ABSTRACT

Internationally acknowledged as one of the masters of twentieth-century portrait and documentary photography, Gisèle Freund fled her native Germany in 1933 and settled in Paris. There she continued her studies in sociology at the Sorbonne: her thesis on the history of photography has become basic literature in this field. Forced to gain a living after leaving Nazi-Germany, she eventually became a photojournalist for LIFE magazine and later associate member of the Photoagency MAGNUM:
Apart from her work as a photojournalist she has done an incredible number of outstanding images of many of the most significant artists and writers of her time: Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, T.S. Eliot, John Steinbeck, Colette, Jean Cocteau, Pierre Bonnard, Marcel Duchamp, Hermann Hesse, Virginia Woolf and George Bernard Shaw among many others.
In addition to the portraits and reportages other photos provide penetrating insights into political demonstrations by students and workers in Frankfurt/Main, Germany, in 1932/33, studies of working-class problems in northern England in 1936, and tales of her many travels over a period of thirty years in Central and South America.
Gisèle Freund was especially well known for her masterly use of the 35mm color film when it was first introduced during the 1930s: in some cases her images are the only available color photographs of her famous subjects.
Freund is also the author of several important books, including the internationally esteemed "James Joyce in Paris, His Final Years" (1965), "The World in My Camera (1970)", and "Photography and Society (1974)."
Although Gisèle Freund has travelled and lived abroad, her base has always been Paris from which she continued her active professional career:
The most important stations of her life after her flight from Frankfurt to Paris in 1933, where she lived until 1939, were the south of France from 1940-42 in order to escape the Nazis; with the help of Victoria Ocampo she subsequently went to Argentinia, where she was a photographer and assistant film producer for the Louis Jouvet Theather Company, in Argentina and Chile;
1943-44 she worked for France Libre in Argentina;
1944-45 she lived in New York City;
1947-49 she lived and worked in Mexico;
1950-52 she was an Associate Member of Magnum Photos, Paris;
1978 she received the "Kulturpreis der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Photographie";
1980 she received the "Grand Prix National des Arts";
1982 she became "Officier des Arts et Lettres";
1983 she received the membership of the "Légion d'Honneur";
In the spring of the year 2000 she passed away in Paris.

Ever since its inception, photography has been compared with drawing and painting and the relative merits of the various media have been hotly disputed. From the very first, photographers attempted to prove that the new medium was capable of producing images as beautiful and as profound as paintings.

One hundred years later, this argument is still astonishingly alive. Far from becoming irrelevant or being exhausted, it is, on the contrary, growing ever more complex and convoluted. The discussion has been with us for so long that we tend to regard it as natural or inevitable. Cameras were, after all, developed from the camera obscura – a box containing a system of mirrors used by artists, such as Canaletto, to project the image of a scene onto a sheet of paper and to trace round its contours. This link with fine art was compounded even further when Fox Talbot described his invention as *photogenic drawing*, and named his book on photography, in which photographic prints were used for the first time, "The Pencil of Nature“. Factors like these helped to shove photography away from the science arena, in which it might quite reasonably have been placed, into the lap of art.
This was a somewhat curious decision, given the enormous respect felt for science and "scientific objectivity“ in the nineteenth century, and considering that in those early days of photography, a knowledge of chemistry was far more essential than a feeling for aesthetics. Early experiments in the darkroom, after all, resembled scientific research far more closely than artistic practice. The Daguerreotype in France and the calotype in England were both patented as "inventions“ comparable, say, to the steam engine; and it was to the Academie des Sciences and the Royal Society, respectively, that Daguerre and Fox Talbot presented their papers on photography in 1839, each concentrating on the chemistry of the processes rather than on their artistic merits.
Daguerre had, however, begun his career as a painter, and the fact that the transferred allegiances totally to the new medium, followed by enormous numbers of other painters and engravers, encouraged the view that photography would soon replace the more traditional media and render them obsolete.
There was considerable evidence to support this assumption. In 1830 the Royal Academy exhibition, for example, included 300 miniatures. By 1870 only 30 were on display. The intervening forty years had seen most miniaturists go out of business, or change their medium to become the first street photographers. Nowadays, photography is rarely referred to or taught as a science. This, it would seem is a dead issue. The art/photography argument, however is still raging. As James Collins, the English painter turned photographer, put it "Photography is one of the hot potato issues of the 1970s, and the distinction between artists who merely use photography and those >photographers proper< is a tough battle.“
Not only is the quarrel concerning the relative merits of photography and fine art still continuing, but a serious split within photography between the "straight“ professional and the "fine art.“ photographer has crystallized in the last ten years. When deliberately confronting top commercial and fine art photographers one is amazed to discover just how deeply entrenched the gulf of mutual suspicion is between the two breeds.

The explosion of images during this century has created a context for pictures which is so rich and complex that crossreferences are inevitable, but are also bound to be oblique and multi-valent. Contemporary photographs, for example, consciously refer to Minimalism, Abstract Expressionism, aesthetic theories, psychology, commercial photography and film and also to its own development.
It is its self-conscious overlay of intellectualism which distinguishes contemporary fine art photography both from its historical counterpart and

from commercial photography, although it is creeping into that area too, as commercials become more sophisticated and begin to parody themselves. There is another significant difference, though. Many contemporary photographers appear in their own work. By this simple device the voyeurism of all photographers becomes an issue, and the relationship between artists and their subjects and, by implication, between artists and society in general is foregrounded as an important problem. The artist is presented trapped uncomfortably between audience and image – a self-conscious poseur who is unsure of his actual function.

The label of *artist* has in the meantime lost much of its kudos, and an intellectual coefficient is deemed a neccessary ingredient before an artwork is regarded as both serious and "significant".

The power of photography lies in its "invisibility as a medium, that is its ability to represent reality" so convincingly as to be taken for the reality itself. As John Szarkowski, Director of Photography, Museum of Modern Art, New York, wrote "Throughout photography's history it has been generally assumed that for the purposes of visual knowledge a mountain and a photograph of a mountain are fundamentally the same thing. Presumably no one has really believed this, but it has been a convenient and useful fiction. It has not generally been in the photographer's interest to make an issue of the fact that the photograph of the mountain was only one man's opinion, for his customers did not want opinions. They wanted unchallengeable and objective truth."

As Szarkowski indicates, our acceptance of the photograph tends to be both naive and unquestioning. As the illusion takes hold, the paper on which it is printed disappears from consciousness and we *enter* the picture.