



International Center of Photography

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media release

This Is War! Robert Capa at Work

On view from
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through
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Media Preview
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9:30 - 11am

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Page spread from *Picture Post*, December 3, 1938, with Robert Capa's photographs of the Battle of Rio Segre
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Robert Capa is, without a doubt, one of the leading photographers of the twentieth century. His most striking images—of the Spanish Civil War, of the Sino-Japanese conflict, of World War II—all appeared in the pages of the leading picture magazines of the day. This was the context in which Capa worked and was known, and where he honed his skills as a master of the cinematic photo narrative. *This Is War! Robert Capa at Work* is a groundbreaking exhibition that reexamines Capa's innovations as a photojournalist in the 1930s and 1940s. The title of the exhibition is drawn from the headline of a December 3, 1938 *Picture Post* story including Capa's images from the Battle of Rio Segre. Never-before-seen photographs and newly discovered documents will illuminate six of Capa's most important war stories. *This Is War! Robert Capa at Work* is on view at the International Center of Photography (ICP), 1133 Avenue of the Americas at 43rd Street, from September 26, 2007 through January 6, 2008.

“At a moment of conflict across the globe, and a decidedly new era in the making and distribution of war images through digital technology, it seems timely to examine the legacy of the photographer who defined the possibility of the medium with his Leica,” said Willis E. Hartshorn, ICP Ehrenkranz Director. “Robert Capa’s best work continues to serve as a benchmark for photojournalists today, and provides the world with some of the most indelible images of the twentieth century’s key conflicts.”

On September 5, 1936, just a month into the Republican struggle against General Franco’s fascist army, the twenty-two-year-old Capa made the most famous image of the Spanish Civil War, *Death of a Loyalist Militiaman, Cerro Muriano (Cordoba front)*, now generally known as *The Falling Soldier*. This extraordinary picture, first published

in *Vu*, at once became a sensation and was widely published at the time. It subsequently grew in stature to become the ultimate symbol of the Spanish Loyalist fight. However, this iconic image has been the center of much controversy over the context in which it was made. Is it indeed a soldier at his death? Was it staged? This exhibition will show for the first time all the known images taken by Capa on that day and provide new details to help understand the events that resulted in the creation of this iconic photograph.

In 1938, following the tragic death of his photographic partner, Gerda Taro, Capa traveled to China to document that country's war with Japan, which was widely perceived as the eastern front of the international antifascist struggle. He entered the country as film assistant to documentary filmmaker Joris Ivens, who eventually made *The 400 Million*. Based in Hankou, Capa, as part of the film crew, was under tight censorship and could not travel and photograph freely as he had done in Spain. Nevertheless, Capa managed to make dynamic images of the Chinese army and non-combatants, published in *LIFE* and *Regards*, covering the battle of Tai'erzhuang and the air raids on Hankou and including intimate portraits of generals Chiang and Chou En-Lai.



Gerda Taro
[Robert Capa holding an Eyemo movie camera at the Segovia front, Spain], May 1937
© International Center of Photography
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Capa returned to Spain in late 1938 and followed the Republican soldiers as they battled against the encroaching Francoist forces who were attempting to cross the Segre River. The images from the battle on November 7, 1938 represent the drama and emotion of Capa's best war reportage and were published in an unprecedented number of page spreads in *Regards*, *Match*, *Picture Post*, and *LIFE*. Capa's original captions and corresponding vintage prints allow us to trace the battle movements. Unfortunately, the triumph of the day did not change the course of Republican defeat, and in January 1939 Capa photographed the Spanish refugees, fleeing Franco's advancement, on the road from Tarragona to Barcelona and eventually across the French border.

Capa's photographs of the Omaha beach landing in Normandy, France on D-Day, June 6, 1944, have almost become synonymous with the Allied victory in World War II. The legend of his slightly out of focus images of American GIs going ashore increased greatly after it became known that many of his negatives were destroyed in a darkroom accident. The ICP presentation will unite the ten existing images of the beach landing in the original sequence in which they were shot. Many of these prints are the ones made in the *LIFE* darkroom for publication. Also included are never-before-published censor prints of the American troops preparing for the invasion in England and crossing the English Channel. Personal letters that Capa wrote and received following the dramatic coverage will complement the photographs.

