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André Kertész
Clock of the Académie Française, 1929
Gelatin silver print

National Gallery of Art, Washington, Gift of The Howard Gilman
Foundation and The André and Elizabeth Kertész Foundation
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Culture and Communication

André Kertész

On view from
September 16 through
November 27, 2005

Media Preview
September 15, 2005
9:30 - 11am

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The International Center of Photography (1133 Avenue of the Americas at 43rd Street) is pleased to present *André Kertész*, a major retrospective of the work of a photographer who could aptly be described as a “visual poet.” On view from September 16 - November 27, 2005, this will be the most comprehensive exhibition to date in New York City devoted to Kertész’s images.

The exhibition includes over 100 vintage photographs taken throughout Kertész’s life (1894-1985), during which he created some of the most deceptively simple yet poetically compelling pictures ever made. Considered one of the major figures in photography of the twentieth century, Kertész’s images of Hungary, Paris, and New York influenced such photographers as Brassai, Robert Capa, and Henri Cartier-Bresson.

André Kertész covers three distinct periods within Kertész’s seventy-year career: the early photographs of Budapest taken in the 1910s and early 1920s, the studies of Paris in the 1920s and 1930s, and the series of photographs taken in New York from his arrival in 1936 to shortly before his death in the 1980s. Taken together, these photographs reveal Kertész as emblematic of a

generation of twentieth-century artists whose migrations allowed them to rethink the nature and aims of their art as they sought to reconcile their native sensibilities with new cultures.

Born Kertész Andor in Budapest, he began photographing in 1912 after his mother gave him and his brother, Jenő, a camera. The two worked closely as they took and developed their first photographic images. When Kertész served in the Austro-Hungarian army in World War I, he made photographs of soldiers during moments of leisure away from the battlefield and self-portraits in his uniform. He sent some of the prints to his brother back home with instructions detailing where Jenő should submit them, which resulted in the publication of his photographs in Hungary's illustrated press. After returning from the war, Kertész photographed scenes of daily life, as well as numerous portraits of his brother. Other photographs taken during this period depict his circle of friends, which included many painters and graphic artists who sought to find the roots of a new Hungarian identity through a celebration of its rural past and peasant life.

In 1925, Kertész moved to Paris in order to pursue a career in photography. As he struggled to find consistent employment, Kertész spent many hours wandering around Paris, exploring the city through the lens of his camera. He became close to other Hungarian artists in Paris, who influenced the development of his photographic technique. Kertész began to gain recognition as a photographer who poetically captured traditional Parisian life and culture through his images of cafés, fairs, parks, streets, and bridges. These scenes of Paris are some of Kertész's best known images, and were published in such widely-distributed periodicals as *Vu*, *L'Art Vivant*, *Variétés*, and *Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung*.

In 1936, Kertész left Paris for New York, lured by a contract he had received to establish a fashion studio for a picture agency. Soon after his arrival, the contract fell through, but Kertész decided to stay in the United States due to the political climate in Europe during the years prior to World War II. Kertész found work as a photographer for a number of American magazines such as *Harper's Bazaar* and *House and Garden*, but for a number of years after his move he was not satisfied with the public's reception of his work, compared to the recognition he had received in Paris. Nevertheless, he explored New York in a manner similar to Paris—walking the streets and photographing what he saw. These images, including numerous self-portraits, taken during his early years in New York convey Kertész's sense of isolation and loneliness.

Kertész left his job at *House and Garden* in 1962 in order to devote himself completely to his own photographic interests. Health problems prompted this change, and his exclusive preoccupation with his photographic style brought renewed vitality at the same time as the American public increasingly embraced his work. Kertész began reprinting older negatives and was part of a number of well-received exhibitions at such institutions as the International Center of Photography, MoMA, the Art Institute of Chicago, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The ICP connection deserves special note. In preparing his historic "The Concerned Photographer" exhibition, which opened at the Riverside Museum in 1967, photographer Cornell Capa felt it crucial to include the pioneering work of Kertész, a man he considered to have a "sensitive heart and a tender, delicate vision." Some photographs were sold to underwrite the show's costs, and the exhibition owed a good portion of its initial financial health to the renown of Kertész's images. "The Concerned Photographer" was a popular success both in New York City and in its subsequent travels abroad to Paris, London, and elsewhere. This great acclaim ultimately led to Capa's founding of the International Center of Photography in 1974.

During this period, Kertész also worked on book projects and received a number of honors, including the Legion of Honor from the French government. His photographic style continued to evolve, as indicated by the group of Polaroid photographs he made in the late 1970s. He was the first recipient of ICP's Master of Photography award in 1985.

In these final years of his life, Kertész's critical success included plans for the preservation of his work after his death. He arranged the donation of his archive to the French government, which included notes, correspondence, contact sheets, and negatives. These documents were used extensively in the process of creating the *André Kertész* exhibition and writing the texts published in the accompanying catalogue. Kertész also founded The André and Elizabeth Kertész Foundation in New York, dedicated to supporting the arts and preserving his legacy. He continued to explore the world through his camera with his characteristic playful curiosity almost up to his death; he died at home in New York on September 28, 1985.



André Kertész
Poughkeepsie, New York, 1937
Gelatin silver print

Lent by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Ford Motor Company Collection,
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Publication

The exhibition is accompanied by a major publication, *André Kertész*, published by the National Gallery of Art and Princeton University Press. The catalogue includes essays by Greenough, Robert Gurbo, curator, The André Kertész Foundation, and Sarah Kennel, Assistant Curator, National Gallery of Art (316 pp., 4 color, 112 tritone and 135 black-and-white).

Public Programs

Mystery, Melancholy, and Nostalgia: André Kertész's Changing Vision of Paris
Lecture by Sarah Greenough, Curator, National Gallery of Art
Friday, October 14, 7:00 pm

André Kertész: The New York Years
Lecture by Robert Gurbo, Curator of The André and Elizabeth Kertész Foundation
Friday, November 4, 7:00 pm

Both lectures will be held at the School of the International Center of Photography,
1114 Avenue of the Americas at 43rd Street
Free admission for members / \$5 non-members

This exhibition was organized by Sarah Greenough, Curator, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. The New York presentation is made possible with support from The André and Elizabeth Kertész Foundation, Gayle and Robert Greenhill, Bicky and George Kellner, Alex Hillman Family Foundation, Lisa and Harry Elson, and an anonymous donor.