

Martin Munkacsi

VITALITY

20 March – 16 May, 2009

Opening Reception
Thursday, 19 March, 6-8pm



Lucille Brokaw, Piping Rock Beach, L.I. 1933
Gelatin silver print; printed c.1933

Howard Greenberg Gallery, New York is pleased to announce an exhibition of rare vintage prints by one of the twentieth century's preeminent masters of photography. The exhibition coincides with *Munkacsi's Lost Archive* at New York's International Center of Photography.

In Europe until 1934 and in America thereafter, Hungarian born photographer Martin Munkacsi (1896-1963) single-handedly changed the look of photojournalism and fashion photography. Munkacsi defied convention by incorporating a sense of motion, dramatic camera angles, and elements of whimsy into his work. His vision is now well understood to have had an impact on an entire generation of photographers. This exhibition explores this influence through many of Munkacsi's iconic images including *Lucille Brokaw, Piping Rock Beach, Long Island, 1933* (above).

Born in Kolozsvár, Hungary, Munkacsi arrived in Budapest in 1912 and started out writing for newspapers. Later he taught himself photography as a way to sell his stories. In 1921 he began to photograph sports for the magazine *Az Est*, demonstrating a talent for timing and drama. In 1928 he left Budapest for Berlin and became chief photographer for Germany's Ullstein Press working for *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* and other prominent photo weeklies. In the years prior to the war, Munkacsi traveled extensively, including trips to Algeria, Egypt, Liberia, Palestine, Turkey, and various European destinations. Munkacsi even once traveled in a zeppelin to North America.

It is significant that both Henri Cartier-Bresson and Richard Avedon credit Munkacsi with being instrumental in the development of their styles. After watching Munkacsi photograph on 59th Street in New York, Avedon later recalled, *"It was my first lesson in photography, and there were many lessons after, all learned from Munkacsi, though I never met him. He brought taste for happiness and honesty and a love of women to what was, before him, a joyless, lying art... He did it first, and today the world of what is called fashion is peopled with Munkacsi's babies, his heirs."*

Cartier-Bresson credits Munkacsi's photograph *Liberia, 1930* as the catalyst for his taking up photography, *"In 1932 I saw a photograph by Martin Munkacsi of three black children running into the sea, and I must say that it is that very photograph which was for me the spark that set fire to fireworks...and made me suddenly realize that photography could reach eternity through the moment. The only thing which was completely an amazement to me and brought me to photography was the work of Munkacsi. When I saw the photograph...I couldn't believe such a thing could be caught on camera. I said damn it, I took my camera and went out into the street."*

Munkacsi's innovative work in Europe came to the attention of the gifted editor Carmel Snow at *Harper's Bazaar* who commissioned Munkacsi's first fashion piece in 1933. Munkacsi, once again, defying the rules and knowing little about fashion photography, took a society model by the name of Lucille Brokaw out of the studios of Manhattan and onto the beaches of Long Island. Perhaps harking back to his sports background, Munkacsi asked Ms. Brokaw, dressed in a cape, to run towards him as he snapped the shutter. The resulting picture, of an all-American girl in motion with her cape billowing out behind her, made photographic history. Munkacsi's was the first action photograph made for fashion.

In 1934, Munkacsi emigrated to the U.S. immediately signing an exclusive contract with *Harper's Bazaar* where he worked for more than a dozen years. During his time at *Harper's* he had the good fortune to work with Alexey Brodovitch the legendary art director. Together Brodovitch and Munkacsi created dynamic images of models dancing, diving, golfing, jumping over puddles, climbing in and out of airplanes, all to a twentieth century tempo. Within just a few years, Munkacsi became the highest paid photographer of his time.

This exhibition is a special tribute to Martin Munkacsi's daughter, Joan Munkacsi, who passed away earlier this year. Joan played a crucial role in the preservation of her father's work. For Joan's role in photographic history, we are forever in her debt.

*For further information, or to request visuals for press
Contact Ali Price at 212 334 0010 or ali@howardgreenberg.com
Starting March 19th, the exhibition can be viewed at www.howardgreenberg.com*