

# GERDA TARO

AN *unusual* WOMAN



BY FERNANDO TOLEDO

The topic, *"Testimony and Vision: beyond reporting"*, of the fourth edition of *Fotográfica Bogotá* provides an opportunity for me to recall an unusual character who, due to a series of circumstances, some ideological, some almost sentimental, is linked to my beliefs and above all, one of my passions: the Spanish Civil War.



Anonymous Photographer. Guadalajara- Spain, 1936

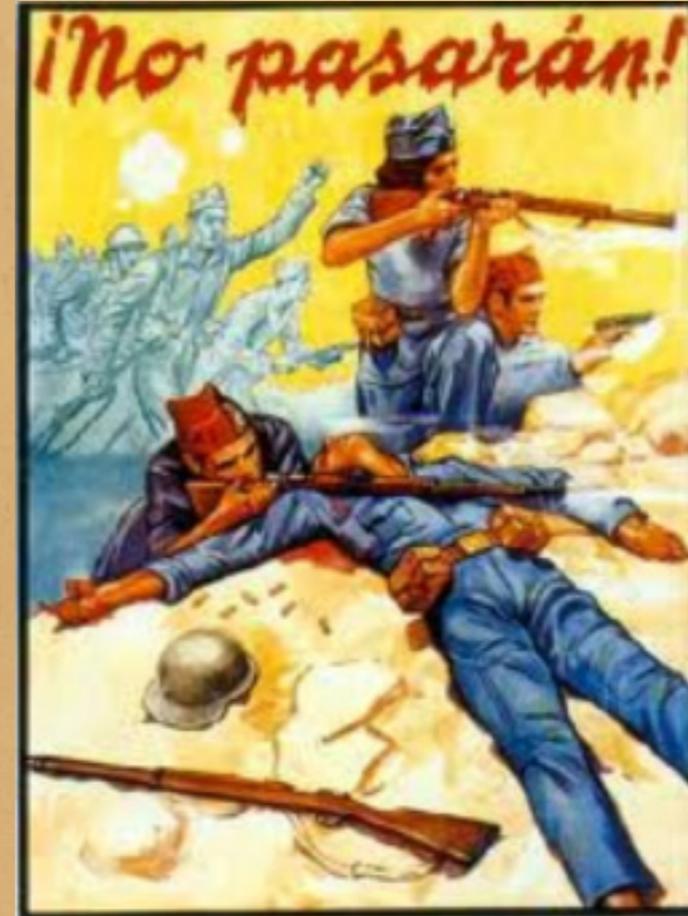
This year, on July 18 to be exact, is the 75th anniversary of the start of a struggle which, in many respects, marked the 20th century and today, 72 years after its conclusion, continues to divide public opinion throughout the world. It is an analogy of what should never, in any context or for any reason, be repeated yet which unfortunately seems to happen all the time and in the most dissimilar parts of the world. The person who recorded this appalling yet moving conflict that led a country to a holocaust lasting nearly 40 years helped turn photography into indisputable testimonial proof. It is no coincidence, then, that the world should have celebrated the century since her birth last year or that it is about to celebrate the 75 years since her death in 2012.



Spain at War: 1936-1939

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AN unusual WOMAN



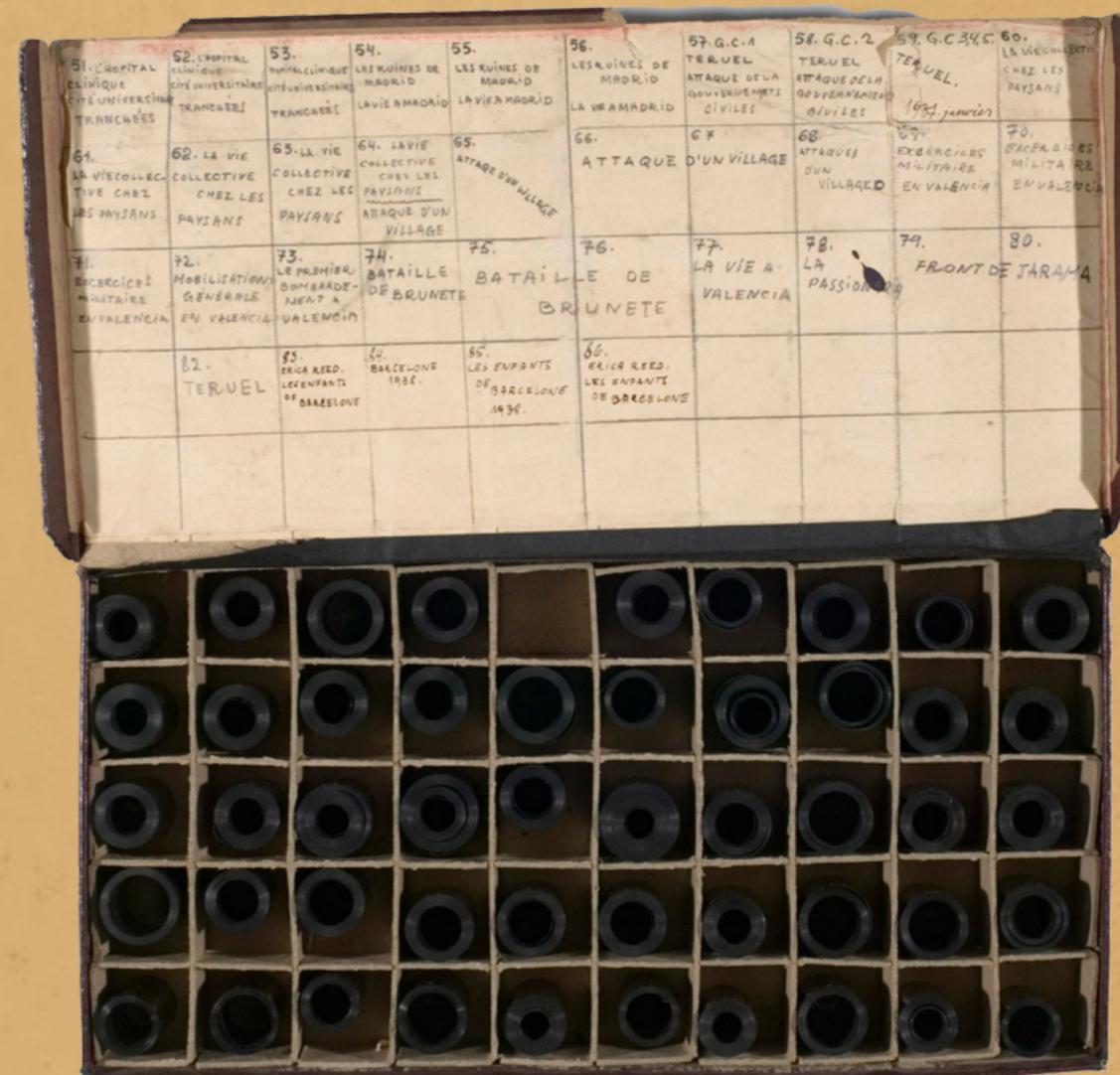
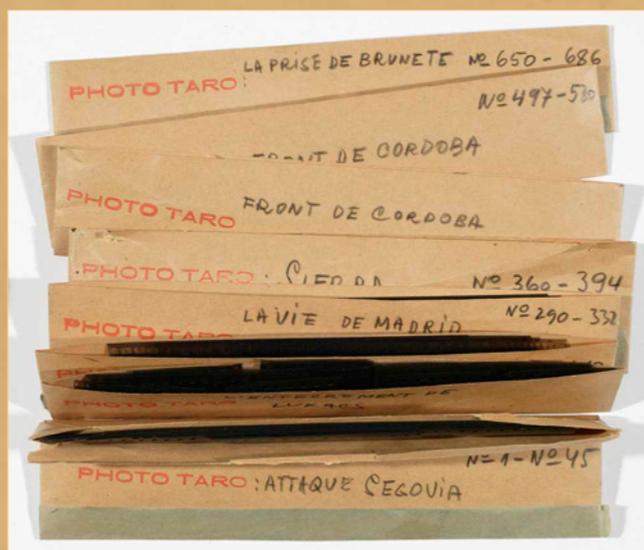
*Gerda Taro*  
*1910-1937*



# GERDA TARO

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Despite the fact that she was a forceful, idealistic woman, a photographer and a historic figure and symbol, until recently, the name of Gerda Taro was virtually unknown. The only people aware of her existence were those familiar with the history of photography or experts on the Spanish Civil War who had undoubtedly heard of her yet regarded this legendary figure as little more than a curiosity. But a few years ago, in 2008, the so-called Mexican suitcase turned up, in a series of events resembling something out of a novel. The suitcase had been protected by a former Mexican diplomat, and contained photographs of the Spanish Civil war taken by her, Robert Capa and David Seymour, who signed his works as Chim. Since then, the name of Gerda Taro acquired the importance it should always have had.

