



Inside/Outside
Walker Evans and Henri Cartier-Bresson

2-25 May 2014

Carson Teaching Gallery
Mount Holyoke College Art Museum
South Hadley, Massachusetts

Inside/Outside

2-25 May 2014

Carson Teaching Gallery
Mount Holyoke College Art Museum
South Hadley, Massachusetts

Introduction

Inside/Outside explores the contrasting photographic sensibilities of Walker Evans and Henri Cartier-Bresson in the middle of the twentieth century. Although the two men knew each other, respected each other enormously, even exhibited together on at least one occasion, they could not have been more different in their ways with the camera. For Evans, a bookish and reserved Midwesterner who initially preferred literature to the visual arts, photography was a deliberate art. If given a choice, he preferred a large view camera, which required slow set-up on a tripod and facilitated the attentions and skills more in keeping with quiet doggedness and a considered patience. In contrast, for Cartier-Bresson, an outgoing and gregarious Frenchman who led a wandering life—he once tried to escape his genteel upbringing by fleeing to Africa and becoming a hunting guide in the bush—photography was a quicksilver art. He much preferred the handheld Leica, which enabled him to capture the unpredictability and serendipity of street life. Evans sought stillness, Cartier-Bresson movement. Evans was keen on the built environment and the manner in which individuals found their places within it, Cartier-Bresson on the activities of people in the throes of historical circumstances. Evans' pictures were shown to their best effect on the museum walls, where his subtle decision-making could be discerned. Cartier-Bresson's were best shown in magazines, where topicality and his handling of the light-speed of events ruled the day. Indeed, the shorthand way to describe the differences between the men is to suggest that Evans was a documentarian, Cartier-Bresson a photojournalist.

But perhaps another way to summarize the differences is to recognize that Evans was primarily interested in the people and places of his homeland while Cartier-Bresson was interested in those who lived elsewhere. We call this difference “inside” and “outside,” though as we try to show Evans often found himself a stranger in his own land and Cartier-Bresson thought himself a confidant and privileged witness of others. Yet the engagement with scenes of familiarity and foreignness helped to structure how they developed their work and what they thought their pictures were best used for.

Inside/Outside began as an advanced seminar on Evans and Cartier-Bresson. Each week, we pursued case studies spanning their long careers and discovered the extraordinarily wide variety of work of the two men. We learned, of course, that there were many exceptions to the usual ways of understanding them. In several key projects beginning in the late 1930s, for example, Evans gave up the hyper-control that characterized his most famous work, in several instances shooting blind as he rumbled along New York's subways. Beginning in 1945, he accommodated himself to what would become a two-decade career at *Fortune* magazine, taking photographs for the very big businesses that he once professed to despise. Likewise, Cartier-Bresson would eventually collect his photographs into picture books, in which the pressing nature of daily events fell away in favor of a focus on the photographer's peculiar visual sensibility, the kinds of choices with his camera that could be later described as “aesthetic,” as opposed to photojournalistic, and eventually land him on the museum's walls.

After the sequence of case studies in the classroom, we turned our attentions to presenting our findings in a more public way. We are fortunate that the Mount Holyoke College Art Museum and Williston Library hold examples of the two photographers' work, and we set out to study and offer a small selection in an exhibition and, as you have it in your hands, a small catalogue. We are also fortunate that we have a good friend in Mack Lee, a longtime gallery owner from Winchester, Massachusetts, who lent us several examples of Evans's 1930s work. One happy result of having Mack's photographs at the museum is that John Stomberg, the museum's director, acquired two, *Lunchroom Buddies, New York City* (1931) and *Seed Store Interior, Vicksburg, Mississippi* (1936). We are extraordinarily thankful to him and his enthusiastic support of our studies. Many of Mack's photographs are less well-known—indeed, somewhat uncharacteristic of the individual projects from which they were made—and we have taken up the challenge to understand and present them. In several instances—Evans's photograph in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, and also Cartier-Bresson's pictures in India and Indonesia—we provide two essays for the same work, in order to provide competing points of view for you to consider.

In addition to our thanks to John Stomberg, we extend our warm thanks to the staff at the Art Museum, especially Ellen Alvord, Rachel Beaupré, Lucy Gong, Caitlin Greig, and Brian Kiernan for helping us with the exhibition and catalogue.

The members of Art History 342

Inside/Walker Evans



Walker Evans (American, 1903-1975)

House in Oak Bluffs, Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts

Gelatin silver print photograph, ca. 1930-31

Courtesy of Lee Gallery, Winchester, Massachusetts

Photograph Laura Shea

Returning to America in 1927 after a thirteen month-long sojourn in Paris, during which he tried to launch a career as a writer, Evans began taking photographs. Living in New York, he initially photographed the skyscrapers being built everywhere around him, noting their bold, modern forms. However, his photographic adventures soon took him outside of the city, where he turned his eye to less monumental subject matter. For these more modest subjects, he brought a more concise visual sensibility, a way of describing that he had developed as a writer. It is best characterized as a straightforward approach to his subjects, in which simple objects are allowed to reveal themselves to the camera, unfettered by the photographer's hand. This approach appealed to Lincoln Kirstein, a rising star in New York's cultural scene and an old friend, and in 1930 he invited Evans on a trip to

document nineteenth-century American vernacular architecture for a book he was planning. The project was Evans's first commission.

