



CaixaForum Barcelona

From 31 October 2019 to 8 March 2020

CaixaForum Barcelona explores how photographers and filmmakers have represented the urban landscape and its inhabitants from the early 20th century until today.

Camera and City

“Hold still / Keep going”, said the recently deceased Robert Frank, one of the photographers who has best reflected the urban landscape through his camera. Frank was referring to the rhythm between stillness and movement, between the photographic and the cinematographic gaze. The *Camera and city* exhibition sets out to show this rhythm through the intense relationship photographers and filmmakers have with cities and their inhabitants. Our collective imaginary of the city is formed through the eyes of these artists, who see its streets as an immense stage. Rather than a simple journey through the history of how photographers and filmmakers view the metropolis, *Camera and city* is above all a visual essay in which the history of photography and the moving image interweaves with the social and political history of the city, its euphorias, solitudes, rebellions and struggles. This exhibition is the first result of the agreement signed recently between “la Caixa” and the Centre Pompidou in Paris. It features 244 works by 80 creators and comprises photographs, films, videos and prints from the Centre’s archives, in dialogue with some of the most outstanding collections of Spanish photography. Among the famous international names included in *Camera and city* are Henri Cartier-Bresson, Paul Strand, Man Ray, László Moholy-Nagy, William Klein, Diane Arbus, Brassai and Robert Doisneau; while Joan Colom, Manel Armengol, Pilar Aymerich, Francesc Català-Roca, Leopoldo Pomés and Carlos Pérez de Rozas form part of the contribution from Spain.

Camera and city. Urban life in photography and cinema. Dates: 31 October 2019 to 8 March 2020. **Place:** CaixaForum Barcelona (Ave. de Francesc Ferrer i Guàrdia 6-8). **Conception and production:** “la Caixa”, in collaboration with the Centre Pompidou, Paris. **Curator:** Florian Ebner, head of the Photography Department at the Centre Pompidou; with curatorial advice from Marta Dahó, Doctor of Arts, for the selection of pieces from Spanish collections.

Barcelona, 30 October 2019. The Deputy General Director of "la Caixa" Banking Foundation, Elisa Durán, and the curator Florian Ebner have today presented *Camera and city. Urban life in photography and cinema*, in CaixaForum Barcelona. This is the first exhibition to be hosted as fruit of the agreement signed in July between "la Caixa" and the Centre Pompidou to collaborate in the organisation of joint exhibitions until 2024.

The "la Caixa" cultural programme focuses particularly on basic artistic manifestations that are characteristic of the 20th and 21st centuries. The Foundation's exhibitions on cinema and photography set out to show the influence of images in shaping contemporary sensibility and to highlight the role of the 20th century's leading visual creators in our way of seeing the world. It has organised various exhibitions to this end, dedicated to such great names in photography as Jacques-Henri Lartigue, Eugène Atget, Robert Doisneau, William Klein, Richard Avedon, Diane Arbus, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Willy Ronis, Philippe Halsman and Robert Capa.

"la Caixa" is now taking a further step forward with this new project organised jointly with the Centre Pompidou, a flagship institution in modern and contemporary art and one of Europe's most important sources of photography. The *Camera and city* exhibition explores the intense relationship photographers and filmmakers have had with the modern city throughout the 20th century.

City streets, architecture and inhabitants have been seen through the lens of the photographic medium since the very moment photography was invented. In fact, photography and cinema have evolved simultaneously in the modern city



Martí Llorens, *Final Demolition of a Railway Building on Avinguda d'Icaria 6-8 (trypic)*, 1989. Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Barcelona

and become eyewitnesses to the transformations and most momentous landmarks in its social, political, economic, urbanistic and architectural history. Photographers and filmmakers have created an entire visual imaginary, both still and moving, of the modern city which is today home to more than half of the world's population.

The exhibition is curated by Florian Ebner, head of the Photography Department at the Centre Pompidou, with the collaboration of Marta Dahó, Doctor of Arts, researcher and teacher, who provided guidance on the selection of pieces from the Spanish collections.

With 244 works by 80 artists, the display offers a thematic journey through the history of urban photography using photographs, films, videos and prints covering almost a century, from the decade of the 1910s to early 2010. But far from a simple history of urban photography, this exploration seeks to portray a visual essay on the subject, interweaving the profound social and urbanistic transformations of cities.