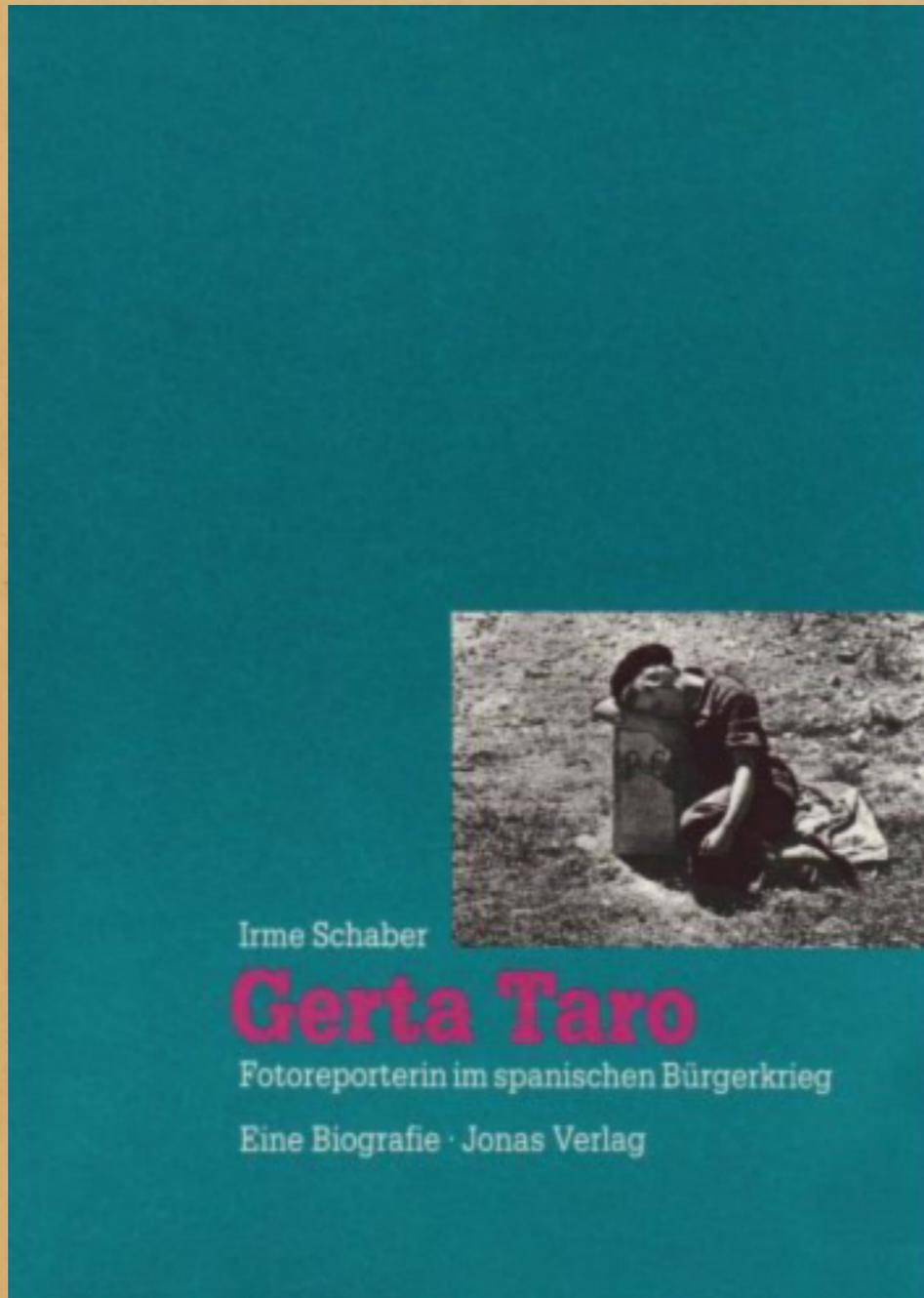


It is worth recalling, however, that before the strange episode of the discovery, thanks to the research of English film-maker Trisha Ziff and the finding of this valuable historical stock in a suitcase, three books had been published by this unusual woman. The first was published by Robert Capa, shortly after the end of the Spanish Civil War. Fifty years later, the superb biography by Irme Schaber, *Gerda Taro, a Revolutionary Reporter in the Spanish Civil War* was published in 1994 and translated into several languages. In 2007, another biography by Spanish journalist and novelist Fernando Olmedo was published, under the title of *Gerda Taro, war photographer*. Following the appearance of the suitcase, exhibitions were held in New York, Paris, Madrid and Barcelona, a play was performed for this first time in this last city and her works have been included in several group shows. All this has turned this unusual woman into an icon and something of a cult figure.



Trisha Ziff

TWO BIOGRAPHIES



Irme Schaber: Gerta Taro: Fotoreporterin in spanischen Bürgerkrieg  
Ed. Jonas Veerlag Marburg 1994



Fernando Olmeda: Gerda Taro: War Photographer.  
Journalism witness to history. Ed. Debate -Barcelona 2007

*GERDA TARO BEYOND THE LEGEND*



In front of Cordoba. Photo of Robert Capa -1936-

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Gerda Taro was, in any case, far more than an anecdotic figure. Her political position, the historical moment in which she lived, her relationship with one of the greatest war photographers of the 20th century, her commitment to a way of thinking at an extremely difficult time in human history and of course, her passion for providing testimony, made her a figurehead. As if that were not enough, she was the first woman photographer to die in a battlefield in the fulfillment of an assignment she had been given, which she performed with unusual dedication.



(No entry of Jews 1912)



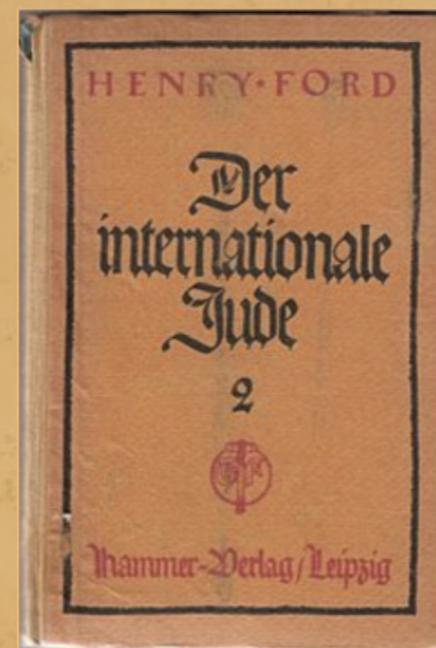
Stuttgart, 1910

Her parents, who, on their arrival in Germany, adopted the names of Heinrich and Gisela, left their native region, like many other Jews, in search of better job opportunities, fleeing poverty and growing persecution. Anti-Semitism was rife in Germany, as well as much of Central Europe. Several anti-Semitic propaganda campaigns had been launched in the region since the beginning of the century. A few years later, the famous book by Henry Ford, *The International Jew*, published in the US in 1920 and published almost immediately afterwards in Germany, not only had a decisive influence on this feeling but deep repercussions on the consolidation of Nazi ideology, particularly the proposals in the Adolf Hitler's infamous *Mein Kampf* or *My Struggle*.

In order to find out about Gerda Taro's life, let us travel for a moment to Germany in 1910, during the reign of Kaiser Wilhelm II, in the thoroughly bourgeois city of Stuttgart where Gerta Pohorylle was born into a Jewish family from Austro-Hungarian Galitzia.



