

ANDRÉ KERTÉSZ

Hungarian, 1912-1985

Hungarian born photographer Andre Kertész's brilliant and innovative career began in 1912 and spanned 73 years. Trained for a career in the financial world, Kertész devoted his earnings and free time to exploring his fascination with photography. His early images of family members and the Hungarian countryside reflect his rich interaction with contemporary Hungarian artists during an amazing period of cultural and artistic growth in Hungary. His work reveals a finely developed vision, present from the moment Kertész first picked up a camera. His ability to construct lyrical images, infused with wit and insight would remain a constant throughout his long career.

In 1925, Andre moved to Paris to fulfill his dream of pursuing a career as a photographer. After a period of both artistic and personal struggle, his well-established pioneering vision brought him great success. His approach to the medium helped to define the shape of photojournalism in Europe, and subsequently America. During the next eleven years, Kertész built an extraordinary body of work, influenced by and influencing the many artists with whom he interacted in Paris between the wars.

Kertész left Paris for New York in 1936 to pursue a career change as a studio fashion photographer. From the beginning, his career in the United States proved problematic. His vision, personality and artistic temperament were not suited for the world of studio fashion photography and he failed to find a home in America as a photojournalist. Unable to return to a Europe after the outbreak of WWII, Kertész finally secured a staff position to work for House & Garden magazine in 1947 where he languished for 15 years creating competent but sterile interiors of the homes of the rich and the famous. Although adored by Conde Nast for shaping the look of the magazine, Andre defined this period as his "lost years."

In 1962, at the age of 68, deeply embittered by his lack of artistic and commercial success in America, Kertész broke his magazine contract to pursue his art; consciously redefining himself as an amateur. For the next 23 years, he photographed with the recaptured enthusiasm of his early years in Hungary and France. By the mid 1970's, he had reestablished himself as a major figure in the fledgling fine art photography world.

Just as Kertész's reputation began to soar, his wife and lifelong companion, Elizabeth, died in 1977 after a long battle with lung cancer. Grief stricken by her death, Kertész turned to the Polaroid SX-70 camera to express his pain and sadness. Although these elegant images are quite personal, Kertész's keen sense of timing and delicate composition transforms these photographs into archetypal imagery capable of making deep emotional statements about the world around him.

By the time Kertész passed away in 1985, his work was honored by artists and photographers, collected by major museums and galleries and studied by scholars. With more than 20 books published in his name. His lifelong battle for recognition in America had been won.

Robert Gurbo © 2004
Curator
Estate of André Kertész