

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART PRESENTS THE FIRST MUSEUM SURVEY OF GRETE STERN AND HORACIO COPPOLA, INFLUENTIAL AVANT-GARDE ARTISTS AND FOUNDERS OF MODERN LATIN AMERICAN PHOTOGRAPHY

From Bauhaus to Buenos Aires: Grete Stern and Horacio Coppola

May 17–October 4, 2015

The Edward Steichen Photography Galleries, Third Floor

Press Preview: Thursday, May 14, 2015, 9:30–11:30 a.m.

NEW YORK, February 3, 2015—The Museum of Modern Art has organized the first major exhibition to examine the individual accomplishments and parallel developments of two of the foremost practitioners of avant-garde photography, film, advertising, and graphic design in the first half of the 20th century: Grete Stern (German, 1904–1999) and Horacio Coppola (Argentine, 1906–2012). ***From Bauhaus to Buenos Aires: Grete Stern and Horacio Coppola*** will be on view May 17 through October 4, 2015, and features more than 300 works gathered from museums and private collection across Europe and the Americas—many of which have never before been exhibited in the United States. These include more than 250 vintage photographs and photomontages, 40 works of original typographic design and award-winning advertising materials, 26 photobooks and periodicals, and four experimental 16mm films. *From Bauhaus to Buenos Aires* is organized by Roxana Marcoci, Senior Curator, and Sarah Meister, Curator; with Drew Sawyer, Beaumont and Nancy Newhall Curatorial Fellow, Department of Photography.

Stern and Coppola were united in their exploration of a modernist idiom, yet despite their relationship as husband and wife (from 1935 to 1943) they pursued this goal along remarkably original paths. Having started their artistic careers within the European avant-garde of the late 1920s and early 1930s, Stern and Coppola produced their major body of works in Argentina, where they thrived amid a vibrant milieu of Argentine and émigré artists and intellectuals. As harbingers of New Vision photography in a country caught up in the throes of forging its own modern identity, their distinctly experimental styles led to their recognition as founders of modern Latin American photography.

The earliest works in the exhibition date from the late 1920s to the early 1930s, when both artists began their initial forays into photography and graphic design. After beginning her studies in Berlin with Walter Peterhans, who became head of photography at the Bauhaus, in 1928 Stern met Ellen (Rosenberg) Auerbach and together they opened the pioneering studio *ringl + pit*, specializing in portraiture and advertising. Named after their childhood nicknames (Stern was *ringl*; Auerbach was *pit*), the studio embraced both commercial and avant-garde loyalties, creating proto-feminist works. The exhibition presents a large number of photographs, graphic design materials, and advertisements by the duo that explored alternative models of the feminine. Defying the conventional style of German advertising photography in this period, *ringl + pit* emerged as a dissident voice that stirred the interest of critics, artists, and consumers.

Coppola's first photographs, made in Buenos Aires in the late 1920s, reveal an optical curiosity completely out of sync with prevailing trends in Argentina. Instead of using the camera to accurately render the details of the visible world, Coppola instead explored its potential to complicate traditional understandings of pictorial space. Like Man Ray and László Moholy-Nagy, he was interested in the effects of light, prisms, and glass for their visual and metaphoric potential, and he photographed his native city from unexpected perspectives akin to Germaine Krull's images of Paris from the same decade. These early works show the burgeoning interest in new modes of photographic expression that led him to the Bauhaus in 1932, where he met Stern.

Following the close of the Bauhaus and the rising threat of the Nazi powers in 1933, Stern and Coppola fled Germany. Stern arrived first in London, where her friends included activists affiliated with leftist circles, and the exhibition presents her now iconic portraits of German exiles, including those of playwright Bertolt Brecht, actress Helene Weigel, Marxist philosopher Karl Korsch, and psychoanalyst Paula Heimann. After traveling and photographing throughout Europe, Coppola joined Stern in London, where his modernist photographs depicting the fabric of the city alternate between social concern and surrealist strangeness.

The exhibition's third gallery includes films that Coppola produced in Berlin, Paris, and London during these years. The first of these films, *Der Traum (The Dream)*, bears the strongest relationship to Surrealist filmmaking, while his next two films, *Un Muelle del Sena (A Quay on the Seine)* (1934) and *A Sunday on Hampstead Heath* (1935), are increasingly ambitious, using the film camera alternately as a still camera and for its unique capacity to pan across a scene and to capture action in urban environments.