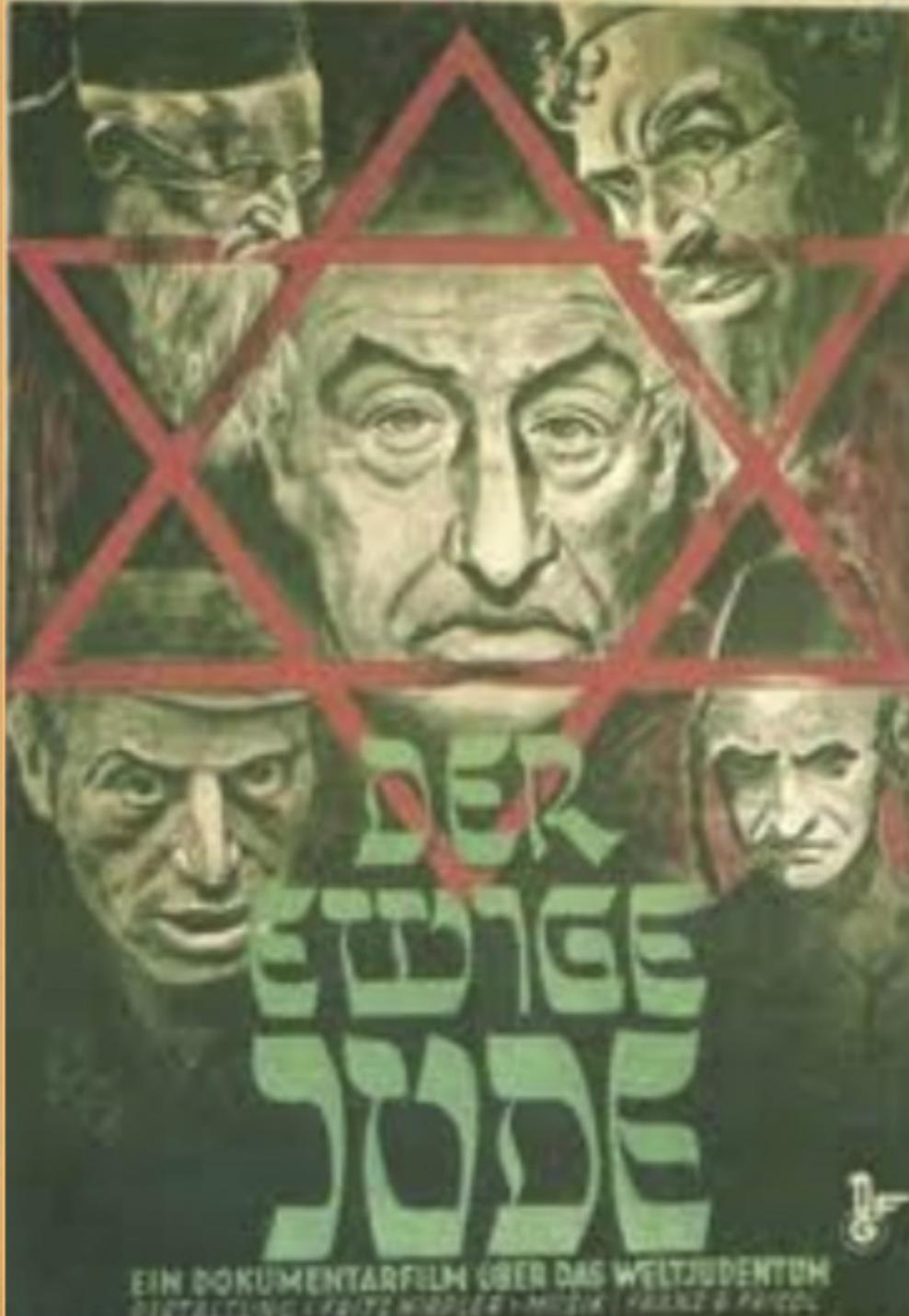
Kaiser Guillermo II



German edition of *The Jew*  
*Henry Ford International* 1920



Posters and flyers  
German Anti-Semitic 1915



It should be recalled, however, that during the second decade of the 20th century, women's names of unusual importance, heralding women's role, began to be common in the European political scene, particularly Germany's, and to create a suitable atmosphere for the long-awaited independence of women. Clara Zetkin was a precursor of feminist movements in Germany and despite having been born in Russia, Rosa Luxemburg or Róza Luksemburg, a Marxist theorist of Jewish origin, like Zetkin, militated in the Social Democratic party. In 1914, they both opposed the participation of Social Democrats in the First World War, which they regarded as a "confrontation between imperialists" and formed the Spartacist League, which would be the germ of the German Communist Party, of which Clara was a delegate, while Rosa also founded the party's insignia newspaper, *The Red Flag*.



Clara Zetkin



Rosa Luxemburgo



Two Fighters | C. Zetkin and R. Luxemburgo after a meeting in 1915

This atmosphere of political independence for women was not exclusive to Germany. All over Europe, the winds of freedom from bondage encouraged by leaders such as French anarchist Louise Michel, French anarcho-feminist journalist Henri Gauche and in England, suffragettes Lydia Becker and Emily Davison, who, with the Germans mentioned earlier, paved the way for the emergence of women in other regions who, years later, shone in state and parliamentary spheres. This was the case, in Spain, for example, of anarchist Federica Montseny, socialists Victoria Kent and Clara Campoamor and communists Margarita Nelken and

## FRANCE



Louise Michel - Anarchist



Henri Gauche-Anarco - Feminist

## SPAIN



Federica Montseny - Anarchist



Victoria Kent - Socialist



Clara Campoamor - Socialist



Margarita Nelken - Communist



Dolores Ibárruri - Communist

## ENGLAND



Emily Davison - Suffragist



Lidya Becker - Suffragist

This was the Europe, where women were beginning to count and their opinions were helping to define the development of events, where Gerta Pohorylle spent the first few years of her life. Hers was a childhood like that of any other middle-class girl in Germany at the end of the belle époque. Her family, out of a desire to improve their station in life, enrolled her at the Queen Charlotte school in Stuttgart for upper-middle and upper class girls to bring her into contact with the city's finest families. The little girl began to move in different circles from those of foreign immigrants into which she had been born. She visited the homes of her classmates, whose families were better off than hers. Her aunt Tera Borealm, her mother's sister and a wealthy woman, had decided to bring her up like a rich girl to make her "a good match."



The early years in the Pohorylle girl's life coincided with the outbreak of the First World War, triggered by a conflict between Serbia, supported by Russia and the Austro-Hungarian empire allied with Germany, which eventually involved 32 countries and caused over ten million deaths. Its end, in 1918, marked the start of major European political changes from a social and ideological point of view. The Great War was also the first conflict to be photographically documented in way that reflected the events of war as they had happened or through fairly faithful reproductions that were re-enactments of certain highly significant moments.

FIRST WORLD WAR



British Battleship



Air Force Germany



English soldier in the trenches



Trenchers



Soldier with Gas Mask



Japanese Artillery



Italian Troops Entrenched



Cemetery in Verdun

In Germany, the end of the war marked the collapse of the imperial monarchy and the birth of the Weimar Republic, which despite its democratic appearance, granted the president virtually unlimited powers, equivalent to those of an emperor. This was period of political and economic crisis, which, following a series of governmental missteps, led to the rise of power of the Nazi party, thirteen years after the establishment of this new form of government.



Friedrich Ebert.  
1° President.



Paul Von Hindenburg.  
2° President.



Hitler's First Cabinet



President and Chancellor

Thanks to her aunt's support, Gerta Pohorylle's adolescence elapsed with no great financial hardship. However, in 1926, the improvement of the German economy benefitted the family's finances, considerably improving their situation. Gerta finished junior high school and it was decided that she should go to a boarding school in Lausanne, in Switzerland, Villa Florissant, a school for upper class girls where she polished her French and English and learnt a little Italian and Spanish. Her family continued to want her to be a good match. At boarding school, she studied history and art history and read several authors, some of whom were extremely critical of the society of the time, whose reflections undoubtedly began to shape her views.

Lausanne



In Germany, as in other countries, despite the economic problems, a certain freedom regarding the arts and literature had begun to develop. A Utopian atmosphere spread beyond its borders and the winds of protest began to make themselves felt. Dadaism was a movement that questioned bourgeois culture and the Bauhaus school developed, founded by architect, town planner and designer Walter Gropius, who established the basis for a new aesthetic approach. Cinema and photography began to emerge as the arts of the future and illustrated publications, including some political works, spread throughout Europe. This liberal atmosphere influenced many young people, including Gerda Pohorylle, even though she was not fully aware of it.



Walter Gropius

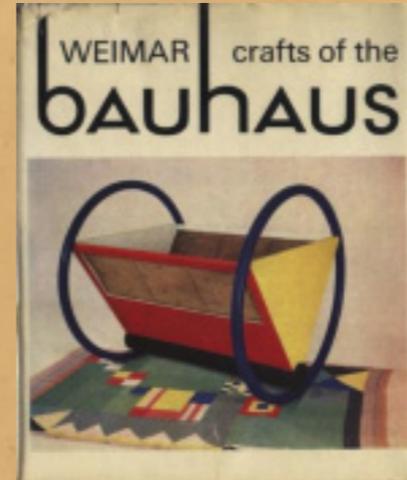


Lajos Tihany: Tristan Tzara Portrait  
Prophet of Dadaism



Poster Dadaist | Movement born in the  
Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich in 1916

## POSTERS OF EXPOSURE BAUHAUS IN WEIMAR IN 1923



German illustrated weekly



Since the war, photography had gradually created a niche for itself in the field of communication and had already reached adulthood. Graflex bellows cameras accompanied reporters on the Front during the Great War but it was not long before new types of equipment were invented.

Germany led the field and in 1925, at Leipzig Fair, it presented the Leica I, by Leitz, based on a revolutionary concept: small negative and large image. Exchangeable optics was soon developed, with the first step being taken by Ernemann from Dresden with its Ermanox camera. It was not long before the legendary twin-lens reflex appeared that became the tool of choice for professionals: the famous Rolleiflex by Rollei.

During that period, women began to make their presence felt in the sphere of great photography. To cite these examples, the Italian Tina Modotti, who lived in Berlin in the 1930s, became a world figure, not only in photography but also on the political and cultural stage of Mexico, her adopted country. Germans Ellen Auerback and Grete Stern, who shared a studio in Stuttgart in 1928, became two examples of avant-garde photographic art, as members of the Bauhaus school to which they belonged.



Graflex



Ermanox

Tina Modotti



Rolleiflex



Leica I

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Ellen Auerbach



Gerta, who was not interested in this progress despite regarding herself as an up-to-date woman, was back in Germany where she had begun to go out with Pieter Bote, a man twice her age, and to enjoy the wave of freedom the Weimar Republic had given youth. Bote was a good match and a wealthy man and she thought he was suitable because at the time, she was unsure what she would do and did not think it would be a bad idea to marry a member of the upper classes.

Grete Stern



Gerta stroll through the center of Stuttgart with Pieter Bote



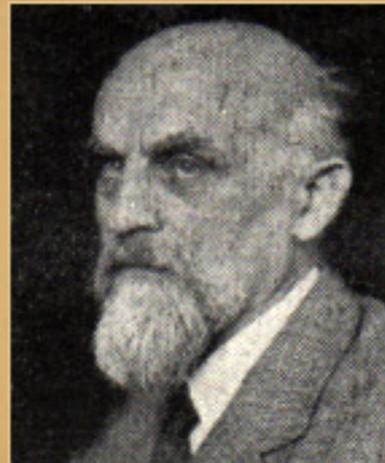
Emblem of the Wanderwölgel



This period saw the rise of the *Wandervogel* (wild birds), a sort of German Boy Scout movement, founded several years earlier, whose increasingly political influence reached Gerta and her milieu. It was a youth movement that protested against the formal life of their parents, denounced war and promoted a return to nature. Gustav Wyneken, a promoter of *Jugendkultur* or youth culture, stressed that not only Germany but all of western culture had failed to train the new generations and predicted what would happen during the Nazi regime. Germany was a young country for young people, where rebelliousness was accepted and encouraged, and Gerta was no exception: she was interested in contemporary, modern issues. She was fascinated, for example, by the great movie actresses such as the Danish Astrid Nielsen and the Swedish Greta Garbo, with her garçon hairstyle that young women loved.

But she was also sensitive to contemporary design and often strolled through the Weissenhof district, built for the 1927 exhibition, and one of the prides of Stuttgart. She was attracted by the work of architects such as Mies van der Rohe and Le Corbusier. Could she have dreamt of being a film star or perhaps a great architect? It is difficult to know but at 18, she did not seem to be in much of a hurry to decide. Everything would seem to suggest that she was a rather frivolous girl but with a certain sensitivity and in any case, extremely modern.