The city is seen as a stage showing both recreational and political activity, with the inhabitants as actors in a long story of expansion and decline which has witnessed moments of euphoria, solitude, melancholy and rebellion. The works contain a theatrical dimension: performance, in an artistic sense, and participation in a political sense.



Carlos Pérez de Rozas, *Collection of Mattresses for Refugees*, 20 October 1936. Arxiu Fotogràfic de Barcelona. Barcelona City Council

Several world-famous names in the discipline of photography are featured in the exhibition, such as **Man Ray, László Moholy-Nagy, Paul Strand, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Brassai, Robert Frank, Robert Doisneau, Diane Arbus, Margaret Michaelis** and **Lee Friedlander**. Spanish photography enters into dialogue on equal terms with the international exhibits, presenting works by authors like **Francesc Català-Roca, Leopoldo Pomés, Pilar Aymerich, Anna Malagrida, Agustí Centelles, Carlos Pérez de Rozas, Manel Armengol, Josep Brangulí, Joan Colom, Jorge Ribalta, Xavier Ribas** and **Francesc Torres**.

The city as a stage

Structured into ten areas, the exhibition proposes a renewed vision of urban photography. Its format is chronological but avoids linear progress and resists any idea of building an exhaustive account. The journey begins with a prologue in the form of **Paul Strand's** pioneering image, *Blind Woman* (1916), which the influential American photographer captured with a hidden camera. A clear declaration of intentions of modern photographic realism which embodies the concept of straight photography. The iconic picture enters into dialogue with a silent documentary directed by **Strand** and the painter/photographer **Charles Sheeler** in 1921, *Manhatta*, an emblematic piece of city film, an apotheosis of New York which extols its verticality and steel structures. It also engages with the contemporary diptych by **Martí Llorens** depicting the demolition of buildings during pre-Olympic Barcelona.



Paul Strand, *Blind Woman*, New York, 1916.
Centre Pompidou, Paris, Musée national d'art moderne – Centre de création industrielle
© Aperture Foundation, Paul Strand Archive
© Centre Pompidou, MNAM-CCI/Philippe Migeat/ Dist. RMN-GP

The vertical city is one of the themes that appears at the beginning of the display, corresponding to the end of the First World War. This was a period of great euphoria regarding the city and of profound faith in modernity, technology and progress. Views of the Eiffel Tower are paradigmatic of the time, with images by **Man Ray**, **Denise Bellon**, **Germaine Krull**, **André Kertész** and **Jaroslav Rössler**.

The 1930s have a special place in this itinerary, being a decade in which the photographers' gaze is directed towards members of the proletarian population who wandered the streets. Characters of the night are of particular interest, as exemplified by one of the most renowned names in the exhibition, **Brassaï**, or **Margaret Michaelis**, who depicts Barcelona's Chinatown in 1932. The nineteen-thirties were also marked by events in Republican Spain and the Spanish Civil War, a subject to which an entire area of the display is dedicated, with works by **Henri Cartier-Bresson**, **Pere Català Pic**, **Agustí Centelles**,

Gabriel Casas and **Carlos Pérez de Rozas**. This section also analyses how the Civil War was reflected in foreign media through photojournalism.

The archives of the Centre Pompidou are rich in post-Second World War humanist and existentialist photography. This was a time of splendour for street photography, with the rise to fame of such international figures as **Robert Doisneau**, **William Klein** and **Robert Frank**, and **Joan Colom**, **Francesc Català-Roca** and **Leopoldo Pomés** in Spain.

As from the 1960s, photography abandoned its "picturesque" perspective and photographers' viewpoint turned increasingly critical. Moreover, the city streets once again became the setting for rebellion and protest, above all after May 1968. The repression of the final years of Francoism and during the Spanish transition to democracy was reflected in the works of photographers like **Manel Armengol**, **Tino Calabuig** and **Pilar Aymerich**.



Mishka Henner, *Noordeinde Palace, The Hague, South Holland*, 2011. Centre Pompidou, Paris, Musée national d'art moderne - Centre de création industrielle © Mishka Henner © Centre Pompidou, MNAM-CCI/Philippe Migeat/Dist. RMN-GP

The exhibition closes with the approaches of contemporary artists and photographers. These reflect the horizontal city, the city in the new definitions of public space, the suburbs. And they highlight the impact platforms like Google Earth and Google Street View have on our view of the urban landscape.