In *Oak Bluffs, Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts*, Evans approaches an old house obliquely and crops the image close, emphasizing its ornate decorative details. The oblique angle differs from the more strictly frontal view of other photographs in the architecture series, but it stays true to the search for subtle forms. The decorative details are central to Evans's photographs of the Victorian houses, and his photographic technique—using a large format camera on a tripod that allowed him to carefully compose his shot, and insisting on hard, raking light before releasing the shutter—throws them into sharp relief. While the series presents a de facto archive of Victorian architecture, Evans's photographs resist identification as pure documents, speaking to formalist concerns as well as alluding to a social dimension.

While the 1920s saw increasing activity in urban centers and a rise in new construction, a number of preservationist projects were launched as well, including John D. Rockefeller's Colonial Williamsburg, Henry Ford's Greenfield Village, and Lewis Mumford's architectural and cultural study, *The Brown Decades*. In this period of change, these projects represented a taking stock of a national heritage—to discover and represent some “authentic” America that was being displaced. The 1929 Wall Street crash made this search into the American past more urgent. For Evans, an increasing disaffection with the wealth and decadence of big business seems to have led him away from major cities to search for the remains of the previous century. Oak Bluffs was a Victorian resort center, developed in the 1860s to accommodate the seasonal influx of tourists. The ornate wooden houses of the development, with their timeworn façades, appealed to Evans in his visual-historical quest.

While the book Kirstein had planned was never published, a selection of Evans's photographs was exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1933. The show, entitled *Walker Evans: Photographs of 19th Century Houses*, traveled to fourteen other venues. It is not clear whether *Oak Bluffs, Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts* was included in the exhibition.

Poiret I. Masse

Further reading:

Kristen A. Beaumont, “The Rise of a Victorian Seaside Resort: Oak Bluffs, Martha's Vineyard: Reviving Ocean Park,” M.A. thesis, University of Massachusetts at Amherst, 1995.

Maria Morris Hambourg, “A Portrait of the Artist,” in *Walker Evans*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004, 13-25.

Barnaby Haran, “Homeless Houses: Classifying Walker Evans's Photographs of Victorian Architecture,” *Oxford Art Journal* 33:2 (2010), 189-210.

Lincoln Kirstein, “Walker Evans' Photographs of Victorian Architecture,” *Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* 1:4 (December 1933), 4.



Walker Evans (American, 1903-1975)

Lunchroom Buddies, New York City

Gelatin silver print photograph, negative 1931, print 1974

Purchase with funds from Gaynor R. Strickler (Class of 1973) in honor of her husband Charles S. Strickler Jr. (Amherst College, Class of 1971)

Mount Holyoke College Art Museum, South Hadley, Massachusetts

Photograph Laura Shea

Early in his career, Evans was fascinated by New York's skyscrapers and billboards. He was especially fascinated by the neon signs and advertisements of the city and would often photograph them. An awkward, shy man, he had difficulty engaging directly with people. But during his exploration of the city's built environment, he also began to capture street scenes, what the art historian Douglas Eklund describes as the photographer's growing interest in how anonymous New Yorkers were decidedly not part of the "glamorous, boom-time world of skyscrapers and brand names." *Lunchroom Buddies* belongs to these New York street scenes of the unglamorous.

Lunchroom Buddies is unusual because it is unlike the glitzy buildings and billboards and also because it is unlike Evans's other street scenes of New Yorkers. In his famous *Girl in Fulton Street, New York* (1929), for example, his subjects are mostly oblivious to Evans's presence. The photographer usually hid his camera or photographed from a distance. Sometimes he preferred a physical barrier, making use of the many storefront windows on the streets, as in his *Lunchroom Window, New York* (1929), in which three men are seated inside a diner and Evans has photographed them from the street outside. By contrast, *Lunchroom Buddies* suggests a certain engagement between Evans and his subjects. We see two men staring directly at the camera. The relationship between the men is unknown, though they have struck a casual, even intimate pose for the photographer. The pose of the fry cook even mimics that of classical statuary in his *contrapposto* stance, which emphasizes the beautiful S-curve of the human body. We are even tempted to say that, given the classical allusions, these anonymous New Yorkers have been elevated to the status of a fine art.

Emma M. Kennedy

Further Reading:

Douglas Eklund, "Exile's Return: The Early Work, 1928-34," in Maria Morris Hambourg, et. al., *Walker Evans*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000, 28-53.

Judith Keller, *Walker Evans: The Getty Museum Collection*. Malibu: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 1995.

Walker Evans, *American Photograph*, with an essay by Lincoln Kirstein. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1938.



Walker Evans (American, 1903-1975)

Seed Store Interior, Vicksburg, Mississippi

Gelatin silver print photograph, 1936

Museum purchase

Mount Holyoke College Art Museum, South Hadley, Massachusetts

Photograph Laura Shea

Between November 1935 and April 1936, Evans embarked on two road trips that account for the majority of his work for the United States Resettlement Administration (RA), later known as the Farm Security Administration (FSA). When a disillusioned and defeated Evans, then an aspiring wordsmith, returned from Paris and picked up the camera, he, like so many of his contemporaries, chose to explore a definitive time in American history. Soon after working on a series of photographic experiments, Evans was contracted as a freelance photographer by Roy Stryker, head of the FSA. It was Stryker who commissioned Evans's road trips—the result of which is exemplified in *Seed Store Interior, Vicksburg, Mississippi*.