Gustav Wyneken  
Founder of the *Jugendkultur*



The District Weissenhof



Meanwhile, in Budapest, a young man, who was also Jewish, was throwing stones at the first Fascist demonstrations. At the age of 16, Andrei Friedman was already a radical who scorned bourgeois values. He was interested in journalism and often accompanied Eva Besnyö who was intrigued by the new trends in photography, such as those proposed by Lajos Kassak, the artist, leftist writer and founder of Munka journal, who believed it was a socially useful art form. It was not long before the two young people traveled to Berlin, she to study photography and become a well-known photographer and Friedman as a political exile.

Two Young Hungarians



Astra Nielsen



Greta Garbo



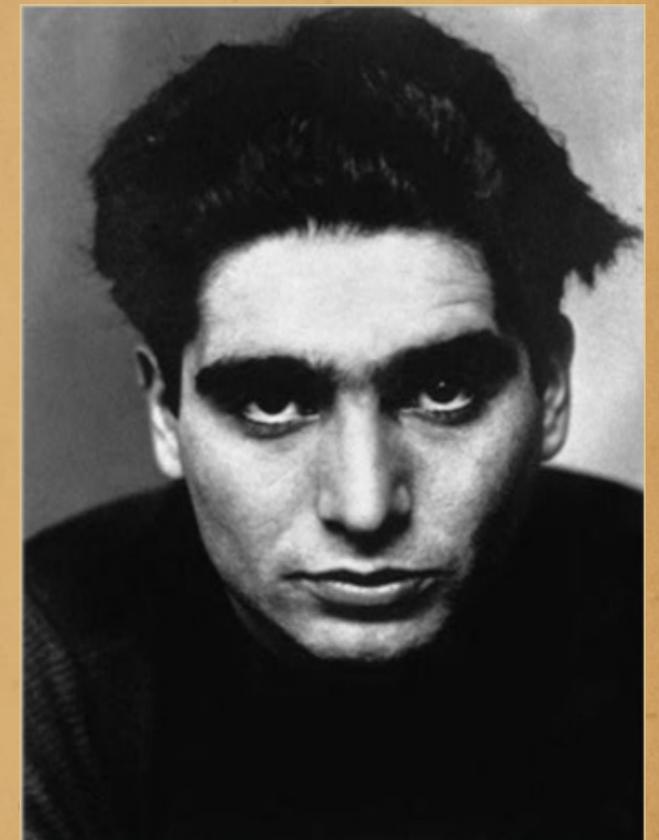
Le Corbusier



Mies van der Rohe



Eva Besnyö



Endre Ernö Friedmann

But let us go back to 1929, when the Pohorylle family was experiencing financial difficulties as a result of which it decided to leave Stuttgart and start afresh, this time in the liberal city of Leipzig.

Leipzig



Leipzig



In the beginning, Gerta missed her friends and, of course, her boyfriend, but she was soon won over by the liberal, cultural atmosphere of her new surroundings. The left made its presence felt more strongly in this Saxon city. Ervin Akerknecht was a medical student and a member of the communist party who spoke of the class struggle and the need to change the system, whom Gerta listened to without paying much attention.



Nazi Emblem

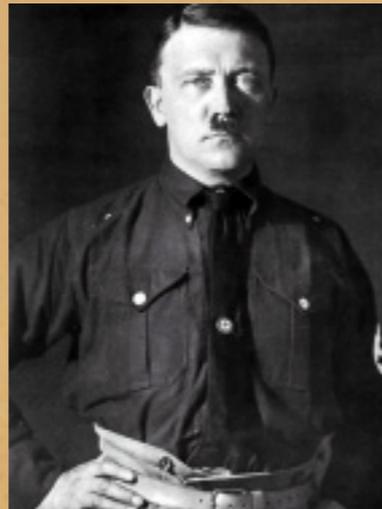
German youth felt the need to take part in politics and just as there were rather belligerent left-wing groups, other groups sprang up such as the Strubmateilung or brown shorts, a paramilitary branch of this young, national socialist party whose progress seemed inevitable. For the previous seven years, it had been approaching political leadership through a mediocre character with charisma by the name of Adolph Hitler, with an unbridled political ambition. In fact, during the 1930 elections, the Nazi party was consolidated as the second political force in the country after the social democrats; one of the factors against them was the exhaustion caused by governing.



Nazi Assembly -Munich 1923



Brown Shorts, Nazi Paramilitary Group



Adolfo Hitler 1927



Nazi Party Members 1930

During the first months of the 1930s, Gerta Pohorylle had changed the way she saw life: proximity to left-wing elements in Leipzig turned her into an unpretentious woman and above all, one committed to the drama of a country with six million unemployed and a complex social problem.



A simple and Committed Woman

She frequented the intellectual circles of the city and met a number of left-wing ideologists who influenced this commitment, such as illustrator Max Schwimmer, who subsequently joined the communist party, Erich Weinert, one of the founders of the Union of Proletarian Revolutionary workers who also espoused communism and playwright Bertold Brecht who was also a communist.

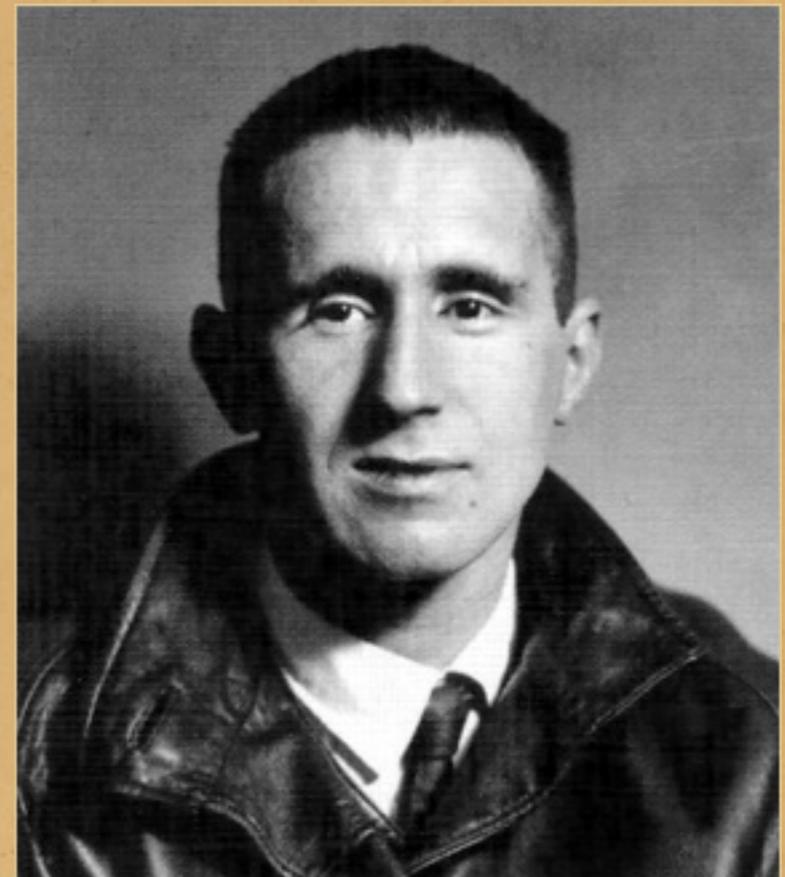
Her latest love had a significant influence on this change: Georg Kuritzkes, leader of a group of left-wing students and the son of Dina Gelbke, a fervent revolutionary who had been a friend of Lenin's. Despite her move towards the left, Gerta never joined the communist party.



Erich Weinert



Max Schwimmer



Bertold Brecht

As opposed to the far-right trends that were being strengthened in Germany, Italy and other European country, municipal elections in April 1931 put an end to the Spanish monarchy: as a result of the victory of the left, King Alfonso XIII decided to abdicate and leave Spain. On 14 April, the 2nd Spanish Republic was proclaimed which attempted, from the very first, not only to establish a democratic government but to carry out a series vital changes in a country that had been subjugated by extreme traditionalism and suffered from profound inequality. Although she was unaware of it at the time, this political change proved to be crucial in Gerta Pohorylle's life.

## THE END OF THE MONARCHY IN SPAIN



Document abdication of Alfonso XII - ABC de Madrid



The nobility farewell to Queen Victoria before leaving for exile

PROCLAMATION OF THE SPANISH REPUBLIC. APRIL 14, 1931



Spanish Republic Flag



Republic was Proclaimed in Eibar - 13/5/1931



Popular Joy



Madrid - April 14, 1931

It was as definitive as the advance of fascist ideology in Germany as a result of the Nazi party, whose absolute triumph was consolidated through Hitler's appointment as chancellor. Following the death of President Von Hindenburg, Germany did not take long to become a ultra right-wing dictatorship with the atrocious consequences this had for Jews, minorities, the left and the German people as a whole. At that moment, the majority supported Nazism as a result of its lingering disappointment over its defeat in 1918 and the dream of achieving new power and national greatness.

## THE END OF DEMOCRACY





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Gerta became an activist in the opposition, with all the danger this entailed where the state only accepted the existence of a single party: the government party. Moreover, she was a Jew in an atmosphere where anti-Semitism was increasing by the minute, presaging an era of violent extermination. Within this context, one night in April 1933, on the pretext of catching her brother, an activist like herself, Gerta was subjected to preventive arrest in her home, in the presence of her parents. Her captors were obviously aware of the subversive activities of this young woman who, perhaps as a result of youthful romanticism, entered Leipzig Women's Prison with a certain satisfaction. However, she was in prison for less than a month and despite having assumed a strong position of permanent rebelliousness towards her jailors, was released due to the influence of certain friends; however, she understood that her life in Germany was no longer possible.