Works in the exhibition that belong to the Centre Pompidou come, specifically, from the Cabinet de la Photographie, which specialises in modern, humanist and contemporary photography; from the Service du Cinéma Expérimental; the Service des Nouveaux Médias, and with respect to the documents and publications, from the Kandinsky Library.

Spanish public and private photography collections that have lent works for this exhibition include the Arxiu Nacional de Catalunya, the Arxiu Fotogràfic de Barcelona, the Arxiu Històric del Col·legi d'Arquitectes de Catalunya (COAC), the Fundació Foto Colectania, the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA), the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya (MNAC), the Museo Nacional

Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (MNCARS), the Fons CRAI Biblioteca Pavelló de la República (Universitat de Barcelona), the Museo Universidad de Navarra and "la Caixa" Foundation's own Collection.

Accompanying the exhibition will be a publication with texts by Florian Ebner, Marta Dahó and Philippe-Alain Michaud. In addition, "la Caixa" has prepared a complete programme of activities based around the display, which includes a cycle of talks entitled *Variacions sobre la ciutat* (Variations on the city), coordinated by the art historian Carmen Rodríguez Pedret PhD, Theory and History of Architecture, ETSAB-UPC.

As part of the exhibition, the public will also find the *Urban Scenes* family and educational space. Drawing inspiration from the photographers in the display, families will be able to compose scenes from urban life, selecting a location, the characters and the urban elements, to carry out experiments involving framing and focus.

First exhibition organised jointly with the Centre Pompidou

In July 2019, "la Caixa" and the Centre Pompidou signed an agreement to jointly organise six exhibitions in CaixaForum centres over the coming years. This framework agreement will enable the Spanish public to discover the French museum's major collections through six presentations that will tour "la Caixa" cultural centres.

These displays will mean that art lovers in Spain will finally be able to see masterpieces from one of the two most renowned modern and contemporary art collections in the world and unquestionably the most important in Europe, with more than 120,000 works dating from 1905 to the present day. Most of the pieces chosen for the six exhibitions will be on view in Spain for the first time.

In addition to *Camera and city. Urban life in photography and cinema*, further projects in the context of this agreement will include an exhibition about the architect and designer Jean Prouvé, another on the works of Sonia and Robert Delaunay, presentations centred on biomorphism and experimental photography, and an exhibition based around the design collections of the Centre Pompidou. These six exhibition projects break down into a total of 19 displays that will be seen in CaixaForum centres in Madrid, Barcelona, Zaragoza, Palma, Girona, Tarragona and Lleida. The programme is also anticipated to arrive to the new CaixaForum Valencia.

This agreement can be added to the partnerships "la Caixa" Banking Foundation has established over recent years with numerous major cultural institutions. If the alliances with the British Museum in London, the Musée du Louvre in Paris and the Museo del Prado in Madrid help us understand ancient cultures and view the work of the great masters of painting, the agreement with the Centre Pompidou now places us squarely in modern times.

AREAS OF THE EXHIBITION

Vertical city: the euphoria for modernity in the 1920s

The 20th century begins in upheaval caused by the First World War. However, from 1918 faith in modernity, technology and progress seems implacable in the Western world. As rhythms of life turn steadily more intense, cinema and photography become the drivers of this acceleration. Rather than simple instruments of analysis they come to be virtual solutions to adapt the human physiology to the new maelstrom affecting every ambit of human life. This euphoria is expressed in one particular direction: verticality (from the bottom up) and the materiality of the new constructions in metal and steel. As a consequence, the United States is now the model to be followed, and in photography too. The photographer **Germaine Krull** chose *Métal* (Metal) as the title of her famous anthology, a collection dedicated to the new architectures, the cranes in the port of Rotterdam and the Eiffel Tower. Lightening and fireworks become the metaphorical sparks of the new role played by electricity. The cinematographic symphonies of large cities invade cinemas; the renowned constructivist artist **László Moholy-Nagy** reflects on celluloid the elegance of the *Pont Transbordeur*, a steel transporter bridge in Marseilles, while the architecture of radio towers becomes an authentic visual demonstration of the arrival of a new urban culture.

