

Concerned Photojournalism

By Meryle Secrest

Cornell Capa, the brother of Robert, said it was inevitable that they should both become photographers. "We were Hungarians and nobody else spoke our language."

Both have traveled around the world as distinguished photojournalists and published books of their work. Robert Capa won almost legendary fame as a war photographer before he died a violent death in Indochina in 1954, at the age of 41.

His younger brother, now 51, has assembled the work of five photographers, "The Concerned Photographer," which opened yesterday in the Arts and Industries Building of the Smithsonian Institution. A book on the same work with the same name is being published this week by Grossman Publishers.

The four other photojournalists in the exhibition are Werner Bischof, David (Chim) Seymour, Dan Weiner and Leonard Freed.

Only Freed is still alive.

Bischof, on assignment in South America, was driving down a winding road in the Andes when the brakes of his truck gave way. Seymour was killed by an Egyptian machine-gunner four days after the armistice at Suez. Weiner died in a plane crash.

Each is known for his commitment to his work. Their objective parallels that of Lewis W. Hine, an early photojournalist: "I wanted to show the things that had to be corrected. I wanted to show the things that had to be appreciated."

Cornell Capa has founded the Fund for Concerned Photography in order to emphasize the role of the photographer as witness and to encourage other young men to follow this role.

"We also want to make sure that the work of the dead men does not die. This is the main point," Capa said. On Page C2 is an interview with Capa and Freed.

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CAPA CORNELL

1969

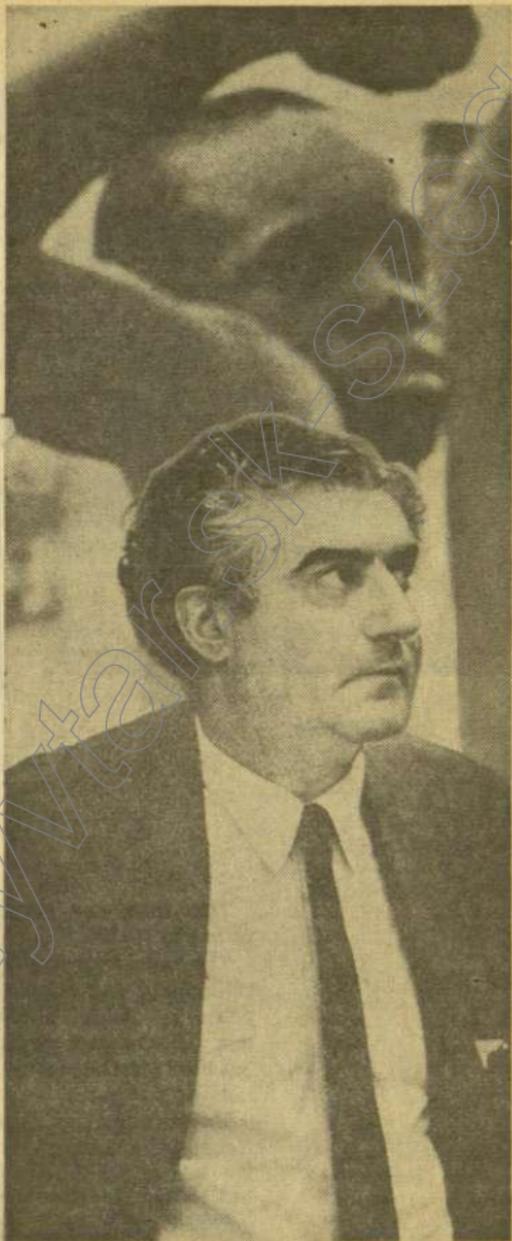
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SZEGED



Contrasts in Israel: A proud father shows off his son in 1951, and a postwar Sinai scene of a skeleton in 1967.

Why do you place such emphasis on not cropping
photograph? What difference does it make?
Freed: I suppose it's a matter of honesty. When I
am involved in the situation, I react in this situation at
this time and visualize it then. What comes afterwards,
cropping the picture, is an entirely different moment
in time when I am in an entirely different frame of



By Margaret Thomas—The Washington Post

Cornell Capa stands amid photos.

mind. It is a question of training oneself to think and react quickly, to judge the situation and react to it.

