

Addison Gallery of American Art, Yale University Art Gallery, and Yale's Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library Jointly Acquire an Important Photographic and Journalistic Archive: The Lucien Aigner Collection

The Addison Gallery of American Art at Phillips Academy, Andover, the Yale University Art Gallery, and Yale's Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library have acquired the Lucien Aigner Collection, an extraordinary archive of photographs, negatives, recordings, film, books, magazine clippings, letters, and journalistic writings.

A pioneer of 1930s photojournalism, Lucien Aigner (1901-1999) belonged to the generation of photographers that included Robert Capa, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Alfred Eisenstaedt, and Erich Salomon. Embracing the introduction of 35mm film and fast, small, lightweight cameras, these artists changed the face of photography, making candid images that captured contemporary life with powerful immediacy.

Born in Hungary in 1901, Aigner began his career as a reporter, then became a photojournalist for *Az Est*, a Budapest daily newspaper. At the age of 25, he moved to Paris to work for James Abbe, an American freelance photojournalist. Though this job was short-lived, Aigner remained in Paris and established himself as an enterprising photojournalist—and early practitioner of the Leica camera—whose pictures of world leaders and events, as well as the city and its people, appeared in prominent photojournals such as *Vu*, *Picture Post*, and *LIFE*. In 1939, before the invasion of France, he immigrated to the United States, where his work appeared in such publications as the *New York Times*, the *Christian Science Monitor*, *Look*, *Coronet*, and *Pageant*. He became an announcer and eventually a producer and director at the Voice of America in the late 1940s. During the McCarthy era in the early 1950s, he was forced to leave his job. For the next 20 years or so he operated a portrait studio in Great Barrington, Massachusetts. In 1970, Aigner rediscovered a suitcase that—having survived WWII occupation—contained approximately 50,000 of his 1930s negatives. He had not opened it since 1950 when his brother, leather goods designer Etienne Aigner, emigrated from Paris and returned it to him. Several years later, the photographer closed his portrait studio to focus on the cataloguing and indexing of his collection of over 100,000 negatives. Following his death in 1999, Aigner's family continued to catalogue, research, and care for this vast collection.

Consisting of tens of thousands of negatives and thousands of prints and contact sheets, this rare and comprehensive collection is made all the more unique by Aigner's extensive writings that accompany virtually every image or series of images and explain the circumstances under which they were shot, and often the current events that surrounded the photo shoot. Considering himself as much a journalist as a photographer, Aigner paired text and pictures to vividly describe a range of themes, from European cafés to American prisons; from Bastille Day celebrations in Paris to

amusement rides in Coney Island; from rehearsals at the Paris Opera Ballet to street life in Harlem. Documenting major European and American political and cultural events, Aigner's archive includes portraits of world leaders and celebrities including Louis Armstrong, Josephine Baker, Winston Churchill, Albert Einstein, Adolf Hitler, Benito Mussolini, Sara Delano Roosevelt, and Haile Selassie, among numerous others. A master at timing, Aigner's candid portraits reflect his desire to reveal the essential vulnerability of prominent figures.

For example, while news services presented Haile Selassie as a composed leader, Aigner catches a nervous king just moments before pleading to the League of Nations for help against Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia. Similarly caught unawares, Mussolini stifles a sneeze in another image of an international conference in 1935, a photo that appeared on the cover of *Newsweek*. This now infamous shot perfectly expresses Aigner's desire to make honest observations of human beings and, in doing so, unmask "the pompous, the self-important, and the mighty." As curator and Magnum photographer Cornell Capa once wrote, "Aigner's anecdotal observations are not profundities of historic encounters of great significance, but backstage glimpses that give human proportions to some major figures of his time."

George Miles, a senior curator at the Beinecke, comments that "it's fair to see Aigner's approach to photography as a precursor of that taken by Robert Capa, Henri Cartier-Bresson, and their colleagues in founding Magnum. Aigner combined pictures and text to tell stories about the world around him, but he also created remarkably singular images that transcend time." While the majority of the collection will be housed at the Beinecke Library, a broad selection of photographs from Aigner's wide range of themes and subjects will become part of the Addison Gallery's and the Yale University Art Gallery's permanent collections.

