

Andre Kertesz

Photographer, b. 1894 Hungary, d. 1985 New York City

"The moment always dictates in my work...Everybody can look, but they don't necessarily see... I see a situation and I know that it's right." -- André Kertész

André Kertész was born Andor Kertész (changed his first name to André at the age of 21) in Hungary, 1894. He bought his first camera and made his first photograph while working as a clerk at the Budapest stock exchange in 1912. After years of amateur snapshot photography in his native Hungary, he moved to Paris in 1925 and began a career as a freelance photographer. There the young transplant, speaking little French, took to the streets, wandering, observing, and developing his intimate approach to imagemaking. He also met and began to photograph other artists, including Brassai and Chagall, and members of the Dada Movement. One of them dubbed him "Brother Seeing Eye", an allusion to a medieval monastery where all the monks were blind except one.

From 1933 to 1936, Kertész published three books of his own photographs. Immigrating to the United States in 1936 with his wife to escape the increasing tension in Europe that was leading to World War II, he settled in New York, where he earned his living photographing architecture and interiors for magazines such as *House and Garden*.

However, his personal photographic style did not mesh well with the straightforward fashion photography the American public (and magazines) expected. He continued to exhibit his individual work as best he could but his reputation slowly faded, and he became disillusioned.

Kertész then had a solo show at the Museum of Modern Art in 1964 which relaunched his career and reputation. He caught the mood of the times and became something of an elder statesman to the photographers of the late 1960s and early 1970s. By the mid-1970s he was showing his work in galleries all over the world. He continued working very productively into old age, and was experimenting with instant Polaroid photography shortly before he died.

Kertész is now recognized as one of the seminal figures of photojournalism.

1894 - Born in Budapest, Hungary, on July 2.

1909 to 1912 - Studied at Academy of Commerce. Showed interest in Photography and bought his first camera in 1912. Self-taught with his brother Eugeno (Jenő).

1912 to 1914 - Worked at the Stock Exchange.

1914 to 1918 - Served in the Austro-Hungarian Army during World War I.

1918 to 1925 - Returned to the Stock Exchange but continued to photograph.

1925 - Moved to Paris.

1926 to 1935 - Worked as a freelance photojournalist for a variety of publications from France, Germany, Britain, and Italy. His artistic circle in Paris included Brassai, Germaine Krull, Berenice Abbott, Man Ray, and poet Michel Seuphor, and painter Piet Mondrian. Aside from being published in the avant-garde circles, Kertész's photographs were published in magazines *Vu* (1928 - 1935) and *Art et Médecine* (1930 - 1936).

1927 - First exhibition at avant-garde gallery Au Sacre du Printemps, Paris.

1928 to 1930 - Short marriage to Rosza Klein (Rosi Kertész).

1933 – Published his first book, *Enfants*. Produced series 'Distortion' for the magazine *Le Sourire*. Marriage to Elizabeth Sali (Salamon), who appears frequently in his photographs.

1936 - Arrived in New York to fulfill a contract with Keystone agency, which he broke the following year.

1937 - First solo exhibition at PM Gallery in New York.

1941 to 1944 - Legally classified as an 'enemy alien' due to his nationality, and this resulted in him being forbidden to publish his work until he obtained his American nationality in 1944.

1946 - First solo exhibiton at an American museum, the Art Institute of Chicago.

1946 to 1962 - Signed an exclusive contract with *Condé Nast* in 1946. After his contract ended, he devoted himself in his own work.

1972 to 1981 - Using a Polaroid camera, he started making series of still lifes.

1983 - Awarded *the Legion of Honour* by the French government.

1984 -Signed deed donating all negatives and correspondence to the French state (Ministry of Culture).

1985 - Died in New York, on September 28.

Archival Sources

Largest collection of letters, documents and clippings regarding Kertész's life and career, donated by the André and Elizabeth Kertész Foundation (AEKF).

- Patrimoine Photographique, André Kertész Archives, Paris

Other archive materials and copies are held by the following foundations and institutions:

- André and Elizabeth Kertész Foundation (AEKF)
- The Art Institute of Chicago
- The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
- The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles
- The National Gallery of Art, Washington