



International Center of Photography

Contact: Communications Department
212-857-0045 info@icp.org

media release



Martin Munkacsi
Fred Astaire on his Toes, 1936
Courtesy the Collection of F.C. Gundlach

Martin Munkacsi: Think While You Shoot!

On view from
January 19 through
April 29, 2007

Media Preview
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9:30 - 11am

RSVP:
info@icp.org
212.857.0045

As she runs toward him on a chilly Long Island beach in November of 1933, Martin Munkacsi snaps a photo of a model dressed in a fashionable swimsuit. In that instant he revolutionizes fashion photography forever. Freeing photographers from the confines of their studios and models from their rigid poses, Munkacsi (1896-1963) introduced fresh ideas and a new spontaneity to the world of fashion imagery. *Martin Munkacsi: Think While You Shoot!*, which is on exhibition at the International Center of Photography (1133 Avenue of the Americas at 43rd Street) from January 19 through April 29, 2007, will offer a rare opportunity to view this and other works by the remarkable yet under-appreciated photographer. The entire range of Munkacsi's work, including the photojournalism from the 1920s and 1930s done in Hungary and Germany, his far-ranging international photo reportage, his sports photography, and fashion photography will be seen in this retrospective exhibition, which was originated by Prof. F.C. Gundlach at the Haus der Photographie in Hamburg.

The ICP presentation of the exhibition *Martin Munkacsi: Think While You Shoot!*, organized by ICP curator Carol Squiers in conjunction with Sandra S. Phillips, Senior Curator of Photography at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, will present over 140 works, including vintage prints drawn from public and private collections along with vintage fashion and news magazines. A large selection of the photographs on view are from the archives of Ullstein Bild, which published many images and photo stories by Munkacsi. Some of his original page layouts from an unpublished book of his work, *The Fabulous World of Munkacsi*, will be exhibited as well.

BACKGROUND

Born Márton Mermelstein in 1896 in Hungary, Munkacsi came from meager beginnings. His father was a painter and sometime magician who changed the family name to Munkacsi in response to rising anti-Semitism. After leaving home at sixteen, Munkacsi began his career as a poet and print journalist in Budapest, conducting interviews and writing personality and gossip stories. He said that he started taking photographs when he needed a picture for a news story on a funeral, and he quickly made a mark as a professional photojournalist and sports photographer. Within a short time he claimed to be the highest paid photographer in Budapest, catapulted by a romantic sense of daring that included strapping himself to the side of a moving race car and suffering serious injury in his quest for an exciting and innovative picture.

By 1927 Munkacsi had set his sights on Berlin, the center of the European publishing world. There he went to work for Ullstein Bild and quickly rose to prominence. He produced a number of photo essays and covers in Germany and around the world for publications such as *Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung (Berlin Illustrated News)*, *Koralle*, and *Die Dame*, the German fashion magazine. One of his images, *Three Boys at Lake Tanganyika*, taken in 1930 on assignment in Liberia, made a profound impression on photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson. "It is the only photo that influenced me," he commented in 1977. "There is such intensity in this image, such spontaneity, such *joie de vivre*, such miraculousness, that I am still dazzled by it, even today."

With Hitler's rise to power, Munkacsi left Berlin and emigrated to the U.S., arriving in New York City in 1934. Carmel Snow, the famous editor-in-chief of *Harper's Bazaar*, and the woman who had encouraged him to try his hand at fashion photography on that windy beach, was waiting for him with a contract. The fresh, energetic photos he took during his years at the magazine continue to influence editorial photography. Richard Avedon paid tribute to Munkacsi's dynamic, memorable style when he wrote that the Hungarian "brought a taste for happiness and honesty and a love of women to what was, before him, a joyless, loveless, lying art."

In conjunction with his *Harper's Bazaar* contract, Munkacsi also handled advertising assignments with *Good Housekeeping*, *Town and Country*, and other top magazines of the day. "Think while you shoot," Munkacsi's motto throughout his long photographic career, referred to his ability to capture fast moving, fluid actions while still considering photographic composition and technique.

For this exhibition, Carol Squiers and Sandra S. Phillips have chosen mainly vintage photographs, supplemented by vintage magazines, to show every phase of Munkacsi's varied career. He was gifted with the ability to combine the reportorial instincts of a journalist with the formal invention and composition of an artist. On view are well-known, groundbreaking fashion and reportage images that inspired Cartier-Bresson and Avedon, as well as many photographs and essays that have not been seen since they were first published. Among them are reportages on the aftermath of German President Paul von Hindenburg naming Adolf Hitler Chancellor of Germany; the fight against malaria in Brazil; and Liberia as the first independent nation in Africa.

After Munkacsi's death, several museums declined the gift of his estate, which was then dispersed. The photographs shown here are drawn mainly from the archives of Ullstein Bild and the collection of Prof. Gundlach, the two largest holdings in Europe on Munkacsi's career. "Finally, and most important of all," the photographer once explained, "in order to take a good photograph of any kind, you must have an idea behind it—a spiritual and intellectual concept of what the picture is going to say."

Martin Munkacsi: Think While You Shoot! for the first time brings a complete range of this important photographer's work to an American audience with a display of images whose influence can be felt throughout the photography world today.

PUBLICATION

The exhibition will be accompanied by an illustrated book of over 300 plates, *Martin Munkacsi*, edited by F.C. Gundlach, with texts by Klaus Honnef and Enno Kaufhold, published by ICP/Steidl, 2006.

SPONSORS

The exhibition is organized in cooperation with the House of Photography – Deichtorhallen Hamburg and kindly supported by Joan Munkácsi and Ullstein Bild. The New York presentation has been made possible with support from Christian K. Keese, Roberta and Steven Denning, and an anonymous donor.