

CAPA, CORNELL

# A Few Words From the 'Anonymous'

1975

## Jacqueline Onassis

By Dorothy McCardle

Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, the former First Lady, has an article in the current *New Yorker* magazine—but no byline.

The issue of Jan. 13, on the newsstands this week, has a reporting job in the unbylined "Talk of the Town" section by Mrs. Aristotle Onassis on New York's new International Center of Photography.

Mrs. Onassis just sent in her type-written manuscript "cold" without consulting William Shawn, the *New Yorker* editor, in advance.

"It was delivered to us by messenger," says Shawn. "It's a straightforward little piece of reporting, very good and very usable with a little editing."

Mrs. Onassis' piece comes third in the magazine, after "Notes and Comments," which always leads the "Talk of the Town," and an item about Washington, D.C. Her contribution is

headed: "Being Present." She describes an interview she had with Karl Katz, chairman of special projects at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, and later her meeting with Cornell Capa, director of the photography exhibit.

Mrs. Onassis, as the former Jacqueline Bouvier, was the "Inquiring Photographer" on the now defunct *Times-Herald* in Washington for 18 months in 1952 and 1953. Thus she writes for *The New Yorker* as a trained newspaperwoman who understands photography first hand.

She will be paid at "regular rates, which run into the hundreds rather than the thousands," says Shawn.

The *Talk of the Town* is staff written, but occasionally outsiders submit something considered so good that it is bought and used without identification of the author. Others who have appeared in *The Talk of the Town*—anonymously include Francine Du Plessix Gray, the fiction writer; James Ivory, the film director, and Jamaica Kinkaid, the author.

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## THE TALK OF THE TOWN

Mrs. Onassis' Talk of the Town piece, reprinted with permission of The New Yorker, runs as follows.

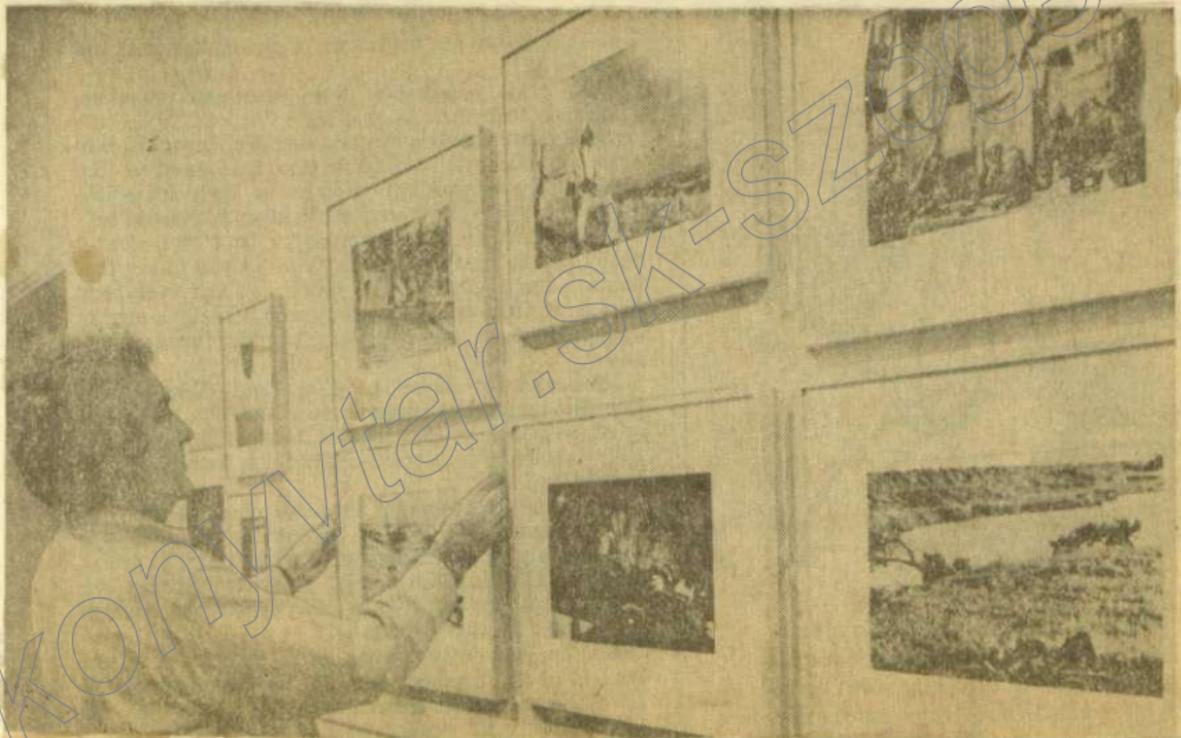
The newest museum in town is the International Center of Photography, which occupies the mansion that formerly served as headquarters for the National Audubon Society, on the northeast corner of Fifth Avenue and 94th Street. The week before the recent gala opening, we talked with Cornell Capa, its executive director, and with Karl Katz, one of the moving