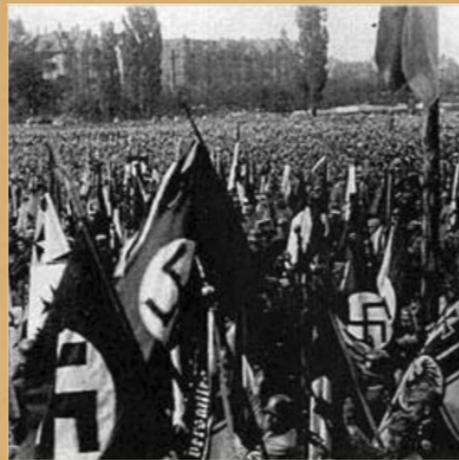


Eberhard Schöngarth  
Commander of the SS in Leipzig





Paris was the favorite destination of several exiles for political reasons. Thousands of people arrived from countries where fascist ideology was advancing to re-make their lives in a setting that was near their home. Gerta, who had spoken French from her time at the Swiss boarding school, also chose this destination. Since she had undergone the experience of exile as a child in her parents' home, she understood that her priority was to be safe and of course, continue fighting Hitler's ideology from abroad. She arrived with a Polish passport provided by the Polish consul in Leipzig, due to her parents' Galitzian origin and did not take long to secure a job as the secretary of an émigré psychoanalyst who paid her a pittance. She depended in the support of committees for exiles and certain friends. She barely managed to make ends meet with her friend Ruth, which whom she shared an attic or "chambre de bonne" as the maids' rooms in the attics of many Parisian buildings were known. The sophistication and refinement she had cultivated in the past became a mere memory.



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Gerta by Fred Stein. Paris

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The boulevards of Montparnasse, Raspail, Saint Germain and Saint Michel, in other words, *la rive gauche*, formed the center of Gerta's life in Paris. The Dome, Coupole and Closerie des Lilles cafés, which she and her friend frequented, enabled them to socialize with German refugees and the French left and to meet up with a number of personalities from the art world.



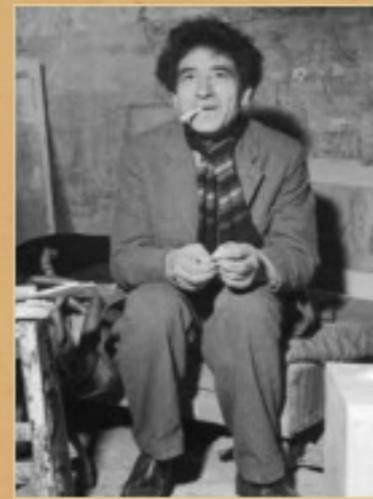
There, they bumped into Bretón, Picasso and the surrealists and Girardoux. They met Giacometti, gallery owner Jeanne Bucher and photographers Willy Maywald and Regina Lanquarz, who was also from Stuttgart. At the Dome, photographer Philippe Halsman signed Ruth as a model. Meanwhile, Gerta enrolled in a course of current political events and Marxist theory. Although she still did not belong to any party, she had undoubtedly adopted an increasingly progressive, left-wing ideology.



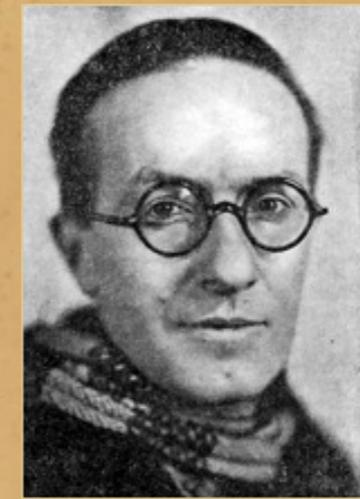
Willy Maywald



Jeanne Bucher



Alberto Giacometti



Jean Girardoux



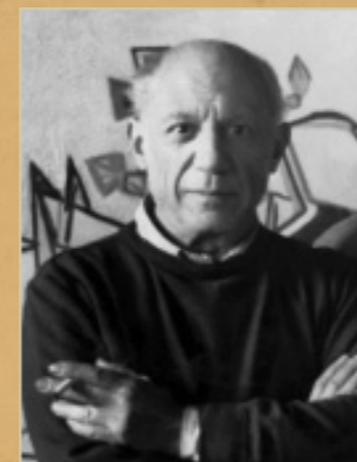
André Breton



Philippe Halsman



Louis Aragon



Pablo Picasso

By chance, one day André Friedmann, the stone-throwing Hungarian boy, asked Ruth for permission to take some open-air photos of her for an advertising brochure. Ruth accepted but asked Gerta to accompany her and so it was in that square in Montparnasse, Gerta first set eyes on that twenty-year-old photographer who, despite his charm, was having a hard time making ends meet. Friedmann spent long hours at the Dome with two photographer friends: David Seymour, the famous Chim, and Henri Cartier Bresson. They sometimes worked for Vu magazine and Berlineer illustrierte Zeitung, although the latter was controlled by the Nazis. Although he was Jewish like Gerta, he could not afford to reject any work. It was not long before the two became friends and after a few short-lived relationships with other people, they started going out.



Erno Andrei Friedmann



The master of street photography, Fred Stein, a German like Gerta, took several photos of them. Gerta gradually became Friedmann's assistant in a dark room they set up in the bathroom of her house. This was her first contact with photography, which soon entranced her. Andrei became her teacher and also secured a job for her with Alliance Photo, the main photographic agency in France, directed by María Eisner. There she began to find out how the photography market operated, as well as the mechanisms of supply and demand. She met photographers such as Cartier Bresson, Chim and Imre Weizs. In fact, she had walked straight into a world that was beginning to fascinate her. With Andrei and her friends from the agencies, she went to parties with the Association of Revolutionary Artists and Writers. She became interested in journalism and attended courses and debates on trends in reporting.



Gerta Pohorylle and Andrei Friedmann by Fred Stein

**GERTA PHOTOGRAPHER**



*Alliance Photo Agency*



María Eisner



Worker by Imre Weisz



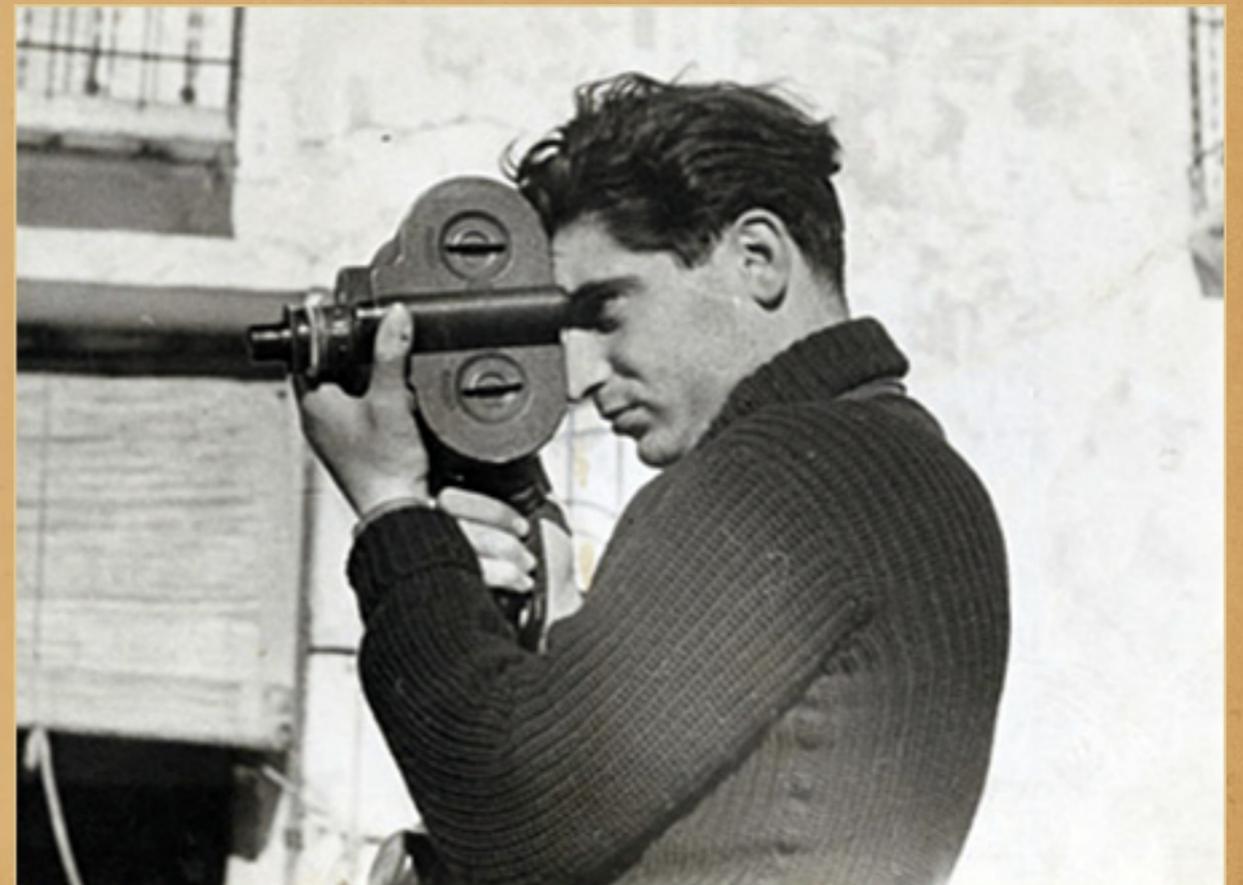
Umbrella by Henri Cartier-Bresson

Gerta and Andrei worked feverishly in addition to dabbling in photography, she continued to help him but found this was not enough. They wanted to secure fixed contracts with illustrated journals but competition was fierce and they did not have that many connections. Gerta adopted an objective, business-like position and suggested to her partner that they invent a character: a highly successful photographer, one of the best in the world, who could afford to charge more than anyone else. It could, for example, be an American, who would have to have a name that was unrelated to his Jewish origins, which could be a handicap. She would also have to change her name, for the same reason. The point was to make a break with the past and engage in a sort of symbolic ritual that gave birth to Gerda Taro and Robert Capa. And the names? They were apparently inspired by two of the most successful people at the time Andrei's was related to the great movie director Frank Capra who had won an Oscar for the best film at 34 with *It Happened One Night*, while Greta, who always liked great actresses, based hers on Greta Garbo. the same syllables, the same glamour. It was 1935 and the strategy worked: contracts did not take long to arrive: Gerda Taro was right and her idea began to work extremely well.

