tenacity in learning, the environment of the period, his personal aspirations and his wonderful relationships. The artist's work began in the 1920s and was characterized by the twin dimension of painting and photography practiced as hobbies; it developed and settled over time as a result of certain milestones, like his trip to Africa in 1930-1931. His work as a whole reflects his love of art, the time spent reading or studying paintings in museums, the deep impression of André Lhote's teachings and his relationship with his North American friends: Julien Levy, Caresse and Harry Crosby, Gretchen and Peter Powel. With the first, Cartier-Bresson took his first steps in the arts of composition, while in the company of the others he discovered the photographs of Eugène Atget and the New Vision trend. The work of the early Cartier-Bresson brings together these diverse influences.

### The attraction of surrealism

At the home of Jacques-Émile Blanche, Cartier-Bresson met René Crevel, through whom he began to frequent surrealist circles, around 1926. "Too shy and young to speak", as he would recount later, "from the furthest corner of the table" he attended some meetings organized by André Breton in the cafés of la place Blanche. From these meetings he would retain some emblematic motifs of the surrealist imagery: packed objects, deformed bodies, characters sleeping with their eyes closed, etc. But what really affected him was the surrealist attitude: the subversive spirit, an attraction to playfulness, the space occupied by the subconscious, the pleasure of urban wanderings, and a predisposition to embrace fate. Cartier-Bresson was particularly sensitive to the principles of convulsive beauty enunciated by Breton, and would not abandon them throughout the decade of 1930. From this point of view there is no doubt that he was one of most genuinely surrealist photographers of his generation.



**Livorno, Tuscany, Italy, 1933**  
 Silver gelatin print, printed in the 1980s  
 Centre Pompidou, Musée National d'Art Moderne,  
 Purchased thanks to sponsorship from Yves  
 Rocher, 2011, former Christian Bouqueret  
 Collection, Paris  
 © Henri Cartier-Bresson/Magnum Photos,  
 courtesy Fondation Henri Cartier-Bresson

### Commitment to political activism

Like most of his surrealist friends, Cartier-Bresson shared many communist political views: anti-colonialism, support of Spanish republicans and a strong conviction that it is necessary to "change life". Following the violent riots in Paris organized by extreme right-wing groups in 1934, which at the time were perceived as a risk to France from the growing European fascist movement, his commitment became even more tangible and he signed many pamphlets encouraging the "call to battle" and the "unity of action" of left-wing forces. During his trips to Mexico and the United States in 1934-1935, most people with whom he associated frequently were deeply involved in the revolutionary struggle. Upon his return to Paris in 1936, Cartier-Bresson had become more radical:

he took part regularly in the activities of the Association of Revolutionary Writers and Artists (ARWA) and started working for the communist press.



*First paid holidays, banks of the Seine, France*  
1936

Silver gelatin print, printed in 1946  
Fondation Henri Cartier-Bresson Collection, Paris  
© Henri Cartier-Bresson/Magnum Photos, courtesy Fondation Henri Cartier-Bresson

### **Cinema and the war**

Cartier-Bresson said that cinema had "taught him to see". The first indications of his desire to make his own movies became clear during his trip to Mexico in 1934. Cinema interested him within the context of his own political commitment, since it was an effective means for reaching a much wider audience than photography and, because of its narrative structure, it would allow him to better convey his message. While in the United States in 1935 he learned basic camera work at a cooperative of documentarists who were very much influenced by the ideas, both political and esthetic, of the Soviet Union and who gathered around Paul Strand under the name "Nykino", a contraction of the initials of "New York" and the Russian word for "cinema". He made his first short with them. When he returned to Paris in 1936, after having unsuccessfully attempted to be hired as an assistant –first with Georg Wilhelm Pabst and then with Luis Buñuel–, he established a partnership with Jean Renoir that would last until the start of the Second World War.

### **The choice of illustrated report**

In February of 1947 Cartier-Bresson opened his first large retrospective exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) of New York. Months later, along with Robert Capa, David Seymour, George Rodger and William Vandivert, he established the Magnum agency, which would quickly become a worldwide benchmark for quality

illustrated reports. Following his exhibition at the MOMA, Cartier-Bresson could have decided to simply be an artist, but he wanted to become a reporter and totally committed himself to the adventure that Magnum represented. From 1947 to the early 1970s he traveled extensively and made reports throughout the world, working for practically every large international illustrated magazine. Despite the obligations imposed by the world of journalism, the tight deadlines of the media system and the contingencies inherent in press assignments, Cartier-Bresson continued to maintain an extremely high level of quality in his photographic production during this stage as a reporter.

***Crowd waiting outside a bank to purchase gold during the last days of the Kuomintang, Shanghai, China, December 1948***

Silver gelatin print, printed in the 1960s  
 Fondation Henri Cartier-Bresson Collection,  
 Paris  
 © Henri Cartier-Bresson/Magnum Photos,  
 courtesy Fondation Henri Cartier-Bresson



### **Visual anthropology**

Cartier-Bresson did not stop photographing certain recurrent themes throughout the years and in the countries that he visited even while reporting. Done on the side while reporting, or completely separately, these series of images raise questions about some of the major social issues of the second half of the 20th century and constitute authentic investigations. They were not done as part of an assignment, nor were they subject to the rush imposed by the press, but they are more ambitious than most of his reports. These thematic and transversal investigations, that the artist himself described as "a combination of reporting, philosophy and analysis (social, psychological and of other kinds)", are similar to visual anthropology, the part of human knowledge in which analog recording tools play an essential role. In this regard, Cartier-Bresson said: "I am visual [...] I observe, observe and observe. I understand with my eyes".



**Course cycliste «Les 6 jours de Paris», vélodrome, Paris, France, November 1957**  
 Silver gelatin print, vintage print  
 Fondation Henri Cartier-Bresson Collection, Paris  
 © Henri Cartier-Bresson/Magnum Photos, courtesy Fondation Henri Cartier-Bresson

### After photography

Since the 1970s, Cartier-Bresson, who was over seventy years old, gradually stopped accepting reporting assignments, i.e. taking photographs according to set instructions. Additionally, he considered that Magnum was moving away from the spirit that brought about its creation, and he therefore retired from agency matters. His international fame had not stopped growing, which had turned him into a living



**Martine Franck, Paris, France, 1967**  
 Silver gelatin print  
 Vintage print  
 30.2 x 44.8 cm  
 Eric and Louise Franck Collection, London  
 © Martine Franck. Henri Cartier-Bresson / Magnum

legend. He spent a great deal of time supervising the organization of his archives and the sale of his negatives, and writing books and organizing exhibitions. Although officially he was no longer a photographer, he always had his Leica at hand and, occasionally, took more contemplative images. But above all, he often visited museums and exhibitions, and spent most of his time drawing.

## **THE CATALOG**

For this retrospective exhibition, FUNDACIÓN MAPFRE has published the Spanish version of the catalog published by Éditions du Centre Pompidou under the direction of Clément Chéroux. This book, with extensive text from the curator and reproductions of all the works on display at the exhibition, has become a benchmark work for future studies on the artist.