Capa claimed that he photographed the last man shot in World War II in Leipzig, Germany in April 1945—a young American soldier killed by the bullet of a German sniper. This famous image published in *LIFE* is a fitting reflection back to *The Falling Soldier* picture. In both, Capa's proximity to war and death unfolds in front of the camera. The exhibition will include Capa's continued coverage in Leipzig of the American soldiers in their pursuit of the remaining German troops in the barren city. These original prints did not pass the censor's office at the time because of the violence that was depicted.



Robert Capa
[Boy soldier, Hankou, China], late March 1938
© Cornell Capa
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Many of Robert Capa's most famous photographs have come to define important historical moments—*The Falling Soldier* of the Spanish Civil War, the American troops landing on D-Day, the last man shot in World War II. But it is important to remember that it was their broad circulation in international picture magazines that first made them iconic. Many of the most visually sophisticated and politically engaged European and American magazines of the mid-century published Capa's photographs of war, including the French *Vu*, *Regards*, and *Match*, England's *Picture Post* and, of course, *LIFE*. Through vintage prints, contact sheets, caption sheets, handwritten observations, personal letters and original magazine layouts, the exhibition looks closely at Capa's working process and the construction of six of his key photo stories. *The Falling Soldier*, 1936; *The Battle of Rio Segre*, 1938; and *Refugees from Barcelona*, 1939, trace his coverage of the Spanish Civil War. *China*, 1938, documents his six-month stay during the Sino-Japanese War. *D-Day*, 1944, and the *Liberation of Leipzig*, 1945, present his photographs of World War II.

The exhibition will be drawn almost exclusively from The Robert Capa Archive at the International Center of Photography, the most comprehensive collection of Capa's work. It contains the complete holdings of the photographer's career, including vintage prints, his personal papers, and related documents.

Biography

Capa was born in Budapest in 1913. A teenager with a precocious interest in literature and radical politics, he was exiled from Hungary at the age of seventeen as a result of his protests against the repressiveness and anti-Semitism of the government. He went to Berlin to study journalism but ended up working as an assistant in the darkroom of an outstanding photojournalistic agency (Dephot), from which he received his first assignment: to photograph the exiled Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky. Early in 1933 Hitler's rise to power forced the young photographer to move on to Paris, where he covered the tumultuous politics of the anti-fascist coalition of liberals, socialists, and Communists known as the Popular Front. In 1936 Robert Capa went to cover the Spanish Civil War. After Spain, he went on to photograph Chinese resistance to the Japanese invasion (1938), Italy, England, France and Germany during World War II (1941-45), the Israeli War for Independence (1948), and the French Indochina War (1954). While photographing French maneuvers in the Red River delta, Capa stepped on an anti-personnel mine and was killed on May 25, 1954.

In addition to the war photographs, Capa also created an enormous number of images that capture more joyful times—the Tour de France and other sporting events, the Paris cafés, and portraits of his many glamorous and successful artist friends including Ingrid Bergman, John Huston, Ernest Hemingway, John Steinbeck, and Pablo Picasso.

Curator

The preeminent Capa scholar Richard Whelan curated the exhibition and authored the accompanying catalogue. He had finished work on both before his untimely death in May 2007. Whelan was Consulting Curator for The Robert Capa and Cornell Capa Archives at ICP. He wrote several major books on Capa: *Robert Capa: A Biography* (Knopf, 1985); *Children of War, Children of Peace* (Bulfinch Press, 1991); *Heart of Spain: Robert Capa's Photographs of the Spanish Civil War* (Aperture, 1999); *Robert Capa: The Definitive Collection* (Phaidon Press, 2001). He also authored *Cornell Capa* (Bulfinch Press, 1992) and *Alfred Stieglitz: A Biography* (Little Brown & Co, 1995), and was the curator of numerous international Robert and Cornell Capa exhibitions.

This Is War! Robert Capa at Work is organized by ICP Assistant Curator Cynthia Young.

Publication

The exhibition will be accompanied by a fully-illustrated eponymous catalogue, published by ICP/Steidl. The 400-page book includes six chapters by Richard Whelan and an introduction by ICP Curator Christopher Phillips.

Sponsors

This exhibition is supported by BNP Paribas and an award from the National Endowment for the Arts.

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