The second half of this journey was comprised of a completely southern itinerary. In February 1936, Evans left for Louisiana, Mississippi, Florida, the Carolinas and finally Virginia—cities known for their antebellum architecture and battlefields that commemorate the Civil War. The key photographs from this trip were circulated by the Museum of Modern Art in three different contexts: *Walker Evans: American Photographs*, an exhibition presented in fall 1938 at MoMA, consisting of one hundred photographs; *American Photographs*, a book published simultaneously by the museum, made up of a selection of eighty-seven images; and *American Photographs by Walker Evans*, a traveling show of eighty-eight images, sixteen of which were not included in MoMA's installation. *Seed Store Interior* was not included in any of these three opportunities for exposure, a deliberate choice according to Evans's admiring literary collaborator Lincoln Kirstein.

Seed Store evokes the kind of specimen-like treatment of objects that Kirstein characterized as “head-on with the unsparing frankness of a Russian ikon or a Flemish portrait.”ⁱ It required a long five-minute exposure and a slow *f*/45 to capture a kind of agrarian *wunderkammer* or “cabinet of curiosities.” Dainty and delightfully quaint birdcages are appropriately arranged above shelves of birdseed that abut rows of poultry and cattle formulas. Bags of beans, exposed through their shells of burlap sack, are artfully arrayed between eye-catching illustrations of vegetable seeds and packets advertising three for twenty-five cents.

Stores—both store fronts and their interiors—were a consistent subject of Evans's camera. *Seed Store* epitomizes the ability of such images to act as registers of everyday life and, perhaps most importantly, to capture concrete manifestations of the American dream—the latter of which Evans's suggests is the focus of his investigation in the American South. “I am fascinated by man's work and the civilization that he's built,” he observed. “In fact, I think that's the interesting thing in the world, what man makes.”ⁱⁱ

The most important early interpreter of Evans's southern photographs was Kirstein. His vision of Evans is one of American ingenuity and fastidiousness. What Kirstein would see in *Seed Store* and, perhaps, what Evans was so struck by in Kirstein's manner of understanding his work is the effect of the industrial revolution in America, the replacement of man by machine, and "the naïve creative spirit, imperishable and inherent in the ordinary man"—a quality Kirstein valued in Evans himself.ⁱⁱⁱ In Evans's body of work, Kirstein envisions a process by which the history of American artisanship is memorialized. He associates Evans's *American Photographs* as being in dialogue with a tradition of indigenous American expression and Evans as belonging to the lineage of American artisans. (However, this proposal is not without its ironies. The camera is, after all, a machine, too, akin to the unfeeling mechanical apparatuses that made American artisans obsolete.)

In truth, what Kirstein saw in Evans was the echo of himself—a man of privilege in tension with the philosophical, sociological, and political standards established by his own class. Drawn to the work of the 1920s leftist, literary collective of the Southern Agrarians, Kirstein's political sensibility can be characterized as a precursor to the 1960s "back to the land" movement. At the heart of this sensibility was the belief that the Old South embodied a kind of American utopia superior to the industrialized North. Laden with the suggestions of an agrarian history and simpler, more stable times, *Seed Store* is dripping with the grievances of Kirstein.

Apart from Kirstein's political interpretation, *Seed Store* can be treated as the product of Evans's project to collect artifacts of the American experience in earnest and to document a time, space, and man's place in it.

Eve I. Bettman

Further Reading:

Walker Evans, *American Photographs*, with an essay by Lincoln Kirstein. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1938.

Lincoln Kirstein, "Walker Evans' Photographs of Victorian Architecture," *Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* 1:4 (1933), 4.

James R. Mellow, *Walker Evans*. New York: Basic Books, 1999.

Douglas R. Nickel, "American Photographs Revisited," *American Art* 6:2 (1992), 78-97.



Walker Evans (American, 1903-1975)

Mining Camp Residents, Morgantown, West Virginia

Gelatin silver print photograph, 1935

Courtesy of Lee Gallery, Winchester, Massachusetts

Photograph Laura Shea

In 1935 Evans worked on a series of projects that enabled him to travel to a large portion of the country, including the mining and manufacturing regions in West Virginia and Pennsylvania. He worked on a campaign for the Resettlement Administration (RA), a New Deal agency preceding the more famous Farm Security Administration (FSA), whose mission was to document the hardships of the Great Depression and how government policies were affecting communities. During his time in West Virginia, Evans captured some extraordinary photographs that speak not only to his continuing development as a photographer but to the truly ramshackle environments of those affected by the Depression.

Mining Camp Residents is an interesting photograph because of its seemingly candid nature. It suggests Evans's usual discomfort with others and also his attempt to capture an unguarded moment—a "truth" of sorts. The woman appears to be caught mid-sentence, the child distracted by something off-screen, what we can only assume to be the object of the woman's own attention. Interestingly, the man looks directly into the camera but does not appear to be

fully aware that he is being photographed. This strategy was familiar for Evans. Earlier in the decade, Evans created a series of New York street portraits in which he would capture anonymous men and women without their knowledge of his activities. With a camera dangling on his chest, he would photograph in such a way as to suggest an invasion of privacy. Observing *Mining Camp*, we can note this earlier sensibility revived, specifically in the tilted nature of the composition, almost as if Evans photographed the mining residents from where his camera hung.

Although we cannot see fully the inner part of the house, we glimpse through both doorways a spare home. We may wonder how an invasion of the residents' privacy can be matched with the photographer's attempt at an honest representation of the Depression.