Jock Reynolds, the Henry J. Heinz II Director of the Yale University Art Gallery, encouraged the three-way institutional sharing that will now keep the vast majority of Aigner's work readily accessible for scholarship, exhibition, and publication at two of America's finest teaching museums and a great university library, each of which will now help perpetually care for this great trove of Aigner's life's work. Reynolds remarks, "We are especially grateful to Stephen C. Sherrill, a 1971 graduate of Andover and 1975 graduate of Yale, along with his wife, Katherine, for offering the generous gift of funds that made this acquisition possible along with a partial gift from the Aigner family."

Judith Dolkart, director of the Addison Gallery adds, "Aigner's keen eye, complemented by the technology of 35mm cameras, provides intriguing insights into the vanity and humanity of epoch-making and quotidian events. We are thrilled to add these to our collection and to engage students and the public in examining and discussing them."

On behalf of Aigner's four children, daughter Anne-Marie Aigner is relieved and thankful that their father's work will now be cared for by such prestigious institutions. "He would be so pleased that his photographs and writings will now not only be safe, but that they will be available to future generations for viewing and research. We only wish he could have lived to see his life's work in such good hands."

The acquisition came about thanks to the efforts of independent art consultant Jennifer Uhrhane, who curated an exhibition of Aigner's photographs in 2011 and proposed the Aigner Collection acquisition to the institutions, on behalf of the Aigner family. "Jennifer had been a fan of

our father's work for a long time. The final resolution of her interest and concern for the preservation of this archive was a happy—and logical—culmination of her efforts. We are all very grateful to her.”

With this acquisition, the Addison and Yale become the largest repositories of this significant artist's work. Aigner's work has been exhibited widely, including a 1982 solo exhibition at the Addison. He is represented in numerous national and international collections, including the Library of Congress; Metropolitan Museum of Art; Museum of Modern Art, New York; International Center of Photography, New York; George Eastman Museum, Rochester, New York; Museum of Modern Art, Stockholm; Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris; and Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Addison Gallery of American Art

Devoted exclusively to American art, the mission of the Addison Gallery of American Art is to acquire, preserve, interpret, and exhibit works of art for the education and enjoyment of all. Opened in 1931, the Addison has one of the most important collections of American art in the country that includes more than 17,000 works by prominent American artists such as George Bellows, John Singleton Copley, Thomas Eakins, Winslow Homer, Georgia O'Keeffe, and Jackson Pollock, as well as photographers Eadweard Muybridge, Walker Evans, Robert Frank, and many more. The Addison Gallery, located on the campus of Phillips Academy in Andover, offers a continually rotating series of exhibitions and programs, all of which are free and open to the public. For more information, call 978-749-4015, or visit the website at www.addisongallery.org.

Yale University Art Gallery

The Yale University Art Gallery, the oldest college art museum in the United States, was founded in 1832 when the patriot-artist John Trumbull gave more than 100 of his paintings to Yale College. Since then its collections have grown to more than 200,000 objects ranging in date from ancient times to the present.

Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library

The Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library is Yale University's principal repository for literary papers and for early manuscripts and rare books in the fields of literature, theology, history, and the natural sciences. The Beinecke's collections afford opportunities for interdisciplinary research in such fields as medieval, Renaissance, and eighteenth-century studies, art history, photography, American studies, the history of printing, and modernism in art and literature. It holds extensive collections of 19th-century American photography by such masters as Alexander Gardner, Carleton Watkins, Timothy O'Sullivan, and William Henry Jackson as well as the papers and photographs of such 20th-century figures as Alfred Stieglitz, Carl Van Vechten, Inge Morath, Eve Arnold, Carl Mydans, and David Plowden.

Contacts

Rebecca Mongeon

Communications Coordinator

Addison Gallery of American Art

rmongeon@andover.edu / 978.749.4342

Joellen Adae
Director of Communications
Yale University Art Gallery
joellen.adae@yale.edu / 203.432.0611

George Miles
William Robertson Coe Curator
Yale Collection of Western Americana
Beinecke Rare Books and Manuscripts Library
george.miles@yale.edu / 203.432.2958