*GERTA INVENTED CAPA, ANDREÍ INVENTED TARO*



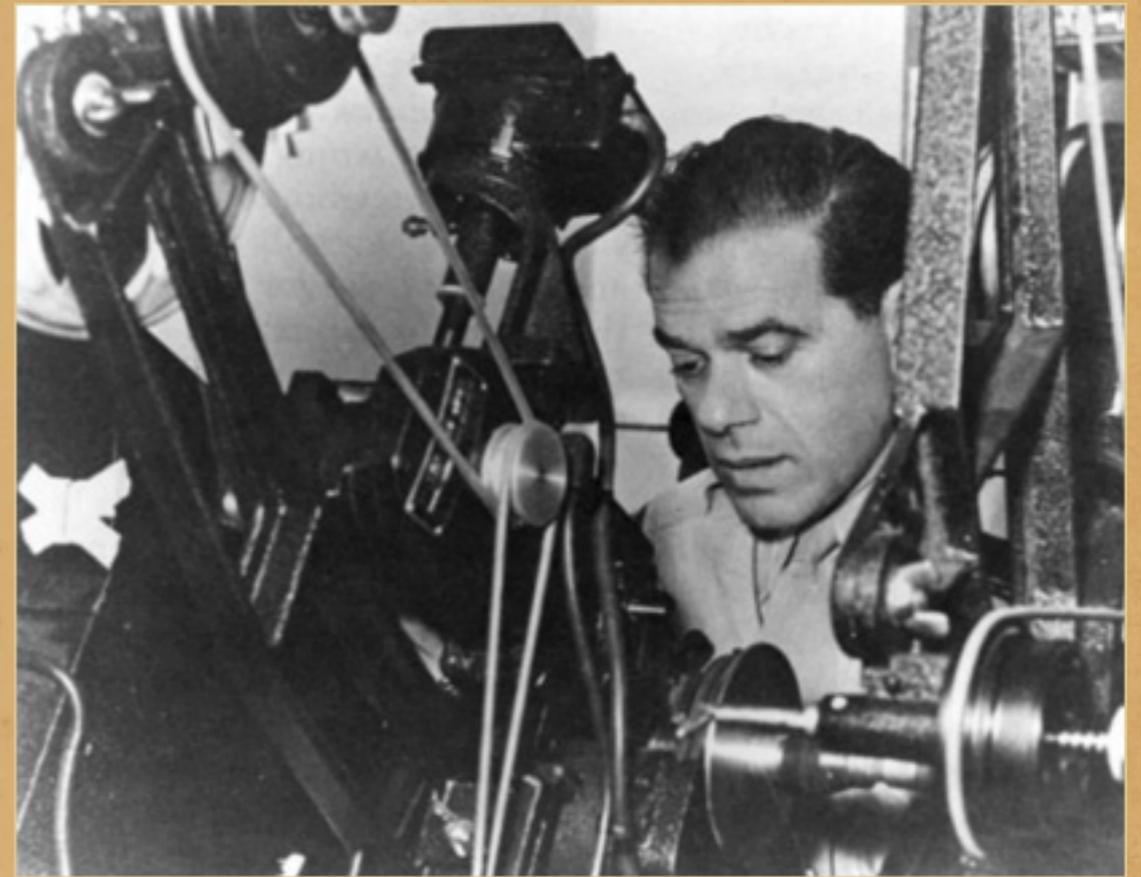
Gerda Taro



Rober Capa



Greta Garbo, Swedish Actress



Frank Capra, Hollywood Director

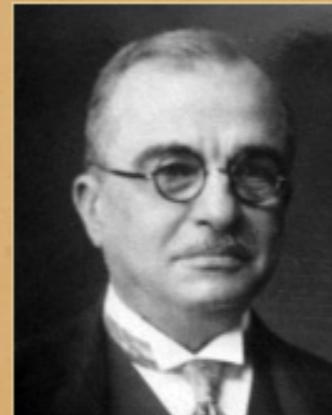
Although fortune smiled on this new character called Robert Capa and therefore his partner and assistant, Gerda Taro, the same could not be said of the European political landscape. In Germany, Italy and most European countries, far-right, totalitarian governments had sprung up and fascist parties and leaders were on the rise.

## THE RISE OF FASCISM



Benito Mussolini and Adolfo Hitler

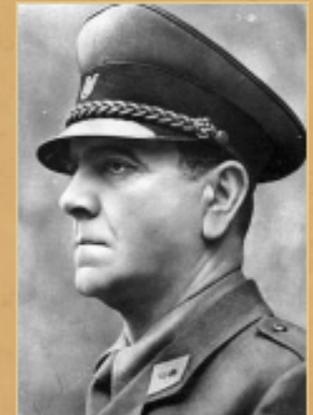
Ioanis Metaxas  
Greece



Miklos Horthy  
Hungary



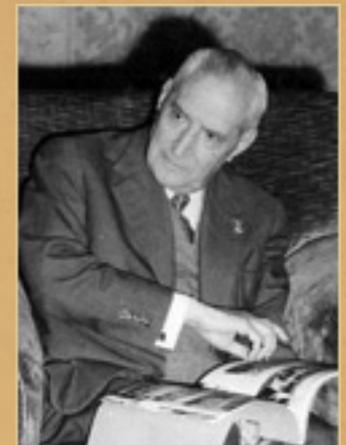
Ante Pavelic  
Croatia



León Degrelle  
Belgium

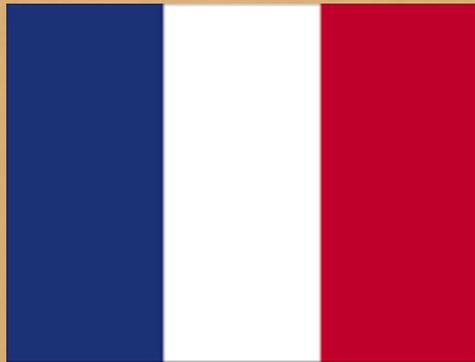


Anton Mussert  
Holland



Oliveira Salazar  
Portugal

Attacks on Jews in Germany became so widespread that the parents of Gerta Pohorhyle or rather the newborn Gerda Taro moved to Yugoslavia. The only hope for democracy was the triumph of the French popular front and the progressive Spanish republic. In France, however, there were significant right-wing forces and in Spain, for several years the Fascist-inspired party known as the Falange, with a large number of followers, coincided with the generals and the most traditional groups in an extremely tense context.



The people in Paris celebrates the victory of the Popular Front, 1936



Leon Blum President of France 1936-37  
on behalf of a coalition of the left



In fact, on 18 July 1936, a group of generals led by Francisco Franco and effectively supported by right-wing parties, rebelled against the Republic. What originally seemed to be an attempted coup d'état ended up becoming one of the cruelest wars in the 20th century. The Spanish Civil war continued until 1939 and its first effect was a profound division throughout the country whose population, due to a number of political and factors, was extremely polarized. This war almost immediately became a metaphor of what might happen on the Continent. Due to their obvious ideological similarity, Franco and the rebel generals soon won the support of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy whereas France, England and the United States, despite their democratic regimes, agreed not to intervene on behalf of the Republic, thereby virtually isolating a legitimate government which, in the whole of Europe, was only supported by Russia.

### THE UPRISING: JULY 17 AND 18, 1936



Niceto Alcalá Zamora  
President  
Spanish Republic  
1931-1936



Manuel Azaña  
Presidente de la  
Republica Española  
A partir de 1936



The uprising began in Tetuán - Morocco Spanish



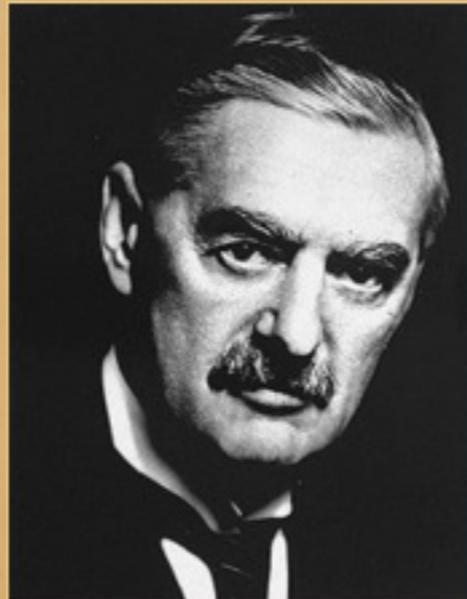
## INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT

### WITH FRANCO



Benito Mussolini and Adolfo Hitler, fascist leader Italy and Germany respectively