Gabriella C. Christian-Solá

Further Reading

Jerald C. Maddox, *Walker Evans: Photographs for the Farm Security Administration, 1935-1938*. New York: DaCapo, 1973.

Gilles Mora and John T. Hill, *Walker Evans: The Hungry Eye*. New York: Abrams, 1993.



Walker Evans (American, 1903-1975)

Street Scene, Bethlehem, PA

Gelatin silver print photograph, negative 1935, print ca. 1935

Courtesy of Lee Gallery, Winchester, Massachusetts

Photograph Laura Shea

For Evans, the stock market crash of 1929 was entirely pertinent to his attitude towards America. Big business got what it deserved. And yet individuals bore the brunt of the economic fallout. His work for the Farm Security Administration, taking pictures to document the difficult times, gave him a close look at the lives of ordinary Americans. *Street Scene, Bethlehem, PA* represents many characteristics of Evans's FSA work, recording what is ordinary and regular of daily life among those hit hardest by the crash. The subjects do not appear to be aware of the camera; the photograph captures an unguarded moment. And yet on the street, these women, scared and poor, come to represent a larger portrait of a ravaged America. "The power of Evans' work," wrote his friend Lincoln Kirstein, "lies in the fact that he so details the effect of circumstances on familiar specimens that the single face . . . strikes with the strength of overwhelming numbers, the terrible cumulative force of a thousand faces."^{iv}

Rachael Berman

Further Reading:

Walker Evans, *American Photographs*, with an essay by Lincoln Kirstein. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1938.

James Guimond, *American Photography and the American Dream*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991, esp. 101-148.

Maria Morris Hambourg, "A Portrait of the Artist," in Maria Morris Hambourg, et. al., *Walker Evans*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000, 2-27.

Douglas R. Nickel, "American Photographs Revisited," *American Art* 6:2 (1992), 78-97.

John Tagg, "Melancholy Realism: Walker Evans's Resistance to Meaning," *Narrative* 11:1 (2003), 3-77.

Walker Evans (American, 1903-1975)

Street Scene, Bethlehem, PA

Gelatin silver print photograph, negative 1935, print ca. 1935

Courtesy of Lee Gallery, Winchester, Massachusetts

Photograph Laura Shea

In 1935, Evans was hired by the Farm Security Administration (FSA) to document the effects of the Great Depression in various U.S. towns, including Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. During his 26-month stint with the FSA, Evans composed some of his most acclaimed works. The Bethlehem photographs include one of his most recognized pictures, *Bethlehem Graveyard and Steel Mill* (1935), as well as a number of other interesting works that document the steel mill town at this economically unstable moment in U.S. history. Evans gathered thirty-eight of the Bethlehem photographs into a series and titled it “Industrial and small towns in Pennsylvania, July, 1935-March, 1936, Bethlehem, a steel town in eastern Penn.” As his long title suggests, Evans first arrived in Bethlehem in July 1935 but continued to photograph the town periodically until March 1936. *Street Scene* was composed at the end of Evans’s time in Bethlehem, when the photographer was more familiar with the area. Evans’s photographs of the industrial town reveal that in a time of financial instability, it continued to maintain a strong sense of community.

Street Scene, like many of Evans’s portraits in Bethlehem, was taken with a 35mm camera and reveals the physical closeness of the photographer to his subjects. Unlike much of his work, though, which is concerned with place, Evans’ proximity to the two women leaves only a small portion of the background, which reveals that the women are standing to the side of a handrail. A comparison with other photographs at the Library of Congress suggests that the handrail was part of an apartment building’s front stoop. In this photograph, we see only the upper halves of the women; the viewer’s attention is focused on their ambiguous, even apathetic facial expressions. The older woman on the left may be the mother of the young girl beside her. She is holding a brown paper bag and a purse. The women are both dressed nicely—a fur coat, smart hats, a dainty ribbon. Evans had a deep-rooted interest in people and was most likely attracted to these women because of their uncertain expressions and ambiguous demeanor.

The effects of the Great Depression was the most influential factor in the composition of Evans’s Bethlehem photographs as well as the other work he completed while employed by the FSA. At a time when so many U.S. citizens were crippled by the economic shortcomings that characterized the 1930s, Evans photographed a town that maintained a strong sense of community and individuality, despite the many hardships. *Street Scene* depicts a mother and daughter who go about their day. Amidst hard times, the women are dressed to flatter, a subtle reminder that life goes on.

Street Scene is certainly not a work that is particularly in keeping with the majority of Evans’s work, which may explain why this photograph was not shown at his 1938 MoMA exhibit, *American Photographs*, his first major solo photography show at that museum.

Dann Disciglio

Further Readings:

Walker Evans, *American Photographs*. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1938.

Outside/Henri Cartier-Bresson



Henri Cartier-Bresson (French, 1908-2004)

Cape Cod, Massachusetts

From *America in Passing*, negative 1947, published 1991

Photograph James Gehrt

This woman explained to me that the flagpole over her door was broken but “on such a day as this, one keeps one's flag on one's heart.” I felt in her a touch of the strength and robustness of the early American pioneers. -- Henri Cartier-Bresson

After escaping from a prison camp in France and finding that a “posthumous” exhibition of his work was underway at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, Cartier-Bresson made his way across the

Atlantic in 1946 to assist the preparations. While in New York, he received a commission from *Harper's Bazaar* to report on famous "creators" in America. Choosing the poet John Malcolm Brinnin as his partner, he set out on a journey across the country. The two men travelled south toward Louisiana, then west to California, looped up to the Midwest, and then finally back to the East Coast. Although commissioned by the magazine, Cartier-Bresson had his own project in mind as he gathered pictures of America and its people, photographing not only creators and celebrities but also anonymous people in their daily lives. Cape Cod was one of the last stops on his trip.

