

BRUCE SILVERSTEIN

For Immediate Release

The Visual Language of Modernity: The Early Photographs of André Kertész

May 25 – August 5, 2023

Bruce Silverstein Gallery proudly presents *The Visual Language of Modernity: The Early Photographs of André Kertész*. This exhibition showcases over fifty original prints of exceptional quality, each taken between 1914 and 1936; featuring iconic and never-before-seen works, explores the intersection between two significant periods of the artist's output: works created in Hungary between 1914 and 1925 and later in Paris between 1926 and 1936, firmly establishing André Kertész at the forefront of Modernist photography.

André Kertész (1894 – 1985), widely considered one of the most influential photographers of the 20th century, is known for using innovative camera angles, unexpected lighting, and up-close cropping that often abstracted his subjects. His images teeter between the real and the surreal through pioneering compositions infused with lyricism and wit that would remain a constant throughout his long career. The photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson recognized Kertész's unique ability to capture seemingly impossible chance encounters and later employed such visual alchemy in his own work, defining them as "decisive moments." This complex and rich visual language created by Kertész, born out of Modernity at the onset of World War I, and later refined during his time in Paris, has influenced generations of photographers to follow and has been employed without attribution by millions of image makers to this day.

"We all owe something to André Kertész." Henri Cartier-Bresson

The Visual Language of Modernity begins its journey in Hungary, with images taken by Kertész between 1914 and 1925. As a young boy, Kertész longed to be creative and a part of the arts; he tried his hand at music and writing poetry, went to museums, and attended the theatre. However, he lamented in his diaries that he would never be a good judge of art because he processed something through his soul. Upon graduation from high school, Kertész received a camera as a gift from his mother when he began photographing everyday life in his native Hungary, shooting in and around Budapest and the surrounding countryside, often photographing his brother Jenő. In these early works, we see the artist experimenting with formalist compositions, and at times, with unusual effects, finding meaning in often the most ordinary of subjects. This exhibition includes a striking example: *Group of four men in trunks sitting on a ramp*, taken in 1914 at the onset of war declared by Austria-Hungary on Serbia. In this photograph, the 19-year-old Kertész, who enlisted in the war, directed his lens at fellow soldiers engaging in leisure rather than capturing those ravaged by the destruction of war. However, the composition takes center stage, featuring a complex grid of rectilinear elements interspersed with light and shadow.



Group of four men in trunks sitting on a ramp, Gelatin silver print, printed c. 1914

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Twelve years later, André Kertész moved to Paris to pursue a career in photography, quickly gaining recognition and was soon featured regularly in magazines and exhibited internationally alongside well-known artists such as Man Ray and Berenice Abbott. As a young artist inspired by the bustling metropolis, Kertész found himself at the center of the thriving Parisian art scene, rubbing elbows at local brasseries, art galleries, and studios with some of the most celebrated artists of the modern era like Marc Chagall, Alexander Calder, Fernand Léger, Constantin Brâncuși, and Piet Mondrian. Within three years, he produced such masterworks as *Satiric Dancer* (1926), *The Fork* (1928), *Meudon* (1928), and dozens of other images that have become classics of modernist photography.

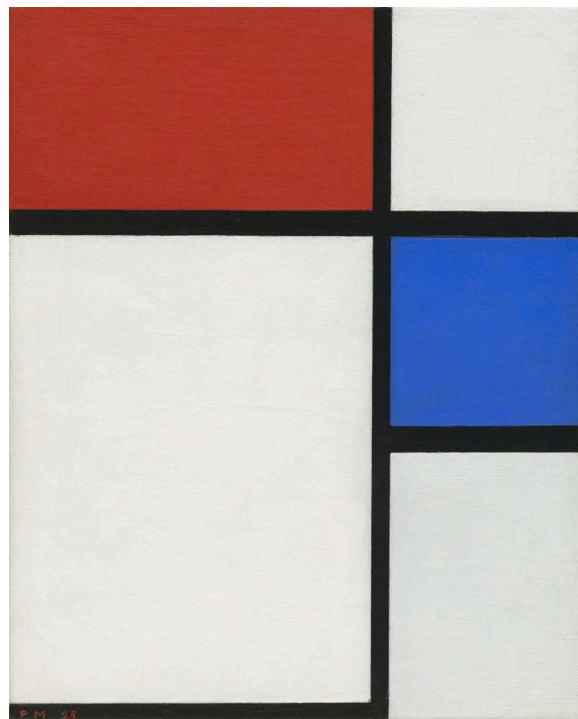
However, one photograph that will forever represent the apex of his artistic powers is *Chez Mondrian* (1926), perhaps the finest print featured in this exhibition, and created soon after Kertész arrived in Paris, at a time when he had not yet mastered the French language. This photograph serves as a visual communication between Kertész and the elder Mondrian, who had emigrated from Holland, enabling the former to convey his admiration and understanding of the painter's linear compositions. While *Chez Mondrian* pays homage to Mondrian's visual style, Kertész's earlier work, such as *Group of four men in trunks sitting on a ramp*, suggests that the photographs' construction was a natural extension of the ideas that Kertész had been formulating over a decade earlier: ideas based on strict vertical and horizontal geometries that Kertész developed three years before the founding of the de Stijl movement in 1917 by Piet Mondrian and Theo van Doesberg. *Chez Mondrian* was originally a gift from the artist to his brother and generously loaned by the artist's estate for this exhibit.

The Visual Language of Modernity: The Early Photographs of André Kertész invites visitors to reexamine the artist's works through the prism of contemporary culture. Although many factors influenced Kertész during a pivotal time in history, this exhibition demonstrates that his Modernist vision was integral to how he viewed the world from a young age.

The Visual Language of Modernity: The Early Photographs of André Kertész opens Thursday, May 25th, with a reception from 6 – 8 pm. For more information, please contact inquiries@bruceilverstein.com or go to www.bruceilverstein.com.



André Kertész (1894-1985)
Chez Mondrian
Gelatin silver print tipped to period vellum, printed c. 1926



Piet Mondrian (1872-1944)
Composition No. 2 with blue and red
Oil on Canvas, 1929
Collection: The Museum of Modern Art, New York