The city's new actors: between picturesque environment and the proletariat

Once the First World War had ended, numerous European countries installed new democratic, republican systems. However, these tended to be fragile and often threatened by economic crises and conflict between former bourgeois elites and the working class. Following the 1920s economic crash, soaring and plummeting fortunes give rise to a new social permeability which feeds the anxieties and hopes associated with a society in movement. This in turn raises the interest of authors, artists, filmmakers and photographers in the new figures of the urban landscape. Photographers of the late 19th century, often amateurs who until then had focused their gaze on the bourgeois upper class and grand avenues, begin to turn their lenses towards the proletarian population living in the suburbs, or to characters of the night. An example of this may be found in **Brassaï**: he creates an imaginary repertoire of beings that could easily have been taken from *The Threepenny Opera* by Bertolt Brecht. The flip side of this euphoria for modernity is to be found in the solitude of the individual lost in the great city, the place of the mysterious encounters that make up the "socially picturesque" style of Pierre Mac Orlan. The former Soviet Union is the setting in which the utopia of a socialist society begins to take shape, but is rapidly transformed into dystopia by the militarisation and forced uniformity of public life.

The militant city: Spain in the 1930s

Why does 1933 Spain become a huge experimental stage for a young 25-year-old French surrealist artist, painter and photographer, on which he will be able to develop his art? Like **Henri Cartier-Bresson**, there are other French and European

intellectuals, left-wing writers, artists and photographers who travel to Spain to describe the social tensions and make reports on the Popular Front's victory in the 1936 Spanish election just prior to the Civil War. Still more significant would be the influx of young photographers that would arrive with the International Brigades to fight against Fascism in the war which had more media coverage than any other before it. Their images would be published alongside those of the most renowned Spanish and Catalan photographers of the time, such committed Republicans as **Pere Català i Pic** and **Agustí Centelles**, or experienced photojournalists of the standing of **Gabriel Casas** and **Pérez de Rozas**. Going beyond the icons and singular images of the war, the perspective of this area focuses on all the different ways in which photographs were published in those days. Printed in the pages of French magazines and leaflets, on postcards, in albums and special editions distributed by the Republican Generalitat's Propaganda Commissariat, photography ceases to be simply a witness, to become increasingly more a weapon on the city streets.

The humanist and existentialist city: post-war reconciliation

As from 1945, Paris becomes the capital of humanist photography. It is a place of meeting with the other, of reconciliation with life following the experiences of war. However, rather than attempting to clarify what had separated humankind in the preceding decades, the gaze seems to be directed towards those common points shared by "The Great Family of Man" to quote the title of the most ambitious photographic exhibition of the time, organised by the New York City MoMA. The street becomes the main stage of 1950s photography: a theatrical setting, impregnated with sweet melancholy on some occasions and abounding in heightened existentialism on others. Among the unique figures on the European scene we find **Joan Colom** who, under the shadow of the Franco dictatorship, searches Barcelona's Raval neighbourhoods for a different vision, at the same time both sensual and sculptural. Unaffected by war, in the United States, we once again find the nervous, almost aggressive vitality of the new metropolis in the film by **Helen Levitt** and the photographs of **William Klein**, in which the children's gestures and neon advertising signs proclaim "the law of the strongest" as the credo of the capitalist city. In response to this new canon emerges the subjective research of **Robert Frank** and **Lee Friedlander** into the place of the individual in the modern city.

The critical city: investigations into the social situation

Following the poetic realism and humanist photography of the 1950s, the 1960s bring a change in perspective, but not in subject-matter. The picturesque and imaginary characters that wander the lonely streets of Paris are replaced by modern outcasts, those who have been abandoned: authentic products of the modern, competitive society. These are people who have not managed to survive the experience of the big city, a situation reflected in the film by **Peter Emanuel Goldman**, which reveals a sinister "urban symphony" far removed from the euphoria of the "roaring twenties". As a consequence of growing interest in social sciences and humanities, the photographer's gaze becomes increasingly sensitive to a more complex understanding of modern

societies. This phenomenon is particularly evident in the United States due to the arrival of critical intellectuals, artists and photographers from post-war Europe. The Austrian-born photographer **Lisette Model** becomes an influential teacher at the New School for Social Research in front of a young generation of photographers, a stage which culminates in 1967 with the pioneering exhibition at the MoMA entitled *New Documents*.