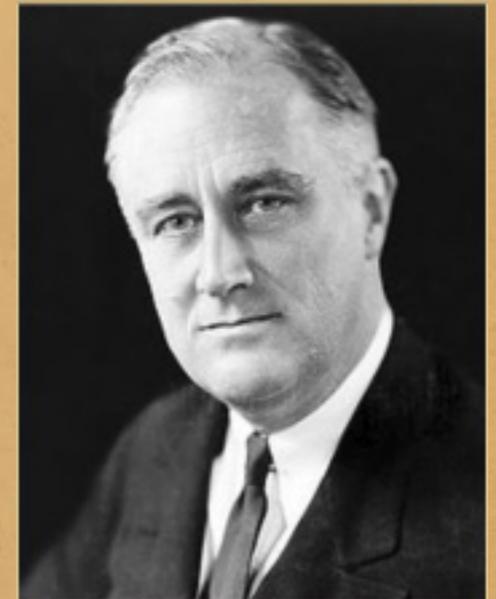
### NON-ALIGNED



N. Chamberlain  
Prime Minister U.K.

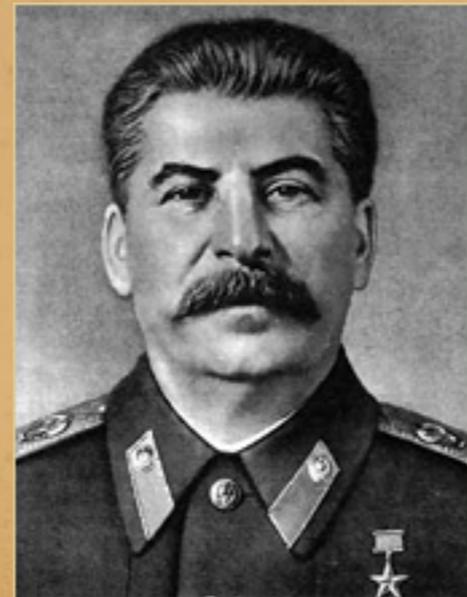


Leon Blum  
France President



Franklin Roosevelt  
U.S. President

### WITH THE REPUBLIC



Joseph Stalin  
Secretary of the Communist Party Central Committee  
U.R.S.S.

The uprising, which was eminently military, also assumed that the Republic would virtually be left without an army. The rapid advance of the rebels from the west of Spain to Madrid, the capture of Seville and the violence experienced by Extremadura, with the support of African legionnaires and a contingent provided by the protectorate of Morocco made it quite clear that this was not merely an attempted coup d'état but an uprising that would soon become civil war. The situation in Spain highlighted the risks faced by progressive regimes in Europe.

## MADRID WAY



Support Moor



Rebels in Extremadura



The Legion joined the uprising



Execution of Republicans



Fighting near Merida

Many cities organized defense committees on behalf of the Spanish Republic and formed military units that subsequently comprised volunteers from 54 countries in an attempt to contain the advance of fascism. These international brigades began to arrive in Barcelona in October 1936.



INTERNATIONAL BRIGADES



**LOS INTERNACIONALES**  
UNIDOS *a los* ESPAÑOLES, LUCHAMOS CONTRA *el* INVASOR

LIT. CROMO, MADRID.

SINDICATO DE PROFESIONALES DE LAS Bellas ARTES 1937



# GERDA TARO

AN unusual WOMAN



In addition, the Civil War became the stage for a highly select group of intellectuals from all over the world who, as journalists or soldiers in international contingents or left-wing activists or observers, made their presence felt in Spain, particularly in Barcelona and in the Madrid besieged by rebels and after November 1936 in Valencia, to which the central government was transferred. Writers, poets, painters and thinkers arrived to inform the world of what was happening and to attempt to contain what was beginning to turn into a massacre.

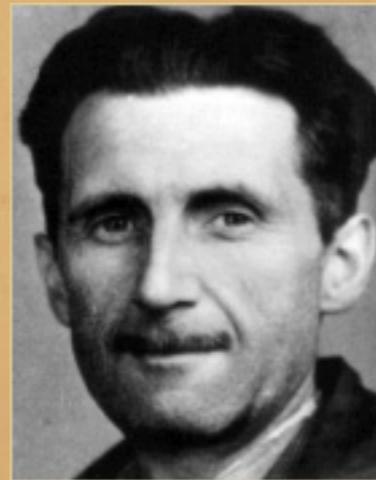
## CHARACTERS WORLD CULTURE IN SPAIN DURING THE WAR



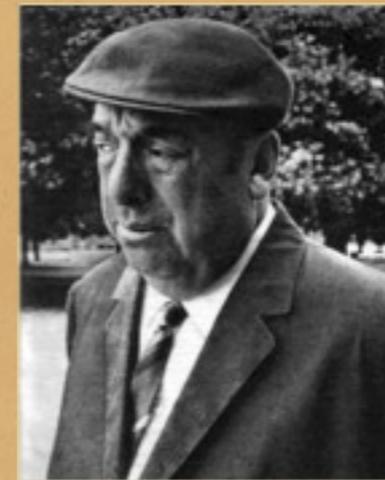
André Malraux



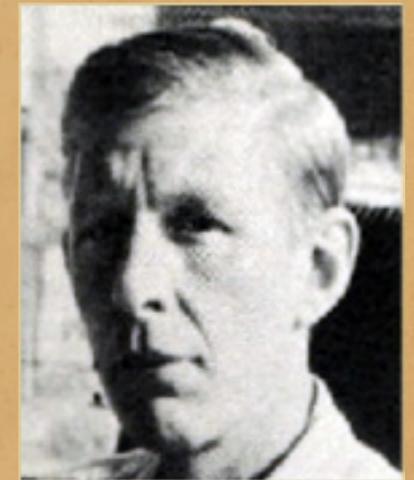
Ernest Hemingway



Georges Orwell



Pablo Neruda



W.H. Auden



John Dos Passos



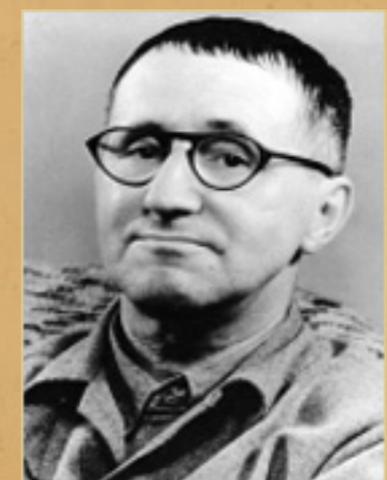
John Dos Passos



Wifredo Lam



Nicolás Guillén



Bertolt Brecht

*The news from Spain, and requests for assistance, flood Europe*





## THE FIZZ OF PROPAGANDA

From Paris, Robert Capa and Gerda Taro, like all their friends, exiles in general and intellectuals, followed events in Spain in late July of 1936 with great interest. Requests for help for the Spanish people surfaced everywhere. The world feared that the next target of Fascism would be France. After reading an article by writer Jean Richard Bloch, published in Barcelona, they both decided to settle in the place where events were taking place. After all, it was also their war: if they were not involved in danger, where could two Jewish exiles committed to freedom live? When they arrived in Barcelona on 5 August 1936, during 17 days after Franco's uprising, Robert Capa and Gerda Taro found themselves in a city that had flung itself into a widespread defense from fascism. The small number of troops in the loyal army meant that workers, women, young people, students, peasants, union members, anarchists, communists, socialists and republicans in general were pressed into service to defend the rule of law. Propaganda and the desire for freedom set the tone, which spread not only to the two photographers but to all the foreigners that turned up in the city.



