

JEU DE PAUME # 72

Concorde

André Kertész

28 September 2010 – 6 February 2011





Satiric Dancer, 1926
Bibliothèque nationale de France

André Kertész (1894–1985) is today famous for his extraordinary contribution to the language of photography in the 20th century. This retrospective, which will be traveling to Winterthur, Berlin, and Budapest, marshals a large number of prints and original documents that highlight the exceptional creative acuity of this photographer, from his beginnings in Hungary, his homeland, to Paris, where between 1925 and 1936 he was one of the leading figures in avant-garde photography, to New York, where he lived for nearly fifty years without encountering the success that he expected and deserved. It pays tribute to a photographer whom Cartier-Bresson regarded as one of his masters, and reveals, despite an apparent diversity of periods and situations, themes and styles, the coherence of Kertész's approach. It emphasizes his originality and poetic uniqueness, drawing on new elements to present his oeuvre as the photographer himself conceived it, reflecting as closely as possible the course of his life. It makes full use of archive documents, focusing in particular on an area of his work that is little known (the beginnings of photo-reportage in Paris and the publication of his images in the press and books), and it analyzes the circumstances surrounding his late resurgence. By exploring the recurring preoccupations and themes of Kertész's work, it sheds light on the complex output of this unclassifiable photographer, who defined himself as an "amateur," and in connection with whom Roland Barthes talked of a photography "that makes us think."



Self-Portrait, Paris, 1927
Courtesy Estate of André Kertész

Hungary 1894–1925: from Andor to André

Kertész's youth left him with an enduring love of the countryside, animals, leisurely walks, and down-to-earth people. His sentimental nature led him to treat photography as "a little notebook, a sketchbook," whose principal subjects were his friends, his family, his fiancée Elizabeth, and above all his younger brother, Jenő, with whom he carried out most of his early experiments in photography. Called up during the war, he continued to take photographs, capturing for the most part trivial events in the lives of the soldiers, whose situation he shared, for in spite of the context photography remained for him a way of expressing emotions. André Kertész was very independent at this time—his work diverged radically from the prevailing pictorialism of the time—and he was laying the foundations for a unique innovative photographic language. In 1914, he began photographing at night; in 1917, he took an astonishing photo of an underwater swimmer, and captured his brother "as a scherzo" in 1919. The two persons watching the *Circus* (1920) and *The Blind Musician* (1921) immediately emerged as modernist images. André Kertész's photography was distinguished at this time by its freedom and diversity of approach, as well as its reliance on feelings and emotional bonds for inspiration.

France, 1925–1936: The Garden of André Kertész

Hard up and speaking only Hungarian, André Kertész lived in Paris amid a circle of fellow Hungarian émigrés. It was in the studio of one of them, Étienne



Place de la Concorde, Paris, 1928

Collection of Robert Gurbo

Béthy, that the dancer Magda Förstner, mimicking one of the artist's sculptures, instigated the famous photograph *Satiric Dancer* in 1926. In the same year, when taking photographs at Mondrian's studio, the photographer emerged as the master of a new type of unorthodox "portrait in absence." Kertész evokes more than he shows, giving life to the inanimate, and creating a poetic language of allusive signs, both poetic and visual. During the early years of his life in Paris, he printed a large number of his images on photographic paper in postcard format (this inexpensive practice occupied a notable place in his work, because he resorted to it so persistently and with such inventiveness).

The street also provided the photographer with micro-events, fleeting associations and multiple signs that became metaphors. The leading representative, along with Man Ray, of international modernity in Paris, he worked for the press, initiating photo-reportage; he took part in several important exhibitions, including "Film und Foto" in Stuttgart in 1929. Kertész nevertheless insisted on retaining his independence, keeping artistic movements, in particular Surrealism, at arm's length. Nourished by his emotions, surprises, and personal associations, his work, with its mirrored images, reflections, shadows, and doubles, established him as a leading exponent of avant-garde photography. But he nevertheless avoided conventional doctrines and styles. *The Fork* (1928), for example, a perfect application of the modernist creed that held sway at the time, reveals another distinguishing feature of Kertész's work: his



Elizabeth and I, 1933

Collection of Sarah Morthland, New York

interest in shadows cast by objects or people. In *The Hands of Paul Arma* (1928) and the extraordinary *Self-Portrait* (1927), these play subtly on the alternation between absence and presence, doubling and disappearance.

