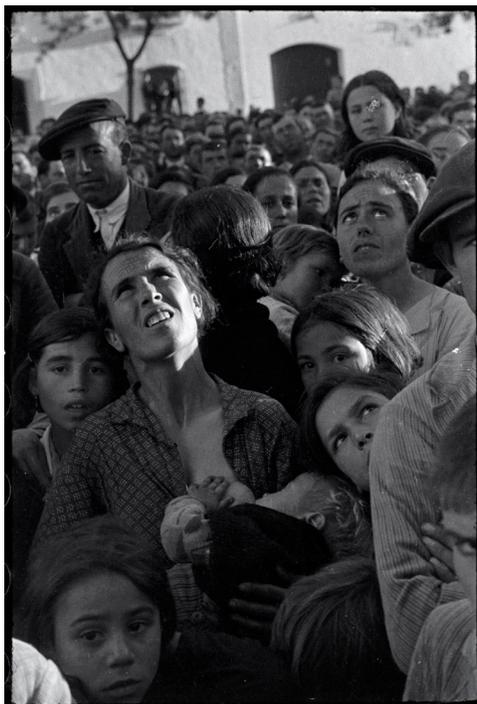


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media release



We Went Back: Photographs from Europe 1933–1956 by Chim

On view from
January 18, 2013
through
May 5, 2013

Media Preview
January 17, 2013
11:30 am–1:30 pm

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Chim, [Woman nursing a baby at a land reform meeting, near Badajoz, Extremadura, Spain], April– May 1936. © Chim (David Seymour)/ Magnum Photos.

We Went Back: Photographs from Europe 1933–1956 by Chim, a new exhibition tracing the life and work of one of the most respected photojournalists of 20th-century Europe, will be on view at the International Center of Photography (1133 Avenue of the Americas at 43rd Street) January 18–May 5, 2013.

This retrospective exhibition follows the development of Chim's career as an intellectually engaged photojournalist, placing his life and work in the broader context of 1930s–50s photography and European politics. Born Dawid Szymin in 1911 in Warsaw, Chim, who after World War II published under the name David Seymour, began his career in 1933 photographing regularly for leftist magazines in Paris, even before his close friends and collaborators Robert Capa and Henri Cartier-Bresson. His most celebrated reportages include the rise of the Popular Front in prewar France; the Spanish Civil War, which he covered alongside Capa and Gerda Taro; the postwar reconstruction of Europe; and the birth of Israel. In each of his images, he combined rare intellectual acumen and emotional intelligence.

“Chim was a keen observer of European political affairs, from the beginnings of the antifascist struggle to the rebuilding of countries ravaged by World War II,” said ICP Curator Cynthia Young, who organized the exhibition. “Although war formed the backdrop to much of his reportage, Chim was not known primarily for his war photography. Through his images of this period of radical upheaval, he emerges as a thoughtful reporter and a creator of elegant compositions of startling grace and beauty.”

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Some of his photographs are well known—a woman nursing a child during a political meeting in Spain, a Polish girl in front of a drawing of her “home” after World War II, Picasso in front of his painting *Guernica*, a wedding in the new state of Israel—but other lesser known images are just as striking—workers at the Vatican waiting for lunch, a tomato garden in the postwar ruins of Frankfurt, children playing on Omaha Beach in front of a half-sunk military boat. These images delineate a sophisticated documentary practice in which Chim infused the informative detail with metaphor.

We Went Back encompasses more than 150 mainly vintage black-and-white prints, previously unseen color prints—including a newly discovered box of transparencies from 1947—and personal ephemera. All of the material in the show is from the collections of ICP and Chim’s nephew Ben Shneiderman, niece Helen Sarid, and extended family.

The Szymin family ran a publishing house in Warsaw that specialized in Hebrew and Yiddish translations of European and American classic novels as well as contemporary Yiddish writers. To prepare for entry into the family business, Chim studied first in Leipzig, then at the Sorbonne in Paris, where he moved in 1932. His career path was diverted when, to cover living expenses, he picked up a camera and began photographing Popular Front events for the major French picture magazine *Regards*. Because “Szymin” was too complicated to pronounce or spell, he proposed “Chim” as a byline and the name stuck. In the spring of 1936, he was sent to Spain to report on the mood of the country following the recent elections. Within months his work was widely published in the international picture press, and he became, along with Capa and Taro, one of the most important photographers of the conflict in Spain.

Back in Paris in 1939, Chim faced terrible prospects as a Jew, a foreigner, and a leftist. In May, he escaped France in a boat with Spanish refugees sailing to Mexico. Later that year, he arrived in New York, where he reconnected with Capa, his sister Eileen Shneiderman, and other friends. He was naturalized as a U.S. citizen in 1942, under the name David Seymour. When World War II broke out, Chim enlisted in the U.S. Army and was assigned to aerial photo reconnaissance at Medmenham, England. He arrived in Paris days after the liberation in 1944. In 1947, he founded the collective Magnum Photos with Capa, Cartier-Bresson, and George Rodger. That same year, he photographed daily life in Allied and Axis territories two years after the war ended for a story titled “We Went Back,” which effectively relaunched his career as a photojournalist. Chim traveled incessantly for the next nine years on assignment for international magazines and special projects, publishing under the byline David Seymour. In 1948, he documented the impact of the war on children across Europe for a UNESCO commission and spent several years observing postwar Italy and its transition to democracy. Beginning in 1951, he traveled regularly to Israel to document the new country and life of the settlers. He was killed while photographing the Suez Crisis in November 1956.

We Went Back is a long overdue reevaluation of Chim’s career, made possible by new scholarship on recently discovered negatives from the so-called Mexican Suitcase and newly catalogued vintage prints. The accompanying exhibition catalogue, published by DelMonico Books/Prestel in association with ICP, contains essays by Roger Cohen, Carole Naggar, and Cynthia Young; more than 150 plates; and an illustrated publication history. Cohen is a columnist for the *International Herald Tribune* and *The New York Times* and has worked as a foreign correspondent in fifteen different countries. Naggar is the author of the Photo Poche *David Seymour* (Actes Sud, 2011). Young most recently organized the exhibition *The Mexican Suitcase: The Rediscovered Spanish Civil War Negatives of Capa, Chim, and Taro* and edited its award-winning catalogue (2010).

This exhibition is made possible by The John and Anna Maria Phillips Foundation, National Endowment for the Arts, The Bernard Lee Schwartz Foundation, Inc., by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council, and with the support of the Polish Cultural Institute New York.

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About ICP

The International Center of Photography (ICP) is the world's leading institution dedicated to the practice and understanding of photography and the reproduced image in all its forms. Through our exhibitions, educational programs, and community outreach, we offer an open forum for dialogue about the role images play in our culture. Since our founding, we have presented more than 500 exhibitions and offered thousands of classes, providing instruction at every level. ICP is a center where photographers and artists, students and scholars can create and interpret the world of the image within our comprehensive educational facilities and archive. Visit www.icp.org for more information.

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