



GALLERY. RESEARCH. COLLECTIONS.

INTRODUCING ARCHIVAL DIALOGUES

By Doina Popescu, Director, Ryerson Image Centre

Archival Dialogues: Reading the Black Star Collection marks the inaugural exhibition of the Ryerson Image Centre (RIC) at Ryerson University. It has been a pleasure to co-curate this exhibition with one of Canada's leading independent curators and thinkers in contemporary art, Peggy Gale. Together, we have had the honour of working closely with eight of Canada's pre-eminent artists and of facilitating their distinct relationships with our collection of 20th century photojournalistic prints. Each artist was commissioned to create a new work of art in "dialogue" with a chosen perspective on the Black Star Collection, executed in the medium of his or her preference. While offering vibrant examinations and complex re-contextualizations of the historic Black Star images from a broad range of relevant, current points of view, the installations also reveal some of the analytical and creative subtleties at the core of eight remarkable art practices. Peggy Gale joins me in extending our deepest gratitude to Stephen Andrews, Christina Battle, Marie-Hélène Cousineau, Stan Douglas, Vera Frenkel, Vid Ingelevics, David Rokeby and Michael Snow for their enthusiasm and commitment to this project.

This catalogue is a complementary piece of the exhibition. It includes eight individual artist projects that share with us the respective artist's process of "reading" the Black Star Collection. Each of these sections begins with the reproduction of a Black Star image which played a key role in the individual artist's research. Just as each installation in the exhibition, each artist project in this book allows the viewer to experience the artist's dialogical relationship to the Black Star photographs, thus bringing these important historical objects into new focus within the multiple contexts of contemporary discourse.

Three insightful essays round out the catalogue. Peggy Gale, intimately familiar with the individual studio practices of our guest artists, writes eloquently about their projects and the significance of each artist's take on the Black Star Collection. In *Now! The Archive in Motion*, Hito Steyerl – Berlin artist, scholar and writer – provocatively addresses the ever urgent question of copyright in relation to stasis and mobility in the archive. Finally, Jennifer Allen – art critic, writer and chief editor of *frieze d/e* – tackles the inspiring question of archival ephemera in her enticingly entitled essay *Crate 17*, reminding us that the archive is not only a place of methodological order and preservation, but also one of continued surprise and discovery.

The Black Star Collection, consisting of approximately 292,000 photojournalistic prints, tells the cultural, social and political history of the 20th century. It is one of the most valuable repositories of collective global memory captured in visual form. The predominantly 8x10 inch black and white prints in the collection are part of the legacy of an era co-defined by the work of the many photo press agencies of the day. The Black Star photo agency was founded in 1935 in New York City by Ernest Mayer, Kurt Safranski and Kurt Kornfeld, who all fled Nazi Germany and brought with them to the United States essential knowledge and experience in the newly sought after and increasingly popular art of picture journalism and the creation of the extended photo essay.

When *Life* magazine was founded in 1936, it quickly became one of Black Star's earliest and most important clients. The agency went on to work with most major news publications of the day, including *Look*, *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Colliers*, *Pageant*, *The New York Times*, *Time* and *Newsweek*, to mention but a few.

By the early '90s, the agency had worked with more than 6,000 photojournalists, many of whom are well known, such as Robert Capa, Andreas Feininger, Charles Moore and W. Eugene Smith, and many of whom remain as yet unknown or even unidentified. Together, they produced some of the most iconic press imagery of the past century.

In 2005, the Black Star Collection was gifted to Ryerson University, which had been collecting photographs since the late '60s and had demonstrated the expertise to both preserve and research these cultural treasures. In the ensuing years, Diamond Schmitt Architects of Toronto was entrusted with the design of the new Ryerson Image Centre, which shares a building with the university's famous School of Image Arts. The Ryerson Image Centre, built to international museum standards, is now housed in one of the most elegant and inviting buildings in the core of downtown Toronto.

The Ryerson Image Centre boasts three interrelated areas of activity. Dedicated to photography and related media (installation art, film and new media), our vibrant and engaging exhibition program addresses topics of social, cultural, historical and aesthetic concern from a variety of contemporary points of view. We work with both Canadian and international artists and also offer a professionally run student exhibition program. Our research centre conducts important primary research and supports a peer-reviewed publication program. Together with the School of Image Arts and the graduate program in Photographic Preservation and Collections Management at Ryerson University, we are partners in the newly bilingual publication of the world renowned historical photographic journal *Études photographiques*. Finally, our growing collection offers students, scholars and curators significant photojournalistic and fine art photography holdings, as well as a number of artist archives, including those of Wendy Snyder MacNeil, Jo Spence and Werner Wolff. The centre engages students and faculty, works with partners from around the world, and welcomes the general public to share in its diverse and dynamic programming.

This is the context within which we invite everyone to join in celebrating the launch of our magnificent new arts facility at Ryerson University. We are delighted to share with you eight revelatory perspectives on our photojournalistic holdings via the works created for *Archival Dialogues: Reading the Black Star Collection*.

I would like to express my sincere thanks to the Canada Council for the Arts, the Ontario Arts Council, the Ontario Cultural Attractions Fund, the Toronto Arts Council, Partners in Art, the Goethe-Institut Toronto, the Howard and Carole Tanenbaum Family Charitable Foundation, the Paul J. Ruhnke Memorial Fund and Ryerson University for their generous support of the inaugural exhibition at the Ryerson Image Centre.

Thank you,

Doina Popescu

Director

Ryerson Image Centre