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MICHAEL BERKOWITZ

ANDRÉ KERTÉSZ IN LONDON

05.06.2015

From 13 May to 13 June 2015 the James Hyman Gallery, upstairs at 16 Saville Row, London, presents 'André Kertész in Europe', which comprises over fifty photographs.

It is a wonderful opportunity to spend a quiet time with the diverse range of the artist's extraordinary work, shot in Continental Europe and in Britain.

IN BRIEF

- *André Kertész left Hungary before the rise to power of the Nazis in Germany in 1933 shook all of Europe*
- *Hungary in the 1920s was becoming increasingly inhospitable for Jews and creative, liberal-minded souls*
- *Peter Pollack prized Kertész as "a pioneer photo journalist" who applied 'New Realism' to popular media*

In a brief autobiographical statement (to be found in the papers of historian **Beaumont Newhall**), Kertész wrote that in his youth, he "liked exploring new places and seeing different people; as (a) schoolboy, (he) became an accomplished truant, going off to visit his friends among the art students, peasants, and gypsies."

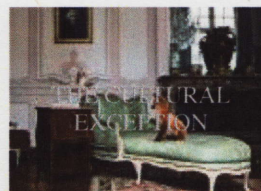
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'André Kertész at table with flowers', Paris, 1927. The Estate of André Kertész, 2015, Courtesy James Hyman Gallery, London

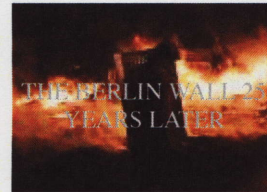
In some respects Kertész was remarkably consistent: as opposed to going for a 'scoop' like most photojournalists, he preferred to shoot "the expressive detail rather than the obvious event".

The art students turned into artists, and he frequently cast his eye over their studios and living spaces. The work of Kertész overall, and the superb selections in the London show, tell us much more about what piqued his curiosity – what he himself found interesting – rather than any particular aspect or lesson of European history or culture.

Great efforts have been exerted over the years to situate André Kertész (1894-1985) in the history of photography, and specifically, to locate him in a particular strain of 'Hungarian' photography.

But how appropriate is such a categorisation? As Robert Capa noted in his memoir, *Slightly out of Focus*, despite being born (like Kertész) in Budapest, "Admiral von Horthy and the Hungarian government had never liked me (and) I had never liked them ... the Hungarian Consulate, since Hitler's annexation of Hungary, refused to say that I was not a Hungarian, nor would they say that I was ... I was born deeply covered by Jewish grandfathers on every side..."

Although Kertész mainly spoke the Hungarian language wherever he lived, and returned to Hungary occasionally after the Second World War, he first left the country before the rise to power of the Nazis in Germany in 1933 shook all of Europe.



ALSO IN COLUMNS

ANNALISA PIRAS
BILL EMMOTT

THE GREAT EUROPEAN DISASTER MOVIE

An intriguing cinematic structure that blends a what-if kind of storytelling with hard-headed experts to tease out history. "The Great European Disaster Movie" is a much-needed reminder that Europe's natural state for centuries was poverty, fighting and fear. Seventy years of peace cannot – should not – be thrown away lightly.

ELIF SHAFAK

OTTOMAN AND EUROPEAN: A SHARED HISTORY

The Battle of Lepanto, — or Inebahti, as it is known in Turkish — was, no doubt, one of the most significant and bloody naval clashes in the 16th century. That fateful day has been preserved in two completely opposite ways in the European and the Turkish memory. For the former, it is a tale of heroic victory. For the latter, it is a tale of shameful defeat. But centuries on today, it is time for us to rethink the Battle of Lepanto, beyond concepts of chivalry and defeat, and try to understand it in its complexity and entirety.

ALEX SAKALIS
FATIH AKIN

ARMENIAN GENOCIDE: IS TURKISH SOCIETY FINALLY READY TO FACE IT? AN INTERVIEW WITH FATIH AKIN, DIRECTOR OF "THE CUT"

The Armenian genocide is something very deep and immovable in our culture and history. It's a blind spot where not so many people know about it, and not so many people talk about it. One of my main reasons for doing the film is to produce something where people come out and inform themselves, discuss, and start to create a room where they can reflect on their own history and trauma.



'Budapest (courtyard with bust)', 1971. The Estate of André Kertész 2015, Courtesy James Hyman Gallery, London

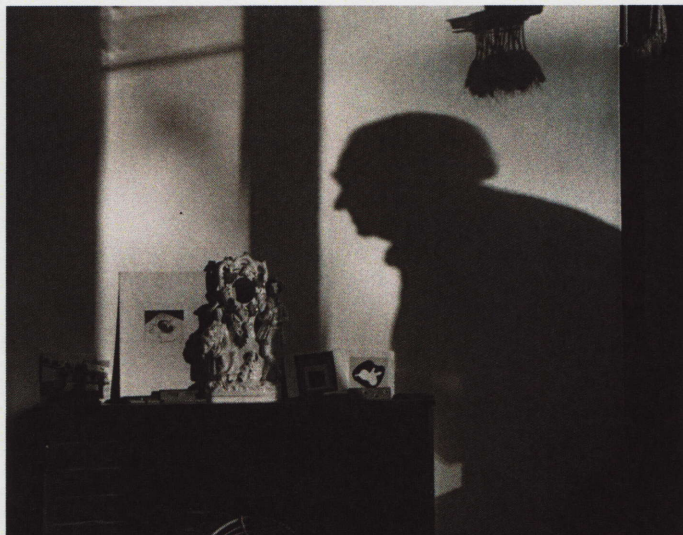
After its failed revolution in the wake of the First World War, Hungary in the 1920s was becoming increasingly inhospitable for Jews and creative, liberal-minded souls.

