



International Center of Photography

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media release



Robert Capa
Gerda Taro and soldier, Córdoba front, 1936
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International Center of Photography

Gerda Taro

On view from
September 26, 2007
through
January 6, 2008

Media Preview
September 25, 2007
9:30 - 11am

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Gerda Taro (1910-1937) was a pioneering photojournalist who spent her brief but dramatic career photographing on the front lines of the Spanish Civil War. From September 26, 2007 through January 6, 2008, the International Center of Photography (ICP), 1133 Avenue of the Americas at 43rd Street, will present the first major exhibition of Taro's work. The exhibition, *Gerda Taro*, will include over eighty photographs drawn from ICP's collection, as well as examples of the many European and American magazines and books that reproduced Taro's dynamic and impassioned war coverage.

Taro's photographs of the war are a striking but little-known record of an important moment in the history of war photography. They are also evidence of the changing possibilities for women in Europe in the 1930s, through Taro's personal narrative as well as her photographs of female militia members in Barcelona and Valencia. Taro was the first woman known to have photographed in the heat of battle, and the first to die in action. Though Taro's promising career was cut short, she produced a body of work that is notable for its animation, commitment, and formal experimentation. The exhibition is drawn from ICP's extensive Taro archive, which includes approximately 200 vintage prints, original negatives, publications, and ephemera.

Gerda Taro was born Gerda Pohorylle, daughter of a liberal Polish Jewish family in Stuttgart, Germany. The family moved to Leipzig when Gerda was nineteen, where the growing strength of the National Socialists and a new circle of friends drew her into involvement in local leftist organizations. In 1933, she was arrested for participating in an anti-Nazi protest campaign. Eventually realizing that it was too dangerous for her to remain in Germany, she left for Paris.

After a year in Paris spent struggling for work, Gerda met Hungarian photographer André Friedmann, who would later change his name to Robert Capa. A romance developed between Gerda and André, and Gerda increasingly managed the business side of André's work, while beginning to experiment with taking her own photographs. She started working at the Alliance Photo agency, providing her with an invaluable lens into the machinery of photojournalism. In February of 1936, she obtained her first press card. Gerda and André, frustrated with their lack of success selling his stories, constructed a fictional American photographer named Robert Capa, under whose identity they might fare better than as one of many Eastern European Jewish émigrés in Paris. Gerda, in turn, changed her last name to Taro, taken from the Japanese artist Taro Okamoto. Both names had Hollywood resonances, too; Capa's echoing the American filmmaker Frank Capra, and Gerda Taro's recalling Greta Garbo.

When the Spanish Civil War broke out on July 17, 1936, Taro and Capa immediately arranged to go to Barcelona. The opportunity to photograph active combat, combined with participating in a leftist cause for which émigrés Taro and Capa were deeply sympathetic, was an incomparable opportunity for the pair. They photographed side-by-side, often recording the same scenes. Their pictures from this period are easily distinguishable because they used cameras that produced negatives with different proportions; Taro the square-format Rollei, and Capa the rectangular Leica. In addition, Taro's work reveals her interest in experimenting with the dynamic camera angles of New Vision photography. After photographing in Barcelona, they headed west and then south to Córdoba, where Capa photographed his famous "Falling Soldier," a loyalist militiaman falling back on a hillside, a moment after he has been fatally shot.

From the outset, the photographic team of Taro and Capa published in magazines with established reputations like *Vu* in France or the *Zürcher Illustrierte* in Switzerland. Though the work was initially credited "Robert Capa," it was a collective project to which they both contributed. Contact print notebooks from this period—which will be included in the exhibition—make this collaboration clear: Taro and Capa's photographs are unattributed and interspersed, with stories comprised of photographs by both authors.

Taro and Capa returned to Paris for the fall and early winter, and made a second trip to Spain in February of 1937. Photographs from this second trip are more difficult to distinguish, since both Taro and Capa were working in the same rectangular 35mm format. Too, they began to publish their photographs "Capa & Taro," as in a spread in the French weekly *Regards* on fighting in Madrid. Capa remained in Spain only briefly, returning to Paris at the end of the month, while Taro stayed on. It appears that their romance had cooled by this point, and Taro was distinguishing herself with a successful independent career in the French leftist press. Beginning in March of 1937, the byline of her photographs in *Regards* and the left-wing French Popular Front newspaper *Ce Soir* reads "Photo Taro." Some of Taro's most arresting photographs were taken in the spring of 1937, in a hospital and morgue following the bombing of Valencia. Taro seems to have predated Capa's famous assertion that "if your pictures aren't good enough, you aren't close enough" with her unflinching images of the civilian casualties of the war.

In July, Taro covered the Second International Writers' Congress on the Defense of Culture at Madrid and then went to Brunete, outside of the capital, to cover fighting for *Ce Soir*. For two weeks, Taro photographed the battle for the city, and her images were widely reproduced, in part because they demonstrated that the Loyalists were holding the Brunete, despite insurgent claims to the contrary. On July 25, as the Loyalist position faltered, Taro found herself in the midst of a hasty retreat. She jumped on the running-board of a car transporting casualties. A tank sideswiped the car, knocking Taro to the ground. She died the next day. Her body was returned to Paris, where Taro was proclaimed an anti-fascist martyr. Her funeral, which was attended by tens of thousands, took place on what would have been her twenty-seventh birthday.

"The work of Gerda Taro is not only remarkable within the larger oeuvre of war photography for the period, but also because it exemplifies the changing roles of women at that time," said Willis E. Hartshorn, ICP Ehrenkranz Director. "Her work holds a significant place within the ICP Collection, and we are pleased to be able to present it in the context of such a major exhibition."

Gerda Taro is curated by Irme Schaber, Taro's biographer and an independent scholar working in Stuttgart; Richard Whelan, noted Robert Capa biographer, photo historian, and until his recent death, Curator of the Capa Archive at ICP; and ICP Associate Curator Kristen Lubben. The exhibition will be accompanied by a 184-page ICP/Steidl catalogue, the first major collected document of Gerda Taro's photographs ever published.

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