Henri Cartier-Bresson

For me the camera is a sketch book, an instrument of intuition and spontaneity, the master of the instant which, in visual terms, questions and decides simultaneously. In order to give a “meaning” to the world, one has to feel involved in what one frames through the viewfinder. This attitude requires concentration, discipline of mind, sensitivity, and a sense of geometry. It is by economy of means that one arrives at simplicity of expression.

To take a photograph is to hold one’s breath when all faculties converge in a face of fleeing reality. It is at that moment that mastering an image becomes a great physical and intellectual joy.

To take a photograph means to recognize, simultaneously and within a fraction of a second, both the fact itself and the rigorous organization of visually perceived forms that give it meaning.

It is putting one, head, one, eye, and one, heart on the same axis.

Biography (1908 – 2004)

Early Life


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

1930: Spends almost one year in the Ivory Coast.

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

First Photographic Experiments

1932: Buys his first Leica and travels accross Europe with his friends Leonor Fini and Pierre 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 the 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* request, he travels for a few months with John Malcolm Brinnin to photograph artists and writers.

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


1953: Travels throughout Europe for *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 since 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: Creates 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.


1972–73: Returns to the USSR.

**Return 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 recognized as being of public interest by the French State.


2004: Henri Cartier-Bresson dies peacefully in Montjustin, Provence on August 3rd.

Bibliography


1948: *Beautiful Jaipur*. Text by Max J. Olivier. The Times of India Press, Bombay


*D’une Chine à l’autre*. Text by Jean-Paul Sartre. Delpire Editeur, Paris


1973: *About Russia.* Thames and Hudson, London


*Photoportraits.* Texts by André Pieyre de Mandiargues. Thames and Hudson, London


*Henri Cartier-Bresson in India.* Introduction by Satyajit Ray, photographs and notes by Henri Cartier-Bresson, texts by Yves Véquaud. Thames and Hudson, London


**Posthumous Bibliography**


Scrapbook. Text by Michel Frizot and Agnès Sire. Steidl, Göttingen


**Exhibitions**

**Personal Exhibitions**


**Posthumous Exhibitions**


**Filmography**

Henri Cartier-Bresson developed a passion for filmmaking in the 1930’s. He studied cinema with Paul Strand in New York in 1935. When he returned to France, he was hired as the second assistant director to Jean Renoir in 1936 for *La vie est à nous* and *Une partie de campagne*, and in 1939 for *La Règle du Jeu*. 
Films directed by Henri Cartier-Bresson


With the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. Director: Henri Cartier-Bresson, with the collaboration of Herbert Kline. Running time: 18 minutes. Black and white.


Films composed of photographs by Henri Cartier-Bresson


1969: *Québec vu par Cartier-Bresson / Le Québec as seen by Cartier-Bresson*. Director: Wolff Koenig. Producer: Canadian Film Board. Running time: 10 minutes. Black and white.


Films about Henri Cartier-Bresson


Audio Production


Collections

Henri Cartier-Bresson’s work is in the collections of museums throughout the world. The following had the privilege to acquire the “Master Collection” – 385 prints chosen in 1979 by Henri Cartier-Bresson:

- Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, France
- De Menil Collection, Houston, Texas, United States
- University of Fine Arts, Osaka, Japan
- Victoria and Albert Museum, London, United Kingdom

Museums possessing a large collection of HCB’s work

- Maison Européenne de la Photographie, Paris, France
- Musée Carnavalet, Paris, France
- Museum of Modern Art, New York, United States
- The Art Institute of Chicago, United States
- The Getty Museum, Los Angeles, United States
• International Center of Photography, New York, United States
• The Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, United States
• The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, United States
• Kahitsuken Kyoto Museum of Contemporary Art, Kyoto, Japan
• Museum of Modern Art, Tel Aviv, Israel
• Stockholm Moderna Museet, Sweden