spirits behind it. The center will exhibit, teach and publish photography, and will set up archives for the preservation of photographs. It grew out of the International Fund for Concerned Photography founded in 1966 by Mr. Capa, who was one of the most eminent photographers for Life. Like the fund, the center has been dedicated to the memory of three photojournalists who were killed in the 1950s while on picture assignments: David Seymour (Chim), Werner Bischof and Robert

Capa (Cornell's older brother). All this we learned from Mr. Katz, an ebullient man of 45, who's chairman for Special Projects of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, while lunching with him in the staff dining room of the Met.

"The Center will be concentrating on photography as a means of communication rather than as art," Mr. Katz told us. "It is interested in committed photojournalists in documentary photography, which no longer has an outlet, now that the big picture magazines have folded. Documentary photography could be said to fall into two broad categories." Mr. Katz had brought a pile of books to lunch and had put them on the chair next to him. He reached for one. "The Concerned Photographer," edited by Cornell Capa, and rifled through it. "Here. This says it better than I can. It's from Cornell's introduction." He pointed to the lines "Lewis W. Hine, an early humanitarian-with-a-camera, may have stated it best: 'There were two things I wanted to do. I wanted to show the





*Cornell Capa, brother of the late photographer Robert Capa, hangs some of his brother's famous pictures at the International Center of Photography.*

things that had to be corrected. I wanted to show the things that had to be appreciated." Mr. Katz shut the book and continued, "Well, that's what it's all about. Now, at last, Cornell has a place of his own. It's been a long time coming. This brilliant, absolutely loveable man, a Hungarian who murders the English language, has never had the recognition he deserves, because he hasn't wanted it. He's always doing things for other people. He's put together exhibitions for all the great museums—for the Library of Congress, the Jewish Museum, the Metropolitan. Anytime those places want a guest photography exhibit, they call Cornell and he drops everything. And he's done 11 books—some of his own pictures, and some he's edited. Those books are the best. This guy's been a friend, a father figure, a teacher to anyone who cares about photography. Some of us felt we couldn't let him go on dispersing his talent, his energy. He had to have a place where he could teach, and where he could reach more people. Somehow we got a little seed money from foundations. Cornell found this lovely house and now—well, you'll see."

Accompanied by Mr. Katz, we left the Metropolitan and walked up the park side of Fifth Avenue in bright sunlight. We stopped at the corner of 94th Street and looked across at the facade of what is still known as Audubon House, a six-story Georgian building of red brick, with shiny black shutters.

Lovely it is. We crossed the street and looked at the metal plaque by the front door:

#### Landmarks of New York

Audubon House  
Delano and Aldrich were the architects of this Georgian style mansion, completed about 1915 for Willard Straight.

Later owners were Judge Elbert H. Gary and then Mrs. Harrison Williams from whom the National Audubon Society purchased the property in 1952.

Plaque erected in 1964 by the New York Community Trust.

We walked into a circular, marble-floored entrance hall. A young girl with long hair and glasses sat at a table, talking into a telephone cradle on one shoulder, and filling envelopes with both hands. As she talked, a second phone kept ringing. She greeted Mr. Katz with a smile, and we headed up a broad marble stairway. On the second floor, we emerged into a long, high-ceilinged, wood-paneled room with a fireplace at one end and a handsome parquet floor. This was once the Straights' reception room and is now called Gallery 2. There we found a young man holding a metal rod. Mr. Katz introduced him to us as Bhupendra Karia, an Indian photographer, who had been working with Cornell Capa for two years and is now the Center's associate director. As we stood talking, Mr. Capa walked in—a sturdy man of 56, with bushy gray hair, bushy eyebrows and a smiling face. "There you are," he said. "The baby is about to be born. We will make it for the opening. Come. I want to show you everything."

Mr. Capa put one arm around Mr. Katz and the other arm around us, and began to steer us through. "We have put the house back exactly as it used to be," he said. "When we moved in, there were many partitions, which we have taken down. See the paneling? We will never hurt it. We designed special boards to hang pictures from, with metal rods." He pointed to the rod that Mr. Karia was holding. "A genius who was produced by Karl Katz thought these up. But, like all geniuses, he made the rods so that they



wouldn't fit the holes. Right, Bhupendra?" Mr. Karia smiled.