Cape Cod, Massachusetts stands out in this collection of American photographs. Most of the other images from the trip are self-contained, in the sense that the subjects are pictured as if unaware of the photographer's presence, whereas this photograph records a direct engagement between an old woman and Cartier-Bresson. Such an interaction diverges from the photographer's more common strategy to shoot as if he were an invisible witness and the outsider's perspective he preferred. The skeptical eye with which he regarded some of his other American subjects gives way in this photograph to a more sympathetic attitude. Standing outside an unkempt clapboard house, her disheveled hair, rumpled dress, and an American flag draped around her neck, the old woman's weathered but steadfast appearance speaks to an earnest, almost evangelical patriotism, of "strength" and "robustness." Cartier-Bresson would later relate her to an early American pioneer.

In the post-war America that Cartier-Bresson encountered, a new, triumphant nationalism was in the air. The media regularly presented images of a prosperous nation and tried to avoid discussion of its problems. *Life* magazine showed America's military might, industrial and technological advancement, and thriving middle class. In contrast, Cartier-Bresson's vision of America emphasized the nation's struggles, showing the diversity of American experiences and revealing inequities and hardships.

The *Harper's* commission did not result in an immediate publication. *Cape Cod, Massachusetts* would eventually be included in Cartier-Bresson's 1952 book *The Decisive Moment*, and was also printed in *Life* magazine that same year. And later, in 1991, the photograph would appear in a book called *America in Passing*, a selection of pictures over a forty year period between 1935 and 1975.

Poiret I. Masse

Further Reading:

Pierre Assouline, *Henri Cartier-Bresson: A Biography*. London: Thames and Hudson, 2005, esp. 146-156.

Henri Cartier-Bresson, *America in Passing*. Boston: Little Brown, 1991.

James Guimond, *American Photography and the American Dream*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991, esp. 151-203.

Agnès Sire and Jean-François Chevrier, *Henri Cartier-Bresson, Walker Evans: Photographing America, 1929-1947*. London: Thames and Hudson, 2009.



Henri Cartier-Bresson (French, 1908-2004)

Gandhi's "Heir" Jawaharlal Nehru shows in his wan face the stunned sense of loss

From "Gandhi Joins the Hindu Immortals," *Life* 24:7 (February 16, 1948)

Photograph James Gehrt

Between February and April 1947, Cartier-Bresson had his first ever exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. The time Cartier-Bresson spent in America marked an important step in the photographer's work. When Cartier-Bresson reflected on his stays in America, he claimed, "I became a professional photographer in 1946 Before, I was doing photography but I didn't know what I was going to be doing."^v With a new sense of confidence and focus, Cartier-Bresson helped organize the photo-collective Magnum and quickly deemed himself the photo agency's sole photographer of Asia. In 1947, soon after the founding of Magnum, Cartier-Bresson left America and traveled to India. The partition between Britain and India was probably Cartier-Bresson's original motivation for traveling to India, but soon after arriving, the photographer was confronted with a new story, the death of Mahatma Gandhi. This was of particular interest to Cartier-Bresson who was employed as photographer for *Life*.

Stylistically the photographs that Cartier-Bresson took in India are much different than his early work and reflect the photographer's changing sensibilities. This photograph of Nehru, the close friend and colleague of Gandhi, was taken the day after Gandhi's assassination and depicts the great pain that he, along with the rest of India, felt at this moment in time. At the center of the composition stands Nehru, who wears an expression of disbelief. Ordinary citizens surround Nehru, but at a distance. Their shocked, sad, and confused faces fill the composition. The photograph gives us little context for the setting; instead the picture is made up mostly of dismayed figures.

We can begin to understand Cartier-Bresson's talent when we become aware of his ability to humanize these figures. When we witness Nehru's expression, we feel the deep sadness that Gandhi's followers experienced; it seems impossible not to lament with the pain that Cartier-Bresson has captured.

In his classic book, *Orientalism* (1978), Edward Said argues that representations of the Orient risk the reduction and misrepresentation of its people into an "other." Cartier-Bresson's work for me reflects a sort of counter-Orientalist aesthetic. This photograph, as well as others in the series, do not generalize or misrepresent the traumas that took place in India. The presence of Cartier-Bresson's hand is minimal and his bias is nonexistent. Rather he is simply letting his camera record the events that he bears witness to in the most uninterrupted way possible. Cartier-Bresson is revealing a truth in these photographs.

It is unclear whether this photograph or others from his time in India ever received their own exhibition while Cartier-Bresson was alive. *Life* originally published this photograph in February 1948. Thames and Hudson later published a comprehensive collection of the India photographs in 1987, in a book entitled *Henri Cartier-Bresson in India* that included a foreword by Satyajit Ray and an introduction by Yves Vequand.

Dann Disciglio

Further Readings:

Henri Cartier-Bresson, *Henri Cartier-Bresson in India*. New York: Thames and Hudson, 1987.
Henri Cartier-Bresson, *Henri Cartier-Bresson: Scrapbook*. London: Thames and Hudson, 2007.