Capa: Cartier Bresson said that the instantaneous fusion of all the elements in the view finder was the moment of truth. After, if you crop the photograph, you have changed the graphic truth. It's like cheating in a game. You missed the picture, so you fix it afterwards.

Freed: The viewer needs to believe in the integrity of the photographer.

Capa: The whole idea of the concerned photographer is the photographer of conscience and what one must foster in the new generations of photographers is respect for the truth in photography which is very hard to maintain. Because the taste makers, the fashion magazines, the newspapers, demand new images and they don't want real images, simply because they are so normal. They want grotesque distortions that stunt the idea and mislead the mind.

Q: Are all of these men photographers who have been involved in extreme situations?

Capa: Yes. The idea for this exhibit came about when I was asked to organize a group show, an idea I did not particularly like. While I was on vacation in Mexico with my wife, I suddenly realized that all these men had this quality of concern in common. I also realized that the work of the men who had died was no longer being shown and was in danger of being totally forgotten. Not to be able to see it was a complete negation of the reasons why you want to be a witness to our time.

Q: Why does a photographer want to be a witness?

Freed: A photographer is put into all kinds of environments that are alien to him. It's an educational process and he has to give himself some kinds of answers. He has to become involved.

Q: But what's the point of documentation? How can one prevent all these senseless deaths?

Capa: This is where we come in, dammit. Take Bischof's photographs of famine in India, which led to congressional appropriations. Or take the picture made by Eddie Adams of AP who snapped, and I use the word advisedly, the famous photograph of the police chief in Saigon killing the guy, which did so much to turn Americans against the war in Vietnam. Should he prevent the action, or take the picture? Which one will do the most good? Which is more powerful, the revolver or the camera? "Through the distress of others, the concerned photographer shows his own," Don Underwood said.

Freed: Photographing a tragedy makes you realize you are responsible to those you photograph. I photographed a mine tragedy in Belgium. How do you justify your entering the private homes of the miners' families at the moment of their grief? Your justification has to be that something better must come of this; otherwise what you are doing has no value. It's subhuman.

"Why does a photographer want to be a witness?"



Seymour's photo shows amputee children playing soccer in Italy in 1949.

Capa: A photographer has to commit himself. I was in Ecuador in 1964 during a student riot protesting a military junta, when the riot started. The students were on one side, the military on a palace balcony and a road separated them. As an American, wearing three cameras, I could stay with the students or go to the balcony. What do I do? Like an idiot I take the viewpoint that I am inviolable. I walk into the street between them, where I can be shot at from both sides. And you are safe because you think so. Until you get killed. And that's the end of the legend.

Q: How then do you define the photographer's goals?

Capa: I refer you to an essay by Frank Gibney: "In a famous essay about Joseph Conrad, the American poet and critic, Robert Penn Warren, wrote a definition of the philosophical novelist. He described a man 'for whom the urgency of experience, no matter how vividly and strongly experience may enchant, is the urgency to know the meaning of experience.' . . . The concerned photographer is the philosophical novelist of this age. Professor Warren's definition could fit Robert Capa or

David Seymour or Andre Kertesz as truly as it fit Conrad."

Q: What are the limits of photography?

Freed: In photography, what I am really exploring is my own feelings. We can't know people we meet. We don't know our wives. We don't know ourselves. And photography is a surface medium; it shows the outsides of things, the veneer. You find the only depth is within yourself. And in this manner, you retain your own balance, your own equilibrium.

Capa: He's pointing out that artists are very selfish people; they are really examining their own psyches. He's looking at people acting out their drama, in order to understand his own. It's all reversed. What does it mean to me?

Once I tried to approach the subject of hazing in an English public school through the eyes of one of the kids being hazed. And I found I couldn't do it. It was a total failure. Eventually, I looked at it through my own eyes. The sooner you find out your own view is what matters, the faster you are off the mark.

