

ANDRÉ KERTÉSZ

(b. 1894, Budapest, Hungary; d. 1985 New York, USA)

Hungarian born photographer André 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, Kertész moved to Paris to fulfill his dream of pursuing a career as a photographer. After a short period of both artistic and personal struggle, his 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.

In an increasingly competitive art world, Kertész found his career began to fade in the mid-1930s. With his wife Elizabeth, he left Paris for New York in 1936 in hopes of reinvigorating his art. From the beginning, his career in the United States proved problematic. His vision, personality, and artistic temperament never found a home in American photojournalism. Unable to return to Europe after the outbreak of WWII, Kertész struggled as he was not able to find steady work through freelancing. He finally secured a staff position working for *House & Garden* in 1947 where he languished for 15 years creating architectural photographs. Although adored by Conde Nast for shaping the look of the magazine, Kertész 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-1970s, 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, Kertész turned to the Polaroid SX-70 camera to express his pain and sadness. Although the elegant images that he produced are quite personal, Kertész's keen sense of timing and delicate composition transform these photographs into archetypal imagery capable of making deep emotional statements about the world around him. He created a powerful and voluminous body of work.

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 had been won.

Robert Gurbo
Curator of the Estate of André Kertész