André Kertész always sought to take advantage of innovations that would enable him to reconfigure reality through unusual images. He very quickly became interested in the optical distortions produced by waves (*The Swimmer*, 1917), or by the polished surfaces of such objects as silver balls or by car headlights. In 1930, when the magazine *VU* commissioned him to take a portrait of its new editor, Carlo Rim, Kertész took him to the funhouse at Luna Park to pose in front of the distorting mirrors. Then, in 1933, at the request of the editor of a girlie magazine, *Le Sourire*, he produced an extraordinary series of female nudes, known as Distortions. He used two models, who posed with two distorting mirrors that, depending on the vantage point chosen, produced grotesque elongations, monstrous protuberances, or the complete disintegration of the body. Following his move to the United States, Kertész hoped to make use of this technique by adapting it to advertising, but he was met with incomprehension (it was not until 1976 that a book devoted to the Distortions was published in American and French editions).

Photo Essays and Illustration

The launch of the news magazine *VU* in spring 1928 gave Kertész the opportunity to exploit a new skill. To supplement contributions from photo agencies,



Lost Cloud, New York, 1937

Courtesy Sarah Morthland Gallery, New York

director Lucien Vogel called on three young freelance photographers (André Kertész, Germaine Krull, and Eli Lotar), each of whom had a distinctive style and would be able to provide a fresh perspective. By defining in advance for these photographers the subjects to be covered, the editorial board of *VU* was creating photo-reportage. Thanks to his ability to produce unexpected images that were evocative rather than documentary, Kertész emerged as a pioneer, notably with his photo essay on the Trappist monks in Soligny, which would earn him a certain notoriety. During his eight-year collaboration with *VU*, the magazine published more than thirty photo essays by him: on each occasion, these were carefully thought out visual constructs, in which the clarity of expression and graphic composition work wonders. Kertész undoubtedly preferred a type of illustration that was more poetic than factual, and this led him to contribute to the art periodical *Bifur* (1929) and, above all, to *Art et médecine*, a magazine for medical staff, which gave scope for his modernist imagination. In around 1930 Kertész was, together with Germaine Krull, the most innovative exponent of illustrational photography. His reputation was reinforced by the publication of three books printed in heliogravure: *Enfants* [Children] (1933), *Nos amies les bêtes* [Our Friends the Animals] (1936), and above all *Paris vu par André Kertész* (1934), which had a text by Pierre Mac Orlan, and whose title ("Paris seen by . . .") underlines that this is not a picturesque description of the city, but the collection of a photographer's "subjective points of view."



Melancholic Tulip, New York, 1939

Courtesy Bruce Silverstein Gallery

Kertész also took photographs of Paris to illustrate *Az igazi Ady* [The Real Ady], a biography of the great Hungarian poet Endre Ady (1877–1919), written by his compatriot, the journalist György Bölöni.

United States, 1936–1962: A Lost Cloud

The offer of a contract from the Keystone agency (which would be broken after one year) prompted Kertész's to move to New York in October 1936. His reservations about fashion photography, the rejection of his photo essays that "talked too much" according to the editorial board of *Life*, and the incomprehension that greeted the *Distortions* series gradually plunged Kertész into depression. The war and the curtailment of the "foreign" photographer's freedom merely added to his difficulties. In 1947, in order to have a regular income, Kertész was forced to accept a contract from the magazine *House & Garden*. In 1952, he moved into an apartment overlooking Washington Square, which prompted a change of direction in Kertész's work. He now watched and witnessed what was taking place on the surrounding terraces and in the square. He used telephoto lenses and zooms to create whimsical series, such as the one featuring chimneys.

