Lisette Model

9 February – 6 June 2010
Lisette Model (1901–83) is a key figure in the history of photography, both for her highly personal style and for her work as a teacher. This exhibition brings together her most representative work. Alongside the familiar pictures from New York, the images of Sammy’s Bar, Coney Island or the streets of the Lower East Side, it features some more unusual images such as photographs from the “Pedestrians” series or pictures of the San Francisco Opera, the bars in Reno and Belmont Park Racetrack, New York. Lisette Model thought of the camera as a detection device, something that makes it possible to see what habit often hides. Concentrating on the frantic, compelling tempo of urban life, she was fascinated by people in the street and the clientele of nightclubs. As a photographer she followed her instincts, then cropped her negatives in the laboratory to eliminate any superfluous details and thus obtain her direct, powerful and richly human images. Berenice Abbott spoke of Model’s “fearless eye.” Without a doubt, her work was also unconventional, a quality that gained her the admiration of colleagues such as Ansel Adams and Edward Steichen, as well as the editors of the illustrated magazines that published many of her pictures.

**Early life**

Elise Amélie Félicie (known as Lisette) Stern was born into a wealthy Viennese family in 1901. In 1903 her father changed the family name to Seybert in response to the anti-Semitism then spreading through Austria. He died in 1924 and two years later Lisette’s mother returned to her native France, where she settled in Nice. Lisette moved to Paris. A deeply musical young woman – Arnold Schönberg had been among her teachers in Vienna – she began taking singing lessons with the soprano Marya Freund. However, for reasons that remain unclear – in a number of interviews she mentioned problems with her voice – she eventually gave up singing and concentrated on photography as a way of earning a living. She learnt her craft in part from her friend Rogi-André, the first wife of André Kertész, whom she later credited with providing the only “photography lesson” she ever acknowledged: “Never photograph anything you are not passionately interested in.” Another mentor, whom she befriended in 1937, was Florence Henri. Model took her first photographs between 1933 and 1938, in Paris and on the Côte d’Azur. Despite her lack of technical training, these pictures are already distinctive. From the outset, her vision is highly personal, at once very direct yet respectful of her subjects, while her lens is drawn to opposing poles of society: the haves and have-nots. Made in Nice in 1934, her famous “Promenade des Anglais” series is an uncompromising portrait of the wealthy, leisured bourgeoisie on the Côte d’Azur. It was also in 1934 that she met Evsja Model, a painter of Russian origin, whom she would marry three years later.
Recognition
En 1938, Evas and Lisette sailed to New York. Fascinated by the city, and eager to escape from the anti-Semitism and social conflicts of Europe, they made it their home. The powerful impact of the city is evident in many of Model’s series, including “Reflections” (1939–45), in which her camera focuses on shop windows and the people and skyscrapers reflected in them, “Running Legs” (1940–41), evoking the haste of men and women in the street, and “Pedestrians” (around 1945), in which she picks out individual men and women from the crowd.
Model was undoubtedly at her most prolific in the years from 1942 to 1949. This was when she took her famous photographs of the bustling bars and nightclubs of the Lower East Side and Bowery. She also made several trips out to the West Coast, where she produced portraits of intellectuals, artists and fellow photographers (Henry Miller, Dorothea Lange, Edward Weston, Imogen Cunningham, etc.) and worked on one of her most incisive series, showing spectators at the San Francisco Opera.
Also in the early 1940s, Model met the editor of PM’s Weekly, Ralph Steiner, who decided to publish pictures from her “Promenade des Anglais” series in his magazine, and then hired her as a contributing photographer. Steiner introduced her to Alexey Brodovitch, art editor of Harper’s Bazaar, who, as her first commission, in 1941, published Coney Island Bather, a portrait of a fleshy, jovial swimmer at the seaside. This would become one of Model’s most famous photographs, and was the first of many in a productive and stimulating relationship with the journal. Model also published in US Camera, the journal edited by Ansel Adams, who became a friend. Again, it was probably Steiner who introduced her to the Photo League, where she met Berenice Abbott, and had her first American solo exhibition, from May to June 1941.
Teaching
It was through the intermediary of Ansel Adams that, in August 1949, Lisette Model was asked to teach the course in documentary photography at the California School of Fine Arts in San Francisco. This first experience of teaching encouraged her to do more and in 1951 she joined the New School for Social Research at Columbia University, where she would work for the rest of her life, among colleagues such as Alexey Brodovitch, Josef Breitenbach and Berenice Abbott. Initially, she continued working as a photographer at the same time. Among the subjects she photographed in the 1950s were the New York Jazz Festival (1954–56) and the horse races at Belmont Park (1956). Eventually, however, she devoted herself fully to teaching.
Model used to tell her students to “photograph from your guts.” She would get them to share her passion for photography by taking them to work in the streets of New York. Noteworthy graduates of her classes include Diane Arbus, Rosalind Solomon, Bruce Weber and Larry Fink. Some of her former students spoke of the vision she conveyed, which was all about focusing on the object of passionate interest rather than worrying about how the image would be perceived; about getting close to the subject and...
taking an interest in the world around us, breaking with the conventions and routine that keep us from seeing what is around us; about living in the present and reacting spontaneously to the freshness of the moment.