Henri Cartier-Bresson (French, 1908-2004)

Gandhi's Secretary Brij Kishen stares with grief-stricken intensity

From "Gandhi Joins the Hindu Immortals," *Life* 24:7 (February 16, 1948)

Photograph James Gehrt

In 1948, Cartier-Bresson and Margaret Bourke-White were commissioned by *Life* magazine to report on Indian independence. They were present when suddenly Gandhi was assassinated. Their coverage chronicles not only Gandhi's last interview but also the events of his assassination and funeral. In a series of striking images in the 8-page photo essay, the viewer is transported to scenes of chaos, grief, and ultimately solidarity. The magazine does not differentiate Cartier-Bresson's photographs from Bourke-White's, though it is not difficult to single out those that suggest "the decisive moment," the photographic sensibility characteristic of Cartier-Bresson.

Gandhi's Secretary's main subject is Brij Kishen, who looks on in abject sorrow and disbelief as the man whom he "served faithfully with complete and self-sacrificing devotion," as *Life* explained, is cremated. Behind Brij Kishen, we see Gandhi's followers straining for one last look at their beloved leader and, to the right, a man orders the mourners back. The extreme foreground of the image is dominated by flames, wood, and the funerary cloth that envelops Gandhi's body. Compositionally, then, the image asks to be read as a series of overlapping planes—a narrative that unfolds into the depth of the scene. There is a strong contrast between the clear, placid sky and trees and the masses of people, the grief-stricken man, and the funeral pyre.

The pictorial strategies in *Gandhi's Secretary* are typical of Cartier-Bresson's "decisive moment." Cartier-Bresson photographed without a flash and refused to crop his prints, meaning he composed his pictures entirely in the moment. And it is very much a chaotic moment that the photographer has captured.

Gandhi's Secretary has continued to be displayed since its initial publication in *Life*, most recently in a 2010 exhibit of Cartier-Bresson's work at the Museum of Modern Art.

Gabriella C. Christian-Solá

Further Reading

Henri Cartier-Bresson, "The Decisive Moment (1952)," *The Mind's Eye: Writings on Photography and Photographers*. New York: Aperture, 1999, 20-43.

Henri Cartier-Bresson, Philippe Arbaizar, and Jane Brenton, *Henri Cartier-Bresson: The Man, the Image and the World: A Retrospective*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2003.

Khalid Latif Gauba, *The Assassination of Mahatma Gandhi*. Bombay: Jaico, 1969.

Susan Goldman Rubin, *Margaret Bourke-White: Her Pictures Were Her Life*. New York: Abrams, 1999.



Henri Cartier-Bresson (French, 1908-2004)

Javanese Fishermen in a vivid prau

From "The New Indonesia," *Life* 28:7 (February 13, 1950)

Photograph James Gehrt

Cartier-Bresson's final report of the three years (1947-1950) he spent photographing in Asia documents Indonesian independence from the Netherlands in 1949. On February 13, 1950, after having published Cartier-Bresson's photographs of Gandhi's funeral and Beijing undergoing Communist revolution, *Life* published a report illustrating his trip through the archipelago soon known as Indonesia. *Life* published thirty-four images, including ten in color—an unusual choice for the photographer—in addition to a cover image. In Indonesia, Cartier-Bresson's wife Ratna (or Retna) Mohini's Javanese origins proved to be especially useful in translating for him and securing introductions. Thanks to Ratna's assistance, Cartier-Bresson was able to work with exactitude in a foreign environment. An excellent example of this attention to detail can be found in his caption material—furious scribbles in a notebook carried by day and translated by night into a narrative aimed at vividly capturing his experiences. They are an amalgamation of anecdote and observation, an excellent example of which can be found in his description of Sumatran durian fruit:

Though it has thorns outside it has a taste so sweet and persistent that for a long time it caresses you It has one decisive advantage over garlic whose taste and smell is has all properties but moreover it is creamy, *ontueux* we would say in French, and a mind *tant peu porté à l'analyse* (so little inclined to analysis) would discover layers of different taste including the one of civet, very decidedly (some like to find in it an alcoholic flavor); as I said previously about women, you must come and see for yourself.^{vi}

For this assignment, Cartier-Bresson was equipped with a medium format camera and two Leicas, in addition to 35mm, 50mm, and 130mm lenses. The medium format camera, a Plaubel, replaced later by an Ikonta, is notably uncharacteristic of Cartier-Bresson's preference, but was needed to capture the color images preferred by magazine publications. Cartier-Bresson was accompanied on this assignment by *Life* reporter, Robert Doyle, with whom he was already acquainted by way of their partnership in Shanghai.

Of the many photographs taken in Indonesia, the images published in *Life* are distinguished by their highlighting of the exotic: brilliantly colored and fantastical garments, "grotesque and graceful dances," foreign and cinematic landscapes, a farm-wife bearing her breasts at the marketplace, a young bride "only 16." These images and Doyle's writing are characteristic of mid-century Orientalism, an attitude consistent throughout Cartier-Bresson's career with *Life*. The photographer's rich caption material was reworked and rewritten to conform to the magazine's overall content and please the sensibility of the American public of the 1950s. Sent to chronicle political and social revolution in Indonesia, it is unclear from the photo essay whether Cartier-

Bresson documents an exoticized Indonesia or a vibrant culture under the threat of post-colonial modernism.

