

**THE MENIL COLLECTION EXAMINES THE WORK OF HENRI CARTIER-BRESSON
IN AN EXHIBITION THAT SURVEYS THE ARTIST'S PIONEERING CAREER,
MARCH 11 – JULY 24, 2016**



HOUSTON, TEXAS, March 3, 2016 – The Menil Collection presents *Life is Once, Forever: Henri Cartier-Bresson Photographs*, an exhibition primarily examining the scope and depth of Henri Cartier-Bresson's pioneering career. Curated by Toby Kamps, curator of Modern and Contemporary Art, the exhibition includes a selection of approximately 50 photographs taken in 17 countries and drawn primarily from the artist's own "Master Collection," a summarizing edit of his archive initiated in the 1970s at the request of his longtime friends and collectors John and Dominique de Menil.

Born to a wealthy Parisian family of textile manufacturers, Cartier-Bresson was a self-taught cosmopolitan inspired by leftist political causes, the concept of humanism, and the Surrealist movement in art. Widely considered to be the founding father of street photography, Cartier-Bresson initiated a movement dedicated to capturing the flux of life in the public sphere. He began taking pictures as a child, but he distinguished himself in the early 1930s, after he purchased a handheld Leica 35mm camera and began, he said, to shoot on the run, or "*à la sauvette*," in cities and rural settings around the world.

Kamps said, "Cartier-Bresson worked at a time when the camera was just beginning to examine all aspects of life. The combination of his political, philosophical, and aesthetic concerns made him an ideal photojournalist – somebody able to pinpoint consequential events, characters, and ideas. His subjects also have an innocence that does not seem possible today in our photo-saturated, online world."

In all his work, Cartier-Bresson cultivated a humanist vision, one emphasizing the importance of individuals and illuminating the human condition. His early images made in Mexico, Spain, and North Africa were prized by the Surrealists for their intricate, collage like compositions made of surprising human gestures and architectural settings. After World War II, during which he escaped from a German prisoner of war camp to document Europe's devastation in

photographs and documentary films, he went on to create many thousands of images of newsworthy, popular-interest, and chanced-upon subjects, as well as hundreds of casual and revealing portraits of cultural luminaries such as Truman Capote, Ezra Pound, Alberto Giacometti, Lincoln Kirstein, and Henri Matisse. In 1947 Cartier-Bresson and a small group of like-minded photographers formed the legendary photographic agency Magnum to promulgate their new, humanist photojournalism.

In his career-defining 1952 book, *The Decisive Moment*, Cartier-Bresson summarized his approach as "the simultaneous recognition in a fraction of a second of the significance of an event as well as the precise organization of forms." His street scenes, landscapes, portraits, and especially his depictions of individuals caught up in the everyday are filled with uncanny, telling details and formal rhymes picked out from time's flux as if by magic. Widely imitated but never equaled, his style is pellucid, free from sensationalism, and infused with humor, mystery, and pathos.

At the request of the de Menils, Cartier-Bresson reviewed his many thousands of contact sheets with the idea of creating a succinct record of his work—the so called "Master Collection." He originally chose 385 images, which were printed by his Paris laboratory Photographic Services in 1972-73. Versions of this archive reside at the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris; the Osaka University of Arts, Japan; the Victoria and Albert Museum, London; and at the Menil Collection, which has over 1,000 images by Cartier-Bresson.

Life is Once, Forever: Henri Cartier-Bresson Photographs is generously supported by the Robert J. Kleberg, Jr. and Helen C. Kleberg Foundation; Lazard Frères & Co.; Gilbane Building Co.; Eddie and Chinhui Allen; Suzanne Deal Booth; Adelaide de Menil Carpenter; Susan and Francois de Menil; Franci Neely; Leslie and Shannon Sasser; Anne and Bill Stewart; and the City of Houston.

Public Programs

Reading and Book Signing with Ewa Zebrowski

Presented in conjunction with FotoFest

Monday, March 14, 5:00 p.m.

Menil Collection Bookstore

Photographer Ewa Zebrowski reads from and signs her recent artist's book *twombly, italia*.

Lecture with Peter Galassi

Monday, March 14, 7:00 p.m.

Menil Collection Foyer

The Menil Collection celebrates FotoFest and the work of Henri Cartier-Bresson with a lecture by photography scholar and curator Peter Galassi who will talk about the artist's place in the history of photography. Galassi curated the 1987 exhibition *Henri Cartier-Bresson: The Early Work* at the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

About FotoFest International

The Menil Collection is proud to join the group of participating spaces for the FotoFest 2016 International Biennial with *Life is Once, Forever: Henri Cartier-Bresson Photographs*.

Founded in 1983, FotoFest International was established to promote international awareness of museum-quality photo-based art from around the world. FotoFest is a non-profit photographic arts and education organization based in Houston, Texas. The first FotoFest Biennial was held in 1986. It is the first and longest running photographic arts festival in the United States. It is considered as one of the leading international photography Biennials in the world.

As a producer of serious international photographic arts exhibitions, FotoFest is a platform for art and social issues. FotoFest is known as a showcase for the discovery and presentation of important new work and new talent from around the world. The FotoFest Biennial takes place citywide in Houston with participation from the leading art museums, art galleries, non-profit art spaces, universities and civic spaces. The Biennial has an audience of 275,000 people from 34 countries. This audience includes a select group of 150 museum curators, gallerists, publishers, editors, photography collectors, directors of non-profit art spaces and international festivals from Asia, Europe, Latin America, Canada and the United States.

More information on FotoFest, and the FotoFest 2016 Biennial may be found at www.fotofest.org.

About the Menil Collection

A legacy of the late philanthropists John and Dominique de Menil, the Menil Collection opened in 1987. Housed in the first United States building designed by the Italian architect Renzo Piano, the Menil Collection's main museum building anchors the 30-acre campus, which includes the Cy Twombly Gallery, a site-specific Dan Flavin installation, the Byzantine Fresco Chapel—now a venue for long-term installations by contemporary artists—and outdoor sculpture. A new building for the Menil Drawing Institute by Johnston Marklee and expected to open in 2017 will be the first freestanding facility in the United States designed expressly for the exhibition and study of modern and contemporary drawings. Presenting regular rotations of artworks from the growing permanent collection, the Menil also organizes special exhibitions and programs throughout the year, publishes scholarly books, and conducts research into the conservation of modern and contemporary art. The museum is open Wednesday through Sunday, 11am to 7pm, and charges no admission fee.

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Image: Henri Cartier-Bresson, Montreal, Canada, 1965, printed 1985. Gelatin silver print, 9 3/8 x 14 1/4 inches (23.8 x 36.2 cm). The Menil Collection, Houston. © Henri Cartier-Bresson/Magnum Photos

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