Lisette Model gave her last talk on photography at the Comfort Gallery, Haverford College, only a few weeks before her death at the age of 82.

**Chronology**

1901
10 November: birth of Lisette Model in Vienna, Austria.

1918–20
Takes music lessons, notably with Arnold Schönberg.

1924
Death of her father.

1926
Moves to Paris.

1933
Gives up music. Gets her first camera and meets Rogi-André.

1934
Starts work on her “Promenade des Anglais” series in Nice. Meets artist Evsa Model, a Constructivist painter of Russian origin.

1935
Images from “Promenade des Anglais” are published in Regards.

1937
Marries Evsa Model

1938
Moves to New York.

1939
Begins her “Reflections” series.

1940
Ralph Steiner publishes selections from “Promenade des Anglais” in PM’s Weekly.

1941
First solo show at the Photo League. Start of her working relationship with Alexey Brodovitch, who publishes her photographs in Harper’s Bazaar.

1942–50
The most productive years of Model’s career. She produces famous images of New York nightspots (Sammy’s Bar, Nick’s, Gallagher’s) and travels to San Francisco, where she meets Ansel Adams.

1951
Becomes a teacher at the New School for Social Research, Columbia University, a position she will hold for the rest of her life.

1955
End of her collaboration with Harper’s Bazaar.

1957
Diane Arbus is among her students.

1968
Made an honorary member of the American Association of Magazine Photographers.

1975
Meets Gerhard Sander, grandson of photographer August Sander, who becomes her dealer and takes responsibility for printing her photographs.

1978
She is guest of honour at the Rencontres Internationales de la Photographie d’Arles, along with Izis and William Klein.
1979
Aperture published a monograph about Lisette Model with layout design by Marvin Israel and text by Berenice Abbott.

1981
“Lisette Model: A Retrospective” is put on at the Museum of Art in New Orleans, and tours to the Folkwang Museum, Essen (Germany) the following year.

1982
Lisette Model is awarded the Gold Medal for Photography by the City of Paris.

1983
4 March: gives her last lecture at the Comfort Gallery, Haverford College.
30 March: she passes away in New York, aged 82.

1990
A major retrospective is put on at the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, curated by Ann Thomas.

Exhibition-related events

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<td>tour of the exhibition with curator Cristina Zelich</td>
<td>Tuesday 9 February, 7 pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Flâneries and Street Photography”: thematic tour by a Jeu de Paume lecturer</td>
<td>Tuesday 23 February, 7 pm</td>
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symposium
The heritage of Lisette Model and Street Photography

In order to elucidate Lisette Model’s approach to photography, the contributors will place her work in its historical, geographical and artistic context, with particular emphasis on McCarthyism and Model’s response to the city of New York. This will provide a context for her perception of the medium and practice of Street Photography. Contemporary photographers will then present their own work in relation to today’s issues of documentary photography.

directed by Samuel Kirszenbaum, photographer and historian of photography, with Lili Corbus, historian, Max Kozloff, art critic, Ann Thomas, curator at the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Guillaume Herbaut, photographer, and Gilles Coulon, photographer

Saturday 13 March, 2.30 pm
cinema
Around Lisette Model: movies in Paris and New York

film programmes
Accompanying the Lisette Model exhibition, a selection of films ranging from anonymous archive efforts to avant-garde and experimental work will be shown daily in the auditorium. The films will echo some of Model’s own themes, such as Paris in the 1920s and 30s, life in the streets or fields, racetracks, zoos, cafés, cabarets, nightlife, Nice and the Promenade des Anglais, New York in the 1940s and 50s with its streets, skyscrapers, the shadows of passers-by, shop windows and their reflections, and the worlds of jazz and contemporary dance.

