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**SFMOMA PRESENTS**

***MARTIN MUNKACSI: THINK WHILE YOU SHOOT!***

From May 12 to September 16, 2007, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) will present the exhibition *Martin Munkacsi: Think While You Shoot!*. Bringing together more than 125 vintage photographs as well as magazines and layouts from the 1920s through the mid-1940s—many of which have not been on view since their original publication—this career retrospective serves to reaffirm Martin Munkacsi’s invaluable contribution to the history of photography. Organized by F. C. Gundlach at the Haus de photographie, Hamburg, the exhibition completes an international tour in San Francisco in a focused presentation overseen by SFMOMA Senior Curator of Photography Sandra Phillips.

Born in 1896, Munkacsi pioneered the art of enlivening photography with action and energy. From the start of his career in the 1920s, when he worked as a sports photographer in his native Hungary, Munkacsi rejected the posed shot, preferring that his subjects move, and that he move with his subjects, handling his heavy camera equipment as if it were portable. (Munkacsi favored the formal composition and specificity afforded by his cumbersome large-format camera.)

Around 1927 Munkacsi relocated to Berlin, then the center of publishing activity, and joined a thriving community of innovative photographers, artists, and photographic reporters. There Munkacsi and his peers capitalized on publishers’ shift away from hand-drawn illustration in favor of photography. Of the many talented freelance photographers available, Munkacsi was the only one to be hired as staff for the preeminent German photo weekly *Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung (BIZ)*. Munkacsi distinguished himself with a



Martin Munkacsi, *Lovely autumn: the last warm days of sunshine*, ca. 1929; Courtesy Ullstein Bild; © Joan Munkacsi

dynamic style of spontaneous reportage that captured fleeting moments—a soccer ball leaving the foot of a sportsman, a dancer twirling in mid-air, a motorcyclist racing through a puddle, children at play—and suggested stories extending beyond the picture plane. Munkacsi's pictures also pointed to the major cultural undercurrents of the period between the two World Wars. Not long after he photographed the “Day of Potsdam,” which marked the start of Nazi dictatorship, anti-Semitic policies bore down on the Jewish-run *BIZ*, and Munkacsi, like many of his Jewish colleagues, fled Germany.

Upon immigrating to the United States in 1934, Munkacsi took a job as a fashion photographer at *Harper's Bazaar* under Editor-in-Chief Carmel Snow. His work during this period revolutionized American fashion photography and remains that for which he is best remembered in the United States. Rebuking the conventional approach, which used the model as a lifeless mannequin or “clotheshorse,” Munkacsi presented the model outdoors and in action—running, swimming, driving, and enjoying the physical freedom, and engineering marvels, of the modern world. His model was the “all-American” athletic woman, a real person with a real identity.

In 1940 Munkacsi signed what was then the most lucrative photography contract to-date, for a *Ladies Home Journal* series titled “How America Lives.” Munkacsi shot 65 of the 78 sequences, which portrayed everyday life in America during World War II.

Arranged roughly chronologically, *Think While You Shoot!* represents all phases of Munkacsi's 40-year career, elucidating his extraordinary range—from the glamour of Hollywood to daily life in Africa—and spotlighting his unrelenting commitment to capturing physical vitality in elegant and innovative framing. In addition to politically-charged photographs for *BIZ* and cutting-edge fashion spreads for *Harper's Bazaar*, highlights of the exhibition include photographs from Munkacsi's travels to Liberia, Brazil, Egypt, and Algeria and portraits of such fascinating cultural figures as Fred Astaire (in an image that appeared on the cover of *Life* magazine in 1936), William Randolph Hearst, Mae West, Jean Harlow, Claudette Colbert, Gary Cooper, Frida Kahlo, and Diego Rivera.

Henri Cartier-Bresson once selected Munkacsi's *Boys running into the surf at Lake Tanganyika* (1930) as a favorite image, which he credits as having sparked his own photographic career (The photograph of African youths running into the surf communicates an exuberant sense of life that is a hallmark of Munkacsi's work.). Despite his considerable contributions to photography, however, Munkacsi has been largely forgotten—partially the result of a fragmented archive. Following his death in 1963, two major U.S. art museums turned down the opportunity to purchase his oeuvre, resulting in the scattering and presumed destruction of many works. By reuniting examples from throughout his career, *Martin Munkacsi: Think While You Shoot!* offers the public a glimpse at Munkacsi's extraordinary output and reaffirms his standing as a preeminent figure in the history of photography.

*Martin Munkacsi: Think While You Shoot!* is accompanied by a fully illustrated hardcover catalogue of the same title (\$65; 416 pages) published by Steidl-Verlag, Göttingen and edited by F. C. Gundlach with essays by Klaus Honnef and Enno Kaufhold.

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**Museum hours:** Open daily (except Wednesdays): 11 a.m. to 5:45 p.m.; open late Thursdays, until 8:45 p.m. Summer hours (Memorial Day to Labor Day): Open at 10 a.m. Closed Wednesdays and the following public holidays: New Year's Day, Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, Christmas. The Museum is open the Wednesday between Christmas and New Year's Day.

**Koret Visitor Education Center:** Open daily (except Wednesdays): 11 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.; open late Thursdays, until 8:30 p.m. Summer hours: Open at 10 a.m.

**Admission prices:** Adults \$12.50; seniors \$8; students \$7. SFMOMA members and children 12 and under are admitted free. Thursday evenings after 6 p.m. admission is half-price. The first Tuesday of each month admission is free.

SFMOMA is easily accessible by Muni, BART, Golden Gate Transit, SamTrans, and Caltrain. Hourly, daily, and monthly parking is available at the SFMOMA Garage at 147 Minna Street. For parking information, call 415.348.0971.

**Visit our Web site at [www.sfmoma.org](http://www.sfmoma.org) or call 415.357.4000 for more information.**

The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art is supported by a broad array of contributors who are committed to helping advance its mission as a dynamic center for modern and contemporary art. Major annual support is provided by the Koret Foundation Funds, Evelyn and Walter Haas Jr. Fund, and Grants for the Arts/San Francisco Hotel Tax Fund. KidstART free admission for children 12 and under is made possible by Charles Schwab & Co. Inc. Thursday evening half-price admission is sponsored by Banana Republic.

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