Edward Welch

Cartier-Bresson, Henri (b. 1908 Chanteloup-en-Brie, France – d. 2004 Montjustin, France)

Henri Cartier-Bresson was a French photographer known especially for his work as a photojournalist. He studied with the Cubist painter André Lhote in Paris during the late 1920s, when he also met key figures of the Surrealist movement, including André Breton and Max Ernst. He was strongly influenced by the Surrealists’ engagement with the urban world as a source of chance encounters and erotic energy. He became a successful exponent of street photography, exploiting the mobility afforded by his lightweight Leica camera to capture the telling scenes of daily life he characterised as “instants décisifs”, or decisive moments. During the 1930s, he was increasingly active as a Communist militant, collaborating with other left-wing cultural figures such as the photographer Robert Capa and the Surrealist writer Louis Aragon. In 1947, with Capa and others, Cartier-Bresson co-founded the Magnum photo-agency, which would become home to some of the world’s pre-eminent photojournalists during the latter half of the twentieth century.

References and further reading:

Assouline, P (2012) Henri Cartier-Bresson: A Biography, London: Thames and Hudson.

Cartier-Bresson, H (2004) The Mind’s Eye: Writings on Photography and Photographers, New York: Aperture.

Galassi, P (2010) Henri Cartier-Bresson: The Modern Century, London: Thames and Hudson.

Scott, C (2007) Street Photography: From Atget to Cartier-Bresson, London: I. B. Tauris.

Walker, I (2002) City Gorged With Dreams: Surrealism and Documentary Photography in Interwar Paris, Manchester: Manchester University Press.