programme 1:
Anonymous filmmakers in Paris and New York
Les Gosses de la Butte, 1920, 4’
Paris New York, 1925, 10’
La Rue Mouffetard, 1930, 7’
Le “Gay Paris” vu par l’Amérique, 1930, 9’
Jardin d’acclimatation, 1937, 7’
Les Boulevards en 1909 et en 1929, 1929, 10’
Luna Park, Coney Island by Night, 1900, 2’
Ellis Island, 1920, 9’
Skyscraper Symphony, 1929, 9’
■ daily at 2 pm
(except 13 March)

programme 2:
1. Nice: À propos de Nice by Jean Vigo, France, 1930, 23’
2. Valeska Gert, pioneer of contemporary dance:
Kaléidoscope : Valeska Gert, rien que pour le plaisir, rien que pour le jeu [Kaleidoskop Valeska Gert] by Volker Schlondörff, 1977, 63’
■ Sunday 14 February, 14 March, 11 April and 16 May, 3:30 pm

programme 3: Filmmakers in New York
Manhattan by Paul Strand and Charles Sheeler, United States, 1921, 7’
A Bronx Morning by Jay Leyda, United States, 1931, 11’
Manhattan Medley by Bonney Powell, United States, 1931, 10’
Broadway by Day by George M. Cohan, United States, 1932, 10’
■ daily at 4 pm
(except 14, 27, 28 February, 13, 14 March, 11 April et 16 May)

programme 4: Paris and New York in the films of directors linked with the early avant-gardes and experimental cinema
Balançoires by Noël Renard, France, 1928, 29’
(27 February only)
Montparnasse. Poème du café crème by Eugène Deslaw, France, 1930, 15’
Les Nuits électriques by Eugène Deslaw, France, 1930, 9’
In the Streets by Helen Levitt, United States, 1952, 16’
On the Bowery by Lionel Rogosin, United States, 1956, 65’ (to be confirmed)
■ Saturday 27 February and Sunday 28 February, 4:30 pm
films and talks

session 1: *Les Hommes, le dimanche* [Menschen am Sonntag] by Robert Siodmak and Edgar G. Ulmer, Germany, 1930, silent, 74’
A mixture of narrative and reportage, documentary and avant-garde, this silent film combines the heritages of Soviet and French cinema with the photographic lessons of German New Objectivity. Retrospectively, it can be seen as heralding Italian Neorealism and the French Nouvelle Vague. It is a small masterpiece, simple yet subtle, about the life of the German capital before the advent of Nazism.

with an introductory talk by Raymond Bellour, writer, emeritus senior research fellow at the CNRS and member of the editorial board of Trafic. After the film, Raymond Bellour will sign copies of his new book, *Les Hommes, le dimanche de Robert Siodmak et Edgar G. Ulmer (Yellow Now, 2009):*
Tuesday 9 February, 7 pm

second screening: Sunday 14 February, 5.30 pm

session 2: *Dans les rues* by Victor Trivas, France, 1934, 80’
Born in Germany, Victor Trivas emigrated to France and then to the United States in 1940. He is the maker of the most German of pre-war French films, “In the Streets,” which presages the poetic realism of Marcel Carné. In order to win over his beloved, a young man takes part in a burglary, but this goes badly wrong.

with introductory talk by writer, critic and curator Dominique Païni: Tuesday 16 February, 7 pm

second screening: Sunday 21 February, 5 pm

session 3: Surprise film by Elia Kazan on the theme of McCarthyism and the FBI investigation of Lisette Model in 1952

with introductory talk by writer, film critic and journalist Michel Ciment: Tuesday 23 February, 7 pm

This programme is organized in collaboration with:

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bookshop

- discussion and book signing with Serge Lemoine and Marianne Le Pommeré, author of a new book on Evsa Model (Éditions Norma)
Friday 26 March at 7 pm

exhibitions
9 February – 6 June 2010
■ Lisette Model
■ Esther Shalev-Gerz: Regarding Your Image
■ Regarding Me!?
■ Satellite programme, Mathilde Rosier:
Find circumstances in the antechamber
(Trouver des circonstances dans l’antichambre)
to 30 March 2010
■ Virtual Space, Samuel Bianchini: All Over
on www.jeudepaume.org and in the resource room
31 March – 17 November 2010
■ Virtual Space, Agnès de Cayeux: Alissa, discussions
with Miladus, Elon/120/211/501
on www.jeudepaume.org and in the resource room

Tours for individual visitors*
with guides from Jeu de Paume: Tuesday to
Saturday at 12.30 am

Family Tours*
Saturday at 3.30 pm

forthcoming exhibitions
29 June – 12 September 2010
■ Bruno Serralongue
■ William Kentridge
■ Satellite Programme, Klara Liden

* Admission free on presentation of exhibition ticket (valid on the day of
purchase only) and for members; reservation required for family tours:
01 47 03 12 41/ serviceeducatif@jeudepaume.org