

ERNA AND VICTOR HASSELBLAD
FOUNDATION

P R E S S I N F O R M A T I O N

**Susan Meiselas is awarded the 1994 International
Photography Prize of the Hasselblad Foundation**

The Erna and Victor Hasselblad Foundation Photography Prize of 1994 has been awarded to Susan Meiselas, New York. The prize consists of the Erna and Victor Hasselblad Foundation Medal and a cash sum of SEK 255.000. It will be presented to Susan Meiselas at a ceremony in Gothenburg, Sweden, on September 9, 1994.

The Foundation motivates its choice as follows: "Susan Meiselas, one of the leading photographers in the humanistic-documentary tradition, has portrayed people in their struggle for social justice and human dignity, as seen in her powerful work from the revolutions of Nicaragua and El Salvador. In her photographs there is a tension in the interrelation between form and social engagement."

This is the fourteenth time this photography prize has been awarded. Former prize-winners are: Lennart Nilsson, Sweden; Ansel Adams, USA; Henri Cartier-Bresson, France; Manuel Alvarez Bravo, Mexico; Irving Penn, USA; Ernst Haas, USA; Hiroshi Hamaya, Japan; Edouard Boubat, France; Sebastião Salgado, Brazil/France; William Klein, USA/France; Richard Avedon, USA; Josef Koudelka, Czechoslovakia/France, and Sune Jonsson, Sweden.

A struggle for social justice and human dignity

Susan Meiselas, a freelance American photographer, was born in 1948 in Baltimore, Maryland. She studied at the Sarah Lawrence College and earned a Masters degree at the School of Education, Harvard University, in 1971. She has been associated with Magnum Photos since 1976 and has worked for magazines, such as *Life*, *Time*, *Geo*, *Paris Match* as well as for *The New York Times*.

In 1975 Meiselas published a book of photographs and texts, *Carnival strippers*, about the working lives of women in striptease shows. In the preface she noted: "Any book allows its reader to

distance himself. The curtain closing on the girl show stage is replaced by the page turning over. Like the show, the book represents coexistent aspects of a phenomenon, one which horrifies, one which honors. If the viewer is appalled by what follows, the reaction is not so different from the alienation of these who participate in the shows."

The English author John Berger wrote about her second book, *Nicaragua* (1981): "Susan Meiselas's extraordinary photographs take us right inside a revolutionary movement and speak on behalf of its participants. Yet unlike most photographs of such material, these refuse all the rhetoric normally associated with such pictures: the rhetoric of violence, revolutionary heroism, and the glorification of misery. Here we have the feeling of real people, members of a real community. And this community has reached an important moment in its history. By working in color, Meiselas has posed another difficulty for herself. Color photographs of this kind of subject inevitably give way to gore or to the aesthetization of violence. Here, instead, we have enormous control, a sense of the everyday, and a vitality rooted in an active community."

Susan Meiselas has also brought together the work of other photographers in exhibitions and books, such as *El Salvador: Work of 30 Photographers* (1983) and *Chile from Within* (1990). Who actually made the photographs seems to be of lesser importance to her than their function as visual source material in a social context, "the role of the photographer is to document the present in relation to the past."

In 1991 Meiselas began, along these lines, to collect documentation of the photographic history of the Kurds and is still working on this project. She has travelled throughout Kurdistan in search for forgotten photographers work, partly on a grant last year from the Hasselblad Foundation. The result of her research and her own photographs will be published later this year in a book titled *In the Shadow of History: Kurdistan*.

She has also co-directed two films: "Living at Risk: The Story of a Nicaraguan Family" (1986) and "Pictures from a Revolution" (1991). In 1979 Meiselas received the Robert Capa Gold Medal for outstanding reportage for her work in Nicaragua. Also could be mentioned the Leica Award for Excellency (1982), the ASMP Photojournalist of the Year Award (1982) and the Engelhard Award from the Institute of

Contemporary Art (1985). From the Parsons School of Design she received a Honorable Doctorate in 1986.

Research and education

The Photography Prize was instituted by Erna and Victor Hasselblad, who donated all their assets to a foundation. According to the Foundations statutes, a Photography Prize and the Erna and Victor Hasselblad Medal are to be awarded every year or every alternate year, as means permit, to a person of particular merit.

In addition, the Foundation is to promote scientific education and research in the natural sciences and in photography. A number of projects are granted funds each year, totaling approximately 1.5 million USD.

In the Fall of 1989, the Foundation opened a Photographic Center in Gothenburg, Sweden. It operates a continuous exhibition and lecture program. A photographic research and reference library is also being built.

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