André Kertész lived in New York from 1936 to 1985 and he never stopped photographing "in" the city, rather than the city itself. He did not record the life of its neighborhoods, the picturesque aspects of its various trades, and its often paradoxical architectural environments. For him, New York was a sound box for his thoughts, which the city echoed back to him



Martinique, January 1, 1972

Courtesy Attila Pocze, Vintage Galéria, Budapest

in the form of photographs. He sought everywhere an antidote to the city's regularity, in the dilapidated brick walls and the inextricable tangle of shadows, beams, and external staircases, and it is sometimes impossible to recognize specific places in these broken geometries: Kertész's New York is highly fragmented, but a single photo could reveal the imaginary city.

He remained true to his intuitive, allusive personal style, and used his work to give voice to the sadness that undoubtedly permeated his entire life in New York, rendered most explicitly in *The Lost Cloud* (1937). Right up until the end of his life, he sought images of solitude, sometimes incorporating pigeons into them. On January 1, 1972, during a trip to Martinique, he caught the fleeting, pensive profile of a man behind a pane of frosted glass: this nebulous vision of a solitary man before the immensity of the sea was the last image in his retrospective collection, *Sixty Years of Photography, 1912–1972*, providing a very provisional conclusion to his career.

Returns and Renewal, 1963–1985

After his retirement in 1961, Kertész developed a new appetite for life and photography. Following a request from the magazine *Camera* for a portfolio, he made a sort of inventory of his available work. In 1963 he had one-man exhibitions at the Venice Photography Biennale and the Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris, the latter enabling him to stay in a city that, on an emotional level, he had never left. In addition, he located and took possession of

several boxes of negatives that had been entrusted to a friend in 1936, at the time of his departure, which prompted a review of his entire oeuvre and led to new prints, with fresh croppings. These various episodes, which can be seen as part of a general reassessment of the value of photography and its history, had a rejuvenating effect on Kertész (who was seventy at the time). The traveling exhibition "The Concerned Photographer" even presented him as a pioneer of photojournalism.

Kertész continued his never-ending search for images, both in the cities that he visited and from the window of his apartment. His two books *J'aime Paris* (1974) and *Of New York . . .* (1976) express his sense of being torn between two cultures. The death of his wife Elizabeth in 1977, shortly before his one-man show at the Centre Georges Pompidou, led him to develop an interest in Polaroids, which enabled him to adopt a more introspective approach. As always, emotion was the driving force behind his work. Of the fifty-three Polaroids brought together in the small book *From My Window*, dedicated to Elizabeth, Kertész, always curious about new technology, was in reality capturing the light of his recollections and the distortions of his memory.

Michel Frizot and Annie-Laure Wanaverbecq, curators of the exhibition

chronology

1894 Andor Kertész is born on July 2 in Budapest.

1912 First camera.

1914 Inducted into the Austro-Hungarian army on October 5.

1915 Badly wounded, he would subsequently be posted behind the front lines.

1917 First publication of some of his photographs.

1919 Photographs constantly with the collaboration of his younger brother, Jenő. Meets Erzsébet Salamon, who would become his wife in 1933.

1925 Kertész arrives in Paris on October 8, where he registers at police headquarters as a "photojournalist."

1926 First publication of some of his photographs in the German press. He meets Piet Mondrian.

1927 First one-man exhibition at the Au Sacre du Printemps gallery in Paris.

1928 Buys his first Leica and receives his first commissions from *VU* magazine. He takes part in the Salon de l'Escalier, an exhibition of avant-garde photography in Paris.

1929 He takes part in the exhibitions "Fotografie der Gegenwart" [Contemporary Photography] in Essen, and "Film und Foto" in Stuttgart.

1931 *Art et Médecine* starts to publish his work regularly.

1933 On June 17 he marries Erzsébet Salamon, who takes the name Elizabeth Kertész. Publication of his first book, *Enfants*.

1934 Publication of *Paris vu par André Kertész* with a text by Pierre Mac Orlan.

1936 Elizabeth and André arrive in New York on October 15.

1937 Kertész works for various magazines. First one-man exhibition in New York, at the PM Galleries.

1938 He does the layout for Robert Capa's book *Death in the Making*.

1939–1941 Has trouble getting hold of photography supplies and experiences health problems. His professional activities are curtailed due to his nationality.