Such tension is evidenced in the photograph of the fishing boat or *prau* slicing through the waves of the Indian Ocean. The picture is so unlike others from the trip, examples of which can be found on a contact sheet (see below) of Cartier-Bresson's boat trip to the islands of Banka and Belitung to photograph their tin mines, the monstrous mechanical giants that rose up out of the sea and dredged tin ore from the beneath the seabed. The rainbow of colors that decorate the fisherman's *prau*, a vessel that was both functional and lucrative, appears gaudy in contrast to the austere and unembellished behemoths that dominate the watery landscape in other pictures. Unlike the image of the *prau*, those of the mines did not appear in the pages of *Life*, perhaps because they were not exotic enough—too modern, too familiar to the West.

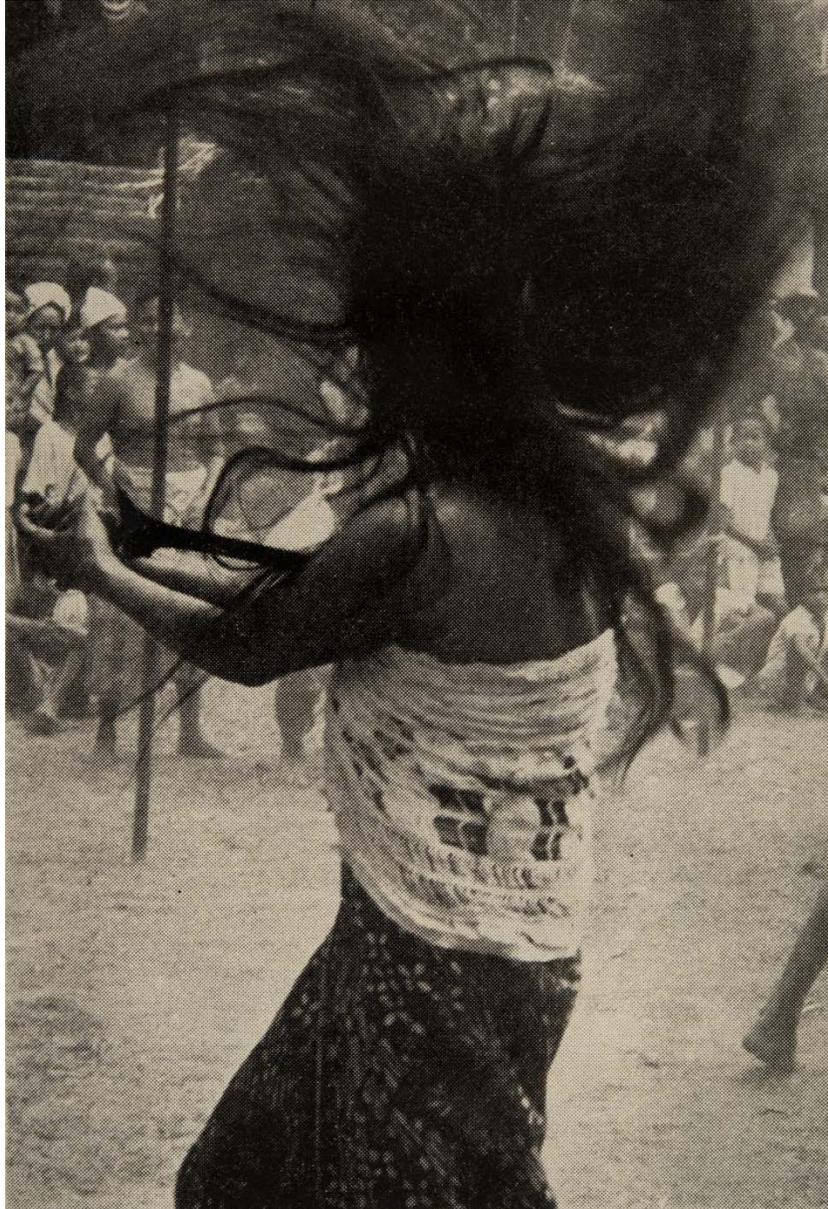
The parallel between these photographs is vital to understanding Cartier-Bresson's experience of Indonesia, however. Despite the innumerable differences between *prau* and mines, they shared a similar function in their maintaining the economic stability of the Indonesian state—both in the rich cultural past or post-colonial future of Cartier-Bresson's "new nation of Indonesia."



Eve I. Bettman

Further Reading:

Peter Galassi, *Henry Cartier-Bresson: The Modern Century*. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2010, esp. 13-23.



Henri Cartier-Bresson (French, 1908-2004)

Trance Dance depicts struggle with witch's dagger

From "The New Indonesia," *Life* 28:7 (February 13, 1950)

Photograph James Gehrt

Cartier-Bresson was not unfamiliar with travel. From an affluent family, he was privileged to travel from a young age. Beginning in 1947 as a founding member of the Magnum Photo agency, Cartier-Bresson continued his explorations abroad, this time as a self-declared photojournalist whose purpose was to cover events in Asia. He sought "ancient" worlds (or so he believed) that had been transformed by European colonization and were, in mid-century, entering into a new modernity. Beginning in November 1948, Cartier-Bresson explored Indonesia as its citizens fought for their independence from the Netherlands. His

account of Indonesia's independence was the last story of his first three years in Asia. *Life* reporter Robert Doyle and his wife Anne Ford Doyle accompanied him. Together they covered the talks at the United Nations between the Dutch and Indonesians and also explored how Indonesians lived together; indeed people and their homelands were Cartier-Bresson's essential subjects. His pictures were published as "The New Indonesia" in a February 1950 issue of *Life*.

