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Arsenal Objekt 19A, 1030 Wien

Henri Cartier-Bresson

Watch! Watch! Watch!

Retrospective at FOTO ARSENAL WIEN

June 28–September 21, 2025

Opening on June 27, 2025

"I am a visual man. I watch, watch, watch. I understand things through my eyes."

Henri Cartier-Bresson

A man jumps over a large puddle to keep his feet dry, his heel practically touching the ground; just a split-second later, the composition reflected on the surface of the water would have been spoiled. The decisive moment is what photography is all about. It is a synthesis of knowledge, sensitivity, technique, form, chance, and pure intuition. The images that are created when these elements coincide are so powerful, unique, and extraordinary that they reveal something about the essence of life. Henri Cartier-Bresson (1908–2004) is considered the founder of modern photojournalism and one of the most famous photographers of the twentieth century.

Cartier-Bresson was one of the cofounders of Magnum Photos in 1947, and his narrative style shaped subsequent generations of photographers. He became an active participant on the street with his camera, establishing the genre of street photography with its focus on interpersonal human

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relationships in everyday life, at work, and in leisure time. As the originator of observing and analyzing human activity in spontaneous moments, Cartier-Bresson used his camera to show how behavioral patterns become visible in fleeting scenes that would have otherwise been lost in the hustle and bustle of the street.

Henri Cartier-Bresson's early oeuvre was strongly influenced by Surrealism and the New Vision movement of the 1920s. Artists such as André Breton and René Magritte shaped his early visual language, in which the ordinary seems mysterious and part of another reality. In the 1930s, he became increasingly interested in photojournalism. As a witness to key events of the twentieth century, he documented numerous political and social events—from the front lines of the Spanish Civil War to the coronation festivities in Great Britain.

A sometimes sympathizer of far-left politics, Cartier-Bresson was especially interested in groups on the fringes of society. Following his escape as a German prisoner of war, he photographed the return of displaced persons in Dessau in 1945. This work marked the beginning of his international career as a photojournalist.

His reports show key events in cultural history and world politics such as Mahatma Gandhi's funeral (1948), the end of the Kuomintang government in China (1949), and life in divided Berlin (1962). He was the first Western photographer to document life in the Soviet Union after Joseph Stalin's death in 1954.

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In addition to political topics, Cartier-Bresson also made portraits of numerous artists, including Coco Chanel and Henri Matisse. Characterized by his sharp eye for the essential and his ability to capture the "decisive moment," his street photography offers a humanistic approach.

The title *Watch! Watch! Watch!* addresses questions of perception that are only possible in photography using a camera: it is the opportunity to capture a tiny moment. With 240 works and numerous magazines and books, this comprehensive retrospective examines the life's work of Cartier-Bresson from the 1930s to the 1970s. In addition to well-known, iconic images, the exhibition presents early pictures that are influenced by Surrealism, photo essays, and portraits, as well as images and films that have never been shown before.

FOTO ARSENAL WIEN is proud to present the first Henri Cartier-Bresson retrospective to be shown in Austria for decades, with works from the holdings of the Fondation Henri Cartier-Bresson in cooperation with the Bucerius Kunst Forum in Hamburg and the Fundación MAPFRE in Barcelona. A publication on the exhibition is available from Hirmer.

More information is available at fotoarsenal.at.

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About FOTO ARSENAL WIEN

FOTO ARSENAL WIEN is Austria's new center for photographic images and lens-based media. Initiated by the city of Vienna in fall 2022, the institution presents and explains contemporary photography in all its forms and uses. FOTO ARSENAL WIEN also organizes the platform FOTO WIEN—Austria's largest, biennial photography festival—and, in a collaboration with the Kunsthalle Wien, the annual Festival Vienna Digital Cultures.

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