Gallery 2 and a large wood-paneled room adjoining it were to be used for one of the opening exhibitions, "Apropos U.S.S.R. (1954 and 1973)."

made up of photographs taken by Henri Cartier-Bresson on two trips to Russia. On the opposite side, the reception room opened into a wood-paneled library, which had a large number of folding chairs stacked against the walls, and three tall windows facing Fifth Avenue. "Here we will have lectures, audio-visual, conferences," Mr. Capa said.

Mr. Katz looked at his watch and said he had to get back to the Metropolitan. Mr. Capa clapped him on the back, said goodbye, and then led us upstairs to a large paneled room on the third floor. We both sat down in directors' chairs of red canvas, drawn up to a Formica-topped table. This room, Mr. Capa explained, was to be used for master classes. Some of the leading photographers would come here once a week and conduct seminars. He went on to say that the Center would be the only museum in the country devoted exclusively to photography, except for the International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House, in Rochester, which was established in 1947. "Modern Art and Whitney, they show photography, of course," he said. "They buy a few negatives of the great photographers, but what happens to the rest? I became concerned about



*Jacqueline Onassis arrives at the International Center of Photography last November.*

that when, around the same time, my brother and Bischof and Seymour died. All the negatives, all their life's work—I could save them. But what happens with the other photographers? The family puts their photographs in the attic, and one day they get thrown out. All the history of the 20th century will be in photographs—more than in words."

Capa stood up. "Come. I want you to meet some of the young people who are with me here," he said. "Some of them come all the way from California. The door will be open from 11 in the morning to 11 at night—maybe later. Who knows, when a lot of photographers get going? There will always be coffee."

We went back down to the reception-room gallery. Capa introduced us to a baby, held by a pretty dark haired young woman. "This is Colin Burroughs, 3½ weeks," Capa said. "And his beautiful mother, Wendy. His father runs the slide machine and works in the dark room."

Downstairs, in the entrance hall, the long-haired young girl was still simultaneously talking on the telephone and filling envelopes. A bearded young man was squatting on the floor beside

ner with another telephone and an open telephone book. He was introduced to us as David Kutz. He said, "Today a telephone operator, tomorrow an electrician, next day a carpenter, maybe one day a photographer."

We went back to Gallery 2. The Cartier-Bresson exhibition was being hung. On a wall between two windows was a 1954 photograph of young Russians dancing in a club under giant posters of Lenin and Stalin. Mr. Karia was staring at it. A young girl approached him with two labels for the picture. "They are chocolate colored with white writing," she said. "Which color do you want—milk chocolate or bittersweet?" Mr. Karia chose bittersweet. Capa stood in front of the Cartier-Bresson photograph appraisingly for a moment, and then told us that Cartier-Bresson had recently given an interview to *Le Monde* in which he stated that painting, not photography, had always been his obsession, and that he drew every day and now considered his drawings much more important than his photography. The interview had caused an uproar in France. *Le Monde* had asked several such photographers to respond, and had printed the responses of, among others, Gilles Peress and Marc Riboud. "Cartier-Bresson treated Riboud like a son," Capa went on. "He was his mentor, and now he tells him that photography doesn't mean anything. So now everybody is responding. Bresson is like that. Psst, psst, psst—the steam gathers, then the lid blows off." He smiled. "The whole thing is so French: love, hate, respect, disrespect, answers, re-answers. So now we have these vibrations crossing the ocean."

From the library we could hear a measured voice on a loud speaker. It was Cartier-Bresson. "That's the Master's voice," Capa said to us, pointing through the door. "You should go and watch his audio-visual. We will have it running all through his exhibition."

We went into the library and sat down on a folding chair. The room was dark and empty. Cartier-Bresson spoke, in almost unaccented English: "Sometimes people ask, 'How many pictures do you take?' Well, there is no rule. Sometimes, like in this picture in Greece, well, I saw the frame of the whole thing and I waited for somebody to pass. That is why it develops a great anxiety in this profession . . . always waiting. What is going to happen? . . . Quick, quick, quick, quick, like an animal and a prey . . . I am extremely impulsive . . . a bunch of nerves, but I take advantage of it . . . You have to be yourself and you have to forget yourself . . . and poetry is the essence of everything . . . The world is being created every minute and the world is falling to pieces every minute . . . It is these tensions I am always moved by . . . I love life. I love human beings. I hate people also . . . I enjoy shooting a picture, being present. It's a way of saying, 'Yes! Yes! Yes! . . . and there's no maybe.'"