1944 André and Elizabeth obtain American nationality.

1947 He signs a contract with the magazine *House & Garden*, which would provide him with a regular income until 1961.

1952 He moves into an apartment at 2 Fifth Avenue overlooking Washington Square.

1959 Publication of an article on Kertész in *Infinity*, helping him to gain recognition in America and abroad.

1961 He terminates his contract with *House & Garden*.

1962 First retrospective exhibition at Long Island University, Brooklyn (New York).

1963 Featured in a lavishly illustrated article in *Camera* (Lucerne). Takes part in the Venice Photography Biennale; one-man exhibition at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. He recovers the negatives that had been hidden for him during the war.

1964 Large one-man exhibition at MoMA in New York.

1967 Chosen as one of the six participants in the traveling exhibition "The Concerned Photographer."

1972 Publication of *Sixty Years of Photography, 1912-1972*.

1974 Publication of *J'aime Paris, Photographs since the Twenties*.

1975 Publication of *Washington Square*. Honorary guest at the sixth Rencontres Internationales de la Photographie, Arles.

1976 Publication of *Of New York . . . and of Distortions*.

1977 Elizabeth dies on October 21, shortly before the opening of a retrospective at the Centre Georges Pompidou. He creates The André and Elizabeth Kertész Foundation in New York.

1979 Takes photographs with a Polaroid SX-70 camera.

1981 Publication of *From My Window*, a collection of Polaroids dedicated to Elizabeth.

1982 Receives the Grand Prix National de la Photographie from the Ministère de la Culture in Paris.

1984 Signs a deed of gift donating his negatives, archives, and correspondence to the French state (gift conserved today at the Médiathèque de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine, Paris).

1985 Goes to Buenos Aires where he has a one-man exhibition and visits his brother Jenő, who is in hospital there. Kertész dies on September 28, shortly after his return to New York.

publication

■ Michel Frizot and Annie-Laure Wanaverbecq, **André Kertész**, co-edition Hazan / Éditions du Jeu de Paume, 360 pages, 25 x 31 cm, hardback, €49



Distorsion no. 200, 1933

Courtesy Klever Holdings



July 3, 1979

Courtesy Stephen Bulger Gallery

around the exhibition

tours

■ La période new-yorkaise (1936–1962)

[The New York period (1936–1962)], by Robert Gurbo, curator of The André and Elizabeth Kertész Foundation and co-owner of the Archive Consulting and Management Services LLC

Tuesday, 28 September 2010, 7pm

■ **Paris-New York: allers-retours dans la photographie d'André Kertész** [Paris–New York: comings and goings in the photography of André Kertész], thematic tour by a Jeu de Paume lecturer
Tuesday, 26 October 2010, 7pm

■ **André Kertész et la Hongrie** [André Kertész and Hungary], by Annie-Laure Wanaverbecq, curator of the exhibition
Tuesday, 9 November 2010, 7pm

■ **Kertész dans l'histoire de la diffusion photographique** [André Kertész in the history of the dissemination of photographs], thematic tour by a Jeu de Paume lecturer
Tuesday, 30 November 2010, 7pm

■ **Kertész et le reportage photographique** [Kertész and photo-reportage], by Michel Frizot, curator of the exhibition
Tuesday, 7 December 2010, 7pm

■ Signes et écriture photographique

[Signs and photographic form], thematic tour by a Jeu de Paume lecturer

Tuesday, 25 January 2011, 7pm

series of screenings in the auditorium

■ André Kertész: cinema from Budapest to New York

programme 1

Selection of archive films that illustrate life in the three cities where Kertész lived: Budapest of the 1920s, showing a tour of the city by camera-carrying tourists (*Post Travel Pictures*, 1927; *Kalabaka*, 1927); Paris, with a report on traffic problems in 1929 (*Aperçu rétrospectif 1909-1929*, 1929); and New York, through the arrival of the ocean liner *Normandie* (Paris–New York by Jean Vивиé, 1938), or with scenes in the subway and the streets (*Portrait of the South Bronx*, 1938; *Third Avenue nel El Torn Down*, 1939).