In 1935, Stern and Coppola married and embarked for Buenos Aires, where they mounted an exhibition in the offices of the avant-garde magazine *Sur*, announcing the arrival of modern photography in Argentina. Following the exhibition's successful critical reception, their home became a hub for artists and intellectuals, both those native to Argentina and the exiles continuously arriving from a war-torn Europe. The fourth gallery in *From Bauhaus to Buenos Aires* presents Coppola's photographic encounters from the city's center to its outskirts and Stern's numerous portraits of the city's intelligentsia.

In 1936, Coppola received a career-defining commission to photograph Buenos Aires for a major publication celebrating the 400th anniversary of the city's founding. Coppola used the opportunity to construct his own modern vision of the city, one that would incorporate the celebration of the local and his appreciation of the city's structure inspired by the architect Le Corbusier. Concurrently, Coppola made his final film, *The Birth of the Obelisk*—an ode to Buenos Aires and its newly constructed monument. The film combines dynamic shots of the city with sequences of carefully constructed stills, demonstrating in six-and-a-half minutes a vibrant, confident mix of influences, from Moholy-Nagy and Krull to the Concrete art movement in Argentina to films by Walter Ruttmann, Charles Sheeler, and Paul Strand.

Throughout the 1940s, Stern took incisive portraits of artists and writers, many of whom were aligned with the international antifascist cause and the emergence of an emancipatory feminist consciousness. These included playwright Amparo Alvajar; socialist realist painters Antonio Berni, Gertrudis Chale, and Lino Eneas Spilimbergo; poet Momy Hermelo; and graphic designer Clément Moreau. Among Stern's numerous other subjects were poet-politician Pablo Neruda, abstract painter Manuel Ángeles Ortiz, and writer Jorge Luis Borges.

The exhibition concludes in the mid-1950s, at the end of Juan Domingo Perón's era, with a large presentation of Stern's *Sueños (Dreams)*, a series of forward-thinking photomontages that she contributed on a weekly basis to the women's magazine *Idilio (Idyll)* from 1948 to 1951. In *Dream No. 1: Electrical Appliances for the Home*, an elegantly dressed woman is converted into a table lamp that waits to be turned on by a male hand, using electricity as a sexual pun to expose feminine objectification. In *Dream No. 24: Surprise*, a female protagonist hides her face in shock as she confronts a larger-than-life baby doll advancing toward her. Debunking fantasies about women's lives, Stern plumbed the depths of her own experience as a mother and artist to negotiate the terms between blissful domesticity and entrapment, privacy and exposure, cultural sexism and intellectual rebellion.

SPONSORSHIP:

Major support for the exhibition is provided by The International Council of The Museum of Modern Art, The Modern Women's Fund, and The David Berg Foundation.

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PUBLICATION:

The exhibition is accompanied by a major catalogue edited by the curators Roxana Marcoci and Sarah Meister that is the first publication in English to examine the critical intersections that defined the notable careers of these two influential artists. Along with 200 plates, the catalogue consists of three illustrated essays on the artists written by the exhibition curators and scholar Jodi Roberts, and a selection of original texts by Stern and Coppola translated into English by Rachel Kaplan. 9.5 x 12 in.; 256 pages; 280 color and duotone ills. Hardcover, \$60. ISBN 978-0-87070-961-6. Published by The Museum of Modern Art and available at MoMA stores and online at MoMAstore.org. Distributed to the trade through ARTBOOK|D.A.P. in the United States and Canada, and through Thames & Hudson outside the United States and Canada.

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Public Information:

The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, NY 10019, (212) 708-9400, MoMA.org. Hours: Saturday through Thursday, 10:30 a.m.–5:30 p.m. Friday, 10:30 a.m.–8:00 p.m. Museum Admission: \$25 adults; \$18 seniors, 65 years and over with I.D.; \$14 full-time students with current I.D. Free, members and children 16 and under. (Includes admittance to Museum galleries and film programs). Free admission during Uniqlo Free Friday Nights: Fridays, 4:00 p.m.–8:00 p.m. MoMA.org: No service charge for tickets ordered on MoMA.org. Tickets purchased online may be printed out and presented at the Museum without waiting in line. (Includes admittance to Museum galleries and film programs). Film and After Hours Program Admission: \$12 adults; \$10 seniors, 65 years and over with I.D.; \$8 full-time students with current I.D. The price of an After Hours Program Admission ticket may be applied toward the price of a Museum admission ticket or MoMA Membership within 30 days.