

**READING MAGNUM: A VISUAL ARCHIVE
OF THE MODERN WORLD (HARRY
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A VISUAL ARCHIVE OF THE MODERN WORLD

READING



MAGNUM

Edited by STEVEN HOELSCHER | HARRY RANSOM CENTER

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Review

"Reading Magnum merits sustained looking and attentive reading. . . . the volume as a whole constitutes a panoramic view of pictures and activities by Magnum's photographers, from the inception of the agency to the present. Readers will find in it much that is new, informative and stimulating." (History of Photography)

"Compelling...rich and rewarding...[It] will inspire readers from across a range of scholarly disciplines to continue the many illuminating conversations opened up within its pages." (AAG Review of Books)

About the Author

Steven Hoelscher is Professor of American Studies and Geography at the University of Texas at Austin. He regularly teaches graduate seminars on the history of photography at the Harry Ransom Center, where he is Academic Curator of Photography. Hoelscher's books include *Picturing Indians: Photographic Encounters* and *Tourist Fantasies in H. H. Bennett's Wisconsin Dells*; *Textures of Place: Exploring Humanist Geographies*; and *Heritage on Stage: The Invention of Ethnic Place in America's Little Switzerland*.

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The Magnum Photos archive—a collection of more than 200,000 photographs by some of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries' greatest image makers—is the most comprehensive accumulation of prints made by the distinguished photo cooperative. Consistently and with striking artistry, Magnum's photographers have done more than simply document the far reaches of the globe; they have helped shape generations' understanding of the world around them. While many of its photographs have been widely published, until now no one has examined the Magnum archive itself. In *Reading Magnum*, experts from several fields investigate this visual archive, now residing at the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin, to discover how a select, influential group of visual authors has used the camera for an ambitious project of cultural interpretation and social commentary.

The chapters in *Reading Magnum* are devoted to themes generated by a close reading of the archive—war and conflict, portraiture, geography, cultural life, social relations, and globalization. These themes are further developed by evocative portfolios of images, which suggest something of the depth and range of the photo agency, and by tracing the trajectory of several iconic images from annotated press print to distribution to eventual publication. Volume editor Steven Hoelscher provides an overview of the Magnum enterprise, and Alison Nordström offers an appreciation of the Magnum archive as a material record of information about the making and disseminating of photographs that is being lost as images on paper are replaced by images on screen. As a whole, the book's unique reading of the Magnum archive reveals patterns of intention, aesthetic vision, and political perspective that become legible only by viewing both the physical objects and the recorded images that constitute this remarkable collection.

- Sales Rank: #1158696 in Books
- Published on: 2013-09-01
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 10.50" h x 1.25" w x 9.50" l, 4.35 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 352 pages

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5 of 5 people found the following review helpful.

Extraordinary Visions

By Paul Adams

This book provides a fascinating glimpse of world events over the past 70 years, seen through the eyes of some of the greatest photographers of this time. The images themselves are arresting. They combine artistry with a rare degree of journalistic sensitivity and are accompanied by fascinating essays addressing the social role of photography and how place images in the media have shaped our views of the world. The book also looks behind the scenes of photography as a business--how photos were selected, cropped, and printed back when they were material objects, and how these objects circulated between the Magnum Photo cooperative and the people who paid to reprint the images. As the photo industry has shifted to digital capture, editing, and delivery, and these old business practices are abandoned, the technical information alone would make this book worth possessing. But hours can be spent just looking at the pictures as well.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

I love this book, but

By Sue Moran

I wish the UT Press had done a better job of making it. I had to send the first copy back and the second has almost the same flaw. The hard cover corners are bent, the back bottom one quite severely.

Although this is an "archive" of a gazillion images with eight thoughtful essays, I can't wait until I've actually read it cover to cover.

The book is a treasure.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

Another wonderful book from Magnum!

By A voracious reader

I own several books of Magnum photos and they're all a treasure, but this one is really special. The photos span many years and they're quite varied, with some that are really affecting and some that are true works of art. I think Magnum photographers are a "gift" to the photography world and I never tire of looking at these photos.

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