He was involuntarily peripatetic, like Capa, Ferenc Berko, Martin Munkácsi, and countless others – despite his affinity for Paris. Given that Kertész was, however subtly or inadvertently, pushing photography in new directions, and especially toward the realm of fine arts, I believe it is more fitting to group him with *émigré* and especially Jewish photographers, and those engaged in expansive discourses concerning photography.

Like Capa's best friend 'Chim' (David Seymour, born in Warsaw), Kertész was the son of a bookseller. (It is no coincidence that he created a fabulous distorted image of the Edouard Loewy Bookstore, Paris, 1928, which appears in the current show.) Just as Erich Salomon had done, he tried (and failed) at various commercial ventures.

Also like Salomon and Alfred Eisenstaedt, Kertész was seriously wounded in the First World War. While he was reticent to articulate a particular aesthetic vision, Kertész tended to see himself as belonging to those deemed 'artists' – including Marc Chagall and Ferdinand Léger.

Prints in the current collection includes shots of his friend the artist Henry Moore and his environment. Before gaining fame relatively late in life, many of Kertész's assignments came from editors such as Stefan Lorant (of German film magazines, and later London's "**Lilliput**" and "**Picture Post**") and Bert Garai, director of the Keystone Agency.



'Henry Moore's Shadow', England, 1980. The Estate of André Kertész 2015, Courtesy James Hyman Gallery, London

Following an exhibition in Julien Levy's New York Gallery in 1932, Peter Pollack was one of the early curators to feature the work of Kertész as 'art', at the Art Institute of Chicago, in 1946. Pollack prized Kertész as "a pioneer photo journalist" who applied 'New Realism' to popular media. 'Man on the Boulevard' (1926), similar to 'Man pushing Pram, Paris 1945-1952' (1948) in this show, was said to have "inspired great photographers who came after him and now pay him homage, particularly Brassai and Cartier-Bresson."



'Man pushing Pram', Paris 1945-52. The Estate of André Kertész 2015, Courtesy James Hyman Gallery, London



'My Friend Brassai,' Paris, Nov 25, 1963. The Estate of André Kertész, 2015, Courtesy James Hyman Gallery, London

Kertész was often noted for possessing a “gift for grasping the precise moment in which some action or scene revealed an artistic significance.”

But rather than uncovering art, it may be said that Kertész himself endowed the scene and moment with importance, even sanctity, which recalls the way in which Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer sought to make the everyday and so-called ‘ephemera’ grist for Kultur.

Yet distinct from Benjamin, Kertész (along with Helmut Gernsheim) believed that the photograph of a work of art, such as his ‘Statue Detail, Louvre, circa 1935’ might itself be considered fine art.



'Statue Detail, Louvre, circa 1935'. The Estate of André Kertész 2015, Courtesy James Hyman Gallery, London

Continuing an approach championed by Alfred Stieglitz, Kertész captured the highly-stylized flat of Mondrian, considering his photography as a fellow discipline of painting and sculpture. The show features a later print of his, 'Mondrian's Glasses and Pipe, Paris, 1926'. (A splendid view of a Venice canal, 1963, recalls Stieglitz's early work.)



'Canal Scene', Venice, September 10, 1963. The Estate of André Kertész 2015, Courtesy James Hyman Gallery, London

But few agreed, or noticed at all, until Cornell Capa included Kertész in a show at the Riverside Museum, the forerunner to the International Center of Photography. In the 1940s Kertész was desperate for work.

Beaumont Newhall once grumbled that "If only his English were almost as bad as my French, he would probably get something quite good. He hopes for his citizenship papers every day: hopes to get into the Army—has aerial experience and is, after all, only 48—or into a government agency or an industrial job. I said I would do what I could."

By the 1970s, with men such as Pollack, Helmut Gernsheim, Harry Abrams, and Josef Breitenbach helping to create what would later be considered the art market for photography, Kertész was on his way to a formidable career, some fortune, and recognition in the wider world. He would probably be bemused, or 'chuffed', as they say in London, at having pride of place in a posh Mayfair Gallery.

Kertész himself, by virtue of his talent, perseverance, and long life, assisted in giving photography a place at the table.

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André Kertész in London | Eutopia

*'André Kertész in Europe', 13 May - 13 June 2015, James Hyman
Gallery, London*

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PHOTOGRAPHY, ROBERT CAPA, TOP OF EUROPE

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