In Indonesia, Cartier-Bresson tried to do the work of ethnography, using his camera to describe individual human societies to others. *Trance Dance* shows a woman dancing the *barong* in the village of Batubulan. (The photograph is sometimes called *Barong Dance, Village of Batubulan, Bali*.) It appeared in *Life* next to an image of another dancer, proposed to be graceful compared to the woman in this image who was labeled as "grotesque." Together the two photographs purported to represent the dancing traditions in Indonesian culture and also the competing ideas of beauty and its opposite.

In addition to picturing an aspect of Indonesian culture, Cartier-Bresson may have likened the formal aspects of the dance with a more profound awareness of the historical change taking place on the islands. "Movement" took on a more symbolic meaning: the freedom of movement in the dance could be equated with other kinds of freedoms of movement, both political and social. This more nuanced understanding of *Trance Dance* may be more apparent in the uncropped version of the photograph, now held in the Magnum archives, in which the dancer is pictured against others who also dance, suggesting a community of action and movement and the communal pleasures in the liberating qualities of dance. It is unknown who cropped the image for publication—whether it was an editorial decision at *Life* or the photographer's own choice. Nevertheless, the fundamental subject is the current state of affairs in Indonesia, broadly speaking, as evidenced by the meanings of the dance. The beauty of pre-modern life, as they are visible in traditions and cultural practices, were Cartier-Bresson's continuing interests.

Rachael Berman

Further Reading:

Henri Cartier-Bresson, "The Decisive Moment (1952)," *The Mind's Eye: Writings on Photography and Photographers*. New York: Aperture, 1999, 20-43.

Peter Galassi, *Henri Cartier-Bresson: The Modern Century*. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2010, esp. 10-77.

Sarah Hermanson, "Henri Cartier-Bresson," *MoMA* 3:6 (2000), 31-32.

Stuart Richmond, "Remembering Beauty: Reflections on Kant and Cartier-Bresson for Aspiring Photographers," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 38:1 (2004), 78-88.

Fred Ritchin, "What is Magnum?" in William Manchester, et. al, *In Our Time: The World As Seen by Magnum Photographers*. New York: American Federation of Arts in conjunction with Norton, 1989.

THE PEOPLE OF RUSSIA
PART TWO

TRAVEL IN THE U.S.S.R.



Photographed by
Henri Cartier-Bresson

Black Sea vacationers wear a popular resort costume

CONTINUED
ON NEXT PAGE

Henri Cartier-Bresson (French, 1908-2004)

Black Sea Vacationers Wear a Popular Resort Costume

From “The People of Russia, Part Two: Travel in the U.S.S.R.,” *Life* 38:5 (January 31, 1955)

Photograph James Gehrt

In Cartier-Bresson’s two-part *Life* magazine photo essay on “The People of Russia,” Americans were given a glimpse into daily life in the Soviet Union. Both parts were published in January 1955 and were among Cartier-Bresson’s most popular *Life* contributions. Part One was focused on city life and work, Part Two on the countryside and leisure.

Given *Life*’s usual attitudes about American exceptionalism during the Cold War, one might expect such a lengthy photo essay to highlight the differences between daily life in the USSR and the United States. But that is hardly the case; indeed, the men and women who appear in the pictures are not immediately identifiable as so very different. Russians, according to the magazine’s photographs, commuted, worked, and went about their everyday lives much like those people in the West.

This attitude toward “familiarity” may plausibly be ascribed to Cartier-Bresson, who through the services of the Magnum photo agency retained control over his pictures. A cosmopolitan man, Cartier-Bresson traveled extensively throughout his life, documenting different peoples and places. Or, as the photographer put it succinctly in the text that accompanied the Russian pictures, he tried to capture a “direct image of the people.”

Black Sea Vacationers appeared as the cover photo for the second part of Cartier-Bresson’s series. The nearest man wears pajamas, a “popular resort costume,” as the title tells us. In the background, other travelers are dressed in a similar casual style. In a bit of layout design, the nearest man, his face in profile and his body pointing us off-stage, encourages us to turn the page and learn more. *Life* proclaimed the whole photo essay “the most revelatory record of the Russian people taken since the cold war set in.”

Emma M. Kennedy

Further reading:

Pierre Assouline, *Henri Cartier-Bresson: A Biography*. London: Thames and Hudson, 2005.

Henri Cartier-Bresson, *About Russia*. New York: Viking Press, 1973.

Peter Galassi, *Henri Cartier-Bresson: The Modern Century*. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2010.

Notes

Bettman, *Seed Store*

ⁱ Lincoln Kirstein, "Photographs of America: Walker Evans," in Walker Evans, *American Photographs* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1938), 198.

ⁱⁱ As quoted in James R. Mellow, *Walker Evans* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 292.

ⁱⁱⁱ Kirstein, "Photographs of America: Walker Evans," 196.

Berman, *Street Scene*

^{iv} Lincoln Kirstein, "Photographs of America: Walker Evans," in Walker Evans, *American Photographs* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1938), 199.

Disciglio, *Gandhi's "Heir"*

^v Henri Cartier-Bresson, *Henri Cartier-Bresson: Scrapbook* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2007), 16.

Bettman, *Javanese Fishermen*

^{vi} As quoted in Peter Galassi, *Henry Cartier-Bresson: The Modern Century* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2010), 15.