The rebel city

The political imbalances arising out of the new world order established after 1945, the Cold War and colonial regimes detonate the outbreak of the huge intergenerational conflict of the late 1960s. The work of photographers from the Magnum agency, founded in 1947 by survivors of the Second World War and the Holocaust and later made up of professionals from around the world, builds a veritable iconography of the city in rebellion. Demonstrations against the Vietnam war and the bourgeois imperialist society that perpetuates it unite young Americans and Europeans in 1967 and 1968. They are protesting against the social order that dates back centuries and has become obsolete and patriarchal. In 1976, Spanish youth takes over this struggle following the death of Franco. Though separated by different moments in time, the concepts follow a common thread and photographers, newly qualified journalists and activists tend to either join the movements or be sympathetic to them.

The city as a stage

The reflection conducted around urban photography with a direct approach to the subject – “spontaneous, sincere photography” – has for decades been the indisputable aesthetic of photography of modernity, as exemplified by **Paul Strand’s** *Blind Woman*. With the passage of time, cinematographic aesthetics become a point of reference, but it is not until 1976 that reference is made by A. D. Coleman to a “directed method”, in other words, a photographic practice similar to those employed by film directors. Narrating a story with a sequence of images is an idea that has always been present in cinematographic language, but this is now to be applied to staging day-to-day lives, to transforming the streets into a film set. Such staging also enables the creation of images of a different complexity, erasing the borders between snapshot, *tableaux vivant* (living picture) and portrait, while at the same time playing with genres and creating images of great intensity. The new approach is perceived as a release of photographic naturalism and from the dictatorship of an authenticity which has never come to exist in its purist form. In parallel, it is in the staging of some of its traditions that photography may be able to question itself about its own history.

The horizontal city

In contrast to the euphoria of the 1920s when cities never ceased to grow in height, the second half of the 20th century finds perception of the city changing to be characterised by horizontal expansion to the suburbs and semi-urban zones. An exception to this phenomenon is Berlin, whose empty centre exhibits the scars of war and barren wasteland of a divided city. From this moment on, it is the suburbs that capture the

attention of photographers interested in the “no places” of modern society. How to deconstruct and retro-develop a city becomes the new goal of architects. The failure of urban and social utopias conceived in the nineteen-sixties and seventies is evidenced in the demolition of entire neighbourhoods. Immigrants, concentrated in the outskirts of the city, now become part of the urban population, to which they contribute with their popular culture, their poverty and their riches as vital resources.

The reflexive city: negotiation of the public space

How to describe this other, more abstract and detached gaze upon the street established as from the 1970s, which sets out to understand how the new social structures function? A gaze which transforms the old street into a modern public space? The way a democracy organises public space, how it gives freedoms to the identities of its individuals or how it accommodates community life become an indicator of a society’s maturity. Rather than the photographers, it is now the artists who, instead of limiting themselves to documenting urban life, try to get involved in it, to enter into contact with passers-by and break the anonymity of human relations. They increasingly seek to explore the abstract notion of public space and any possible margins of manoeuvre. They study forms of political organisation, cultural events and popular manifestations that challenge expressions of the collective memory in which the relationship of a society with its past is revealed.

Global and virtual city

The 21st century metropolis is no longer an autonomous cosmos with its inhabitants, social classes, culture and counterculture, but is now closely connected to the world. In the age of globalisation and the Internet, physical and virtual cities coexist, and the online stock market crash has consequences at street level. As in the 1920s, once again we have the birds-eye view. Google Earth and Google Street View have created the new “scopic regimes” of our times (Jonathan Crary), a new type of surveillance of the public space that far exceeds that of the local authority’s CCTV cameras. The outskirts of the world become more interesting than the old Western centres, as we can now read the future of cities, with their flows of migrants and refugees and those who eke out a living by doing little jobs in the shadows of sunlit streets. And in addition, the parabolic antennas bring to mind the utopias and promises of the huge radio towers of modern times.

Camera and City

31 October 2019 to 8 March 2020

CaixaForum Barcelona

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Times

Monday to Sunday, from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m.

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