In collaboration with Lobster Films

programme 2

Screening of the documentary *André dans les villes : Budapest-Paris-New York*, by Teri Wehn-Damisch (France, 1986, 52'). André Kertész has been living in New York for sixty years. At the end of his life, the photographer has a sudden desire to return to the places that inspired his work: Budapest and above all Paris, where he had photographed his Distortions.

Daily from 28 September 2010 to 6 February 2011 at 1pm (except 19 Nov. 2010 and 21, 22, 28 and 29 Jan. 2011)

Jeu de Paume – Concorde

1 Place de la Concorde, 75008 Paris
access via the Tuileries Gardens, Rue de Rivoli entrance
www.jeudepaume.org

information +33 (0)1 47 03 12 50

Tuesday (late opening) noon–9pm

Wednesday to Friday noon–7pm

Saturday and Sunday 10am–7pm

closed Monday

admission: €7 – concession: €5

Mardis Jeunes: free admission for students and visitors under 26 every last Tuesday of the month from 5pm to 9pm

exhibitions

28 September 2010 – 6 February 2011

■ **André Kertész**

■ **False Friends / An Ephemeral Video Library***

■ Satellite Programme, **Tomo Savić-Gecan: Untitled, 2010***

until 17 November 2010

■ Virtual Space, **Agnès de Cayeux: Alissa,**

Discussion with Miladus, Elon/120/211/501

on www.jeudepaume.org and in the resources room

Tours for individual visitors**

with guides from Jeu de Paume:

from Tuesday to Saturday at 12.30pm

Family Tours**

Saturday at 3.30pm

forthcoming exhibitions

18 November 2010 – 9 March 2011

■ Virtual Space, **Microtruc: Les Trucs**

on www.jeudepaume.org and in the resources room

1 March – 8 May 2011

■ **Aernout Mik**

■ **Société Réaliste: Empire, State, Building**

■ Satellite Programme, **Alex Cecchetti and**

Mark Geffraud*

* free admission

** free admission on presentation of exhibition ticket (valid on the day of purchase only) and for members; Family Tours, by reservation on +33 (0)1 47 03 12 41 / serviceeducatif@jeudepaume.org

The “André Kertész” exhibition has been organized with the aid of the Hungarian Institute in Paris and is part of the Mois de la Photo in Paris, November 2010.



It was realized in partnership with:



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Jeu de Paume – extramural

exhibitions

until 17 October 2010

■ **Catherine Sullivan with Farhad Sharmini**

Within the framework of Le Printemps de Septembre—à Toulouse

Hôtel-Dieu Saint-Jacques, Toulouse

2 Rue Vigerie, 31300 Toulouse

information: www.printempsdesseptembre.com

until 24 October 2010

■ **Willy Ronis: On that Day**

Maison d'Art Bernard-Anthonioz

16 Rue Charles-VII, 94130 Nogent-sur-Marne

www.ma-bernardanthonioz.com/fr/

information +33 (0)1 48 71 90 07

daily noon–6pm

closed Tuesday and public holidays

free admission

until 24 October 2010

■ **Camille Silvy, Photographer of Modern Life,**

1834–1910

National Portrait Gallery

St Martin's Place, WC2H 0HE London

information: www.npg.org.uk

until 7 November 2010

■ **Nadar, Rule and Caprice**

Château de Tours

25 Avenue André Malraux, 37000 Tours

information +33 (0)2 47 70 88 46

Tuesday to Sunday 1pm–6pm

admission: €3; concessions: €1.50

forthcoming exhibitions

28 November 2010 – 29 May 2011

■ **André Kertész, the Intimate Pleasure of Reading**

■ **Émile Zola, Photographer**

Château de Tours

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Underwater Swimmer, Esztergom, 1917

Bibliothèque nationale de France

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