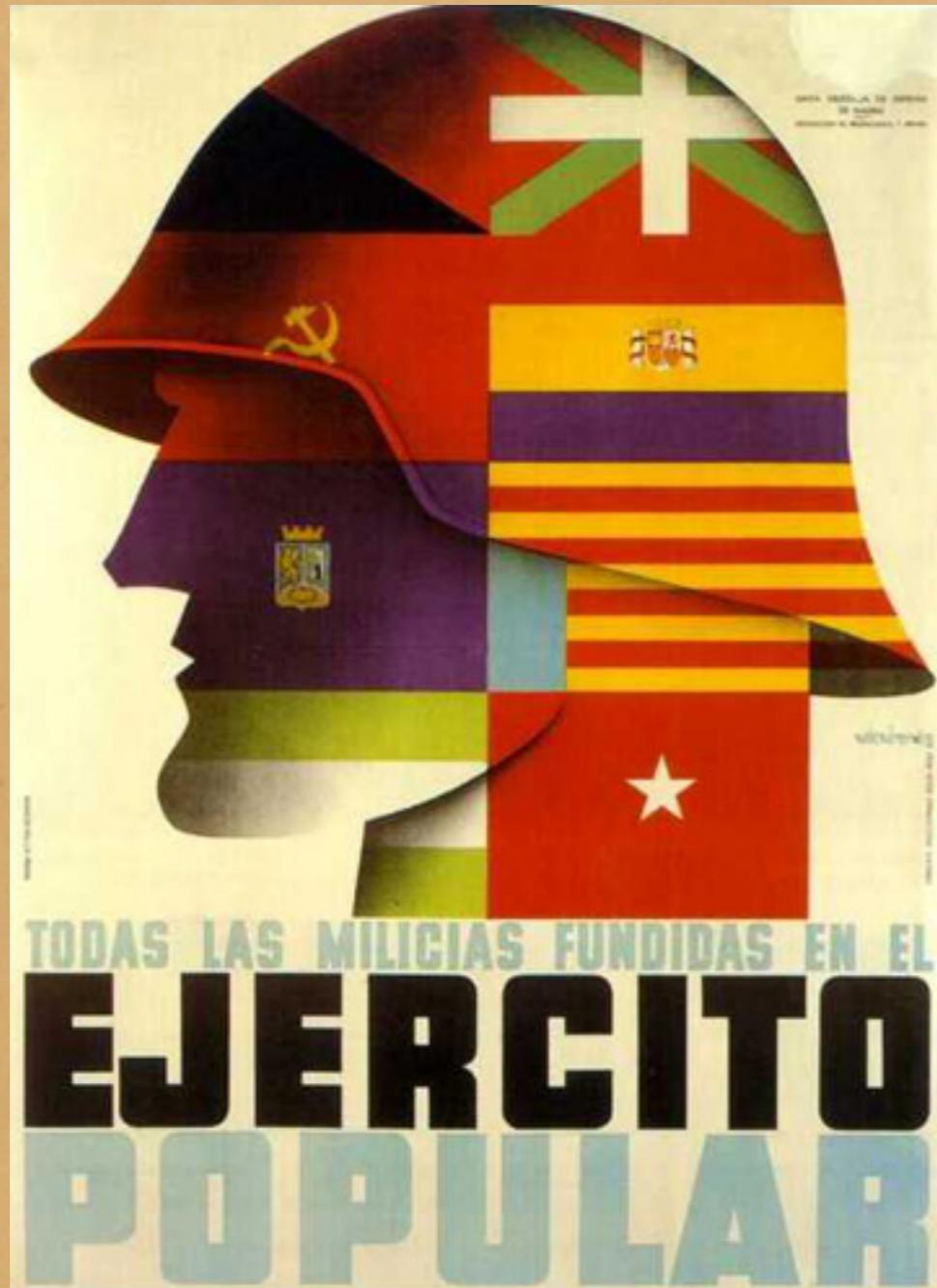




# GERDA TARO

AN unusual WOMAN





This excitement may have been what strengthened Gerda, and, together with Capa's influence, turned her into a great photographer whose work began to consistently show an unusual feature: her photographs provided a glance at the human side of war. It was as though those photographic testimonies of war revealed a rather tender, female attitude. Perhaps inspired by the effusiveness of the soldiers defending a progressive republic, Gerda's work from those early days in Barcelona has a touch of affection, showing the presence of women and even children in the Civil War, in other words, of those that were marginalized from this counter-culture she rejected with all her strength.

*GERDA TARÓ'S PHOTOS: WAR IS ALSO SOMETHING OF WOMEN*



Women getting ready



Militia Artillery

**GERDA TARO**  
*AN unusual WOMAN*



*CHILDREN WITH UNIFORM ANARCHIST OF IBERICA FEDERATION, BARCELONA 1936*



# GERDA TARO

*AN unusual WOMAN*



*COMMON PEOPLE STILL ABLE TO LAUGH*



Men in the window, Barcelona, 1936



Gerda Taro went to Spain five times in a year, three times with Capa and twice alone. It was not long before she became a graphic reporter for major French publications. Her work soon gained recognition in countries such as France and even England where it was possible to publish this vision of war. Without overlooking the horror, which had to be included to make a denunciation, it included a touch of devotion, heightened by the impression caused by the gaiety with which an entire country bore testimony to its ideology.

As the months went by, Spanish political geography was substantially modified by the advance of Franco, whose army was far more organized than the Republicans' and by the international support of what subsequently turned Spain into a laboratory for the approaching World War. In the meantime, the Republic was inexorably weakened.

## SUPPORT TO THE UPRISING OF TWO MILITARY POWERS



*THE SITUATION AT THE END OF 1936*



Franco half head of state of Spain from October



A politically and militarily weak Republic

Capa and Taro used the end of the summer and part of the autumn to visit other fronts. The Andalusian province of Córdoba was the scene of that paradigmatic photograph of the mortally wounded militiaman falling, taken by Robert Capa, which became a symbol and was subsequently unjustly questioned. It was even said that Gerda had taken it. In that same area, in the foothills of the Sierra Morena, the great Hungarian photographer took one of his best known sequences of his partner, protecting herself from Fascist fire together with another militia man. A curious, revealing detail is that the two are wearing the typical espadrilles of Andalusian peasants.



Militia in the Sierra de Cordoba ( Robert Capa)

*GERDA TARO IN FRONT OF CORDOBA 1936*  
*(Robert Capa)*



From the beginning of the war, the main aim of the rebels had been to conquer Madrid. Franco's army planned to reach the city while German and Italian bombers destroyed the capital of Spain. But the inhabitants of Madrid resisted a siege that eventually lasted three years, meaning that the main war fronts revolved around a group whose heroism was legendary. In November 1936, the government was transferred to Valencia, but the capital continued to be the main theater of war and therefore, a magnet for correspondents and journalists from all over the world. After a lightning trip to Paris, Gerda Taro and Robert Capa traveled there after stopping at the Aragón front where Gerda was struck by the peasants who, as anarchists, defended the republic.

## THE SITUATION IN MADRID



ON THE FRONT CATALAN-ARAGONESE



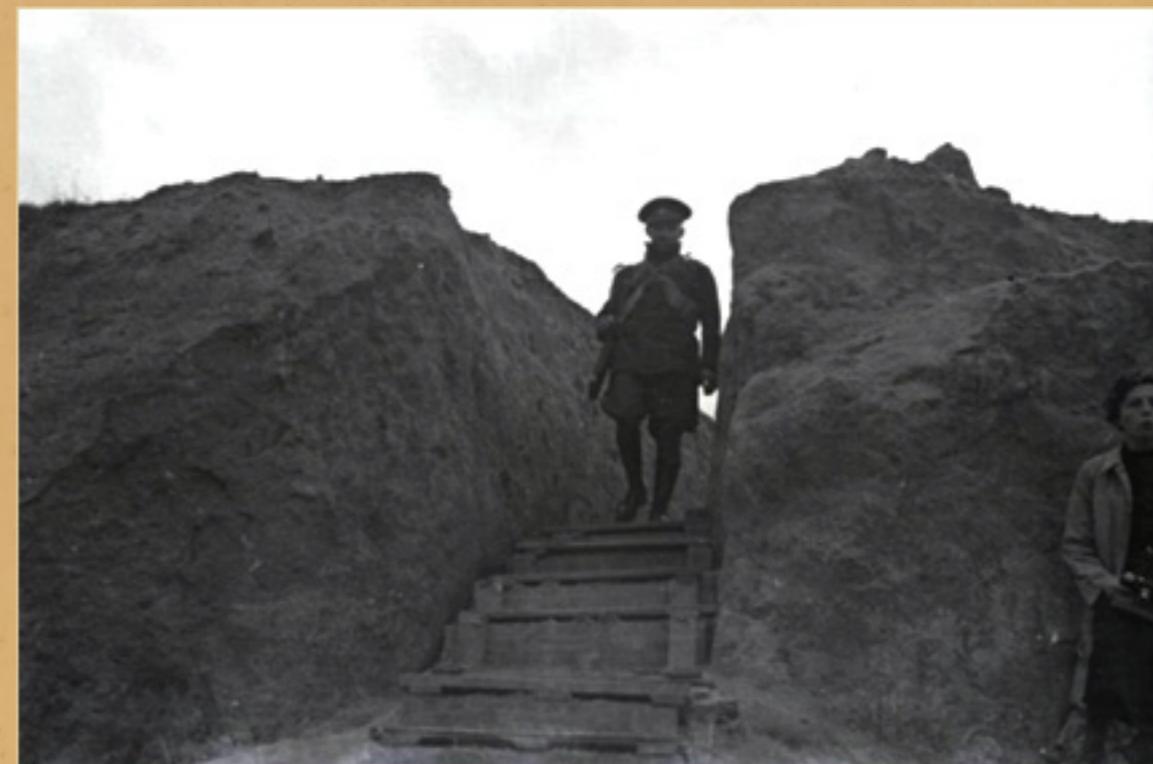
Farmers anarchists (Photographs published by Illustrated London News)

To Gerda and Robert, Madrid appeared to be a city under threat, whose willingness to resist was reflected in images such as workers building a brick wall around the symbol of the city, Cibeles, caught by Taro's camera. But they also recorded what happened later in the university city, which, because of its location on the outskirts was the scene of some of the heaviest fighting to capture Madrid. The two photographers toured the fronts near the city: Sierra de Guadarrama, Toledo... Defying the danger that so often threatened, the photographers began to see their photographs published in major journals. Capa tracked the movements of the International Brigade XII, under the command of the Hungarian writer Mate Zalka, known as General Lukacz. At that time, the two photographers decided to create the Capa & Taro label, which meant the recognition of Gerda as a photographer by the master and the consolidation of their work relationship. They operated on the principle that they were together but separate, which marked the high point of their second, intense trip to Spain.



Workers cover the Cibeles. Gerda Taro. 1936

## IN THE SITE OF MADRID



Gerda and Republican Official in the University City. Robert Capa 1936

*CAPA & TARO*



Taro in Madrid by Capa



Capa in Segovia by Taro

In early 1937, they returned to Spain. Shortly afterwards, Gerta Pohorylle was given an official press card, issued by the Madrid Defense Council, describing her as a reporter with *Ce Soir*, the magazine founded by Louis Aragón, which began to circulate a few months later. The card was stamped by the *Alliance of Anti-Fascist Intellectuals in the Defense of Culture*. Gerda submitted her first photo reports, most of which were themed, to *Vu* magazine, which ran a large photo spread of her work. The young woman from Stuttgart had found her niche: What more could be asked by Gerta Pohorylle, who six years earlier, had seemed rather lost? It was the start of a promising career, in the service of the ideals she believed in and next to the man of her life.

JUNTA DELEGADA DE DEFENSA DE MADRID      Secretaria de Propaganda - Sección Fotográfica

FILIACIÓN DEL FOTÓGRAFO *J-16*

Apellidos *POHORYLLE*      Nombre *GERTA*

Domicilio *Paris, 50 me Varin*      Teléfono .....

Edad *18/10*      Nació en *Stuttgart*      Estado .....

Provincia de .....

Trabaja en *"Ce soir", Paris*

Domicilio del destino *Alianza de Intelectuales*

Partido político a que pertenece *A.E.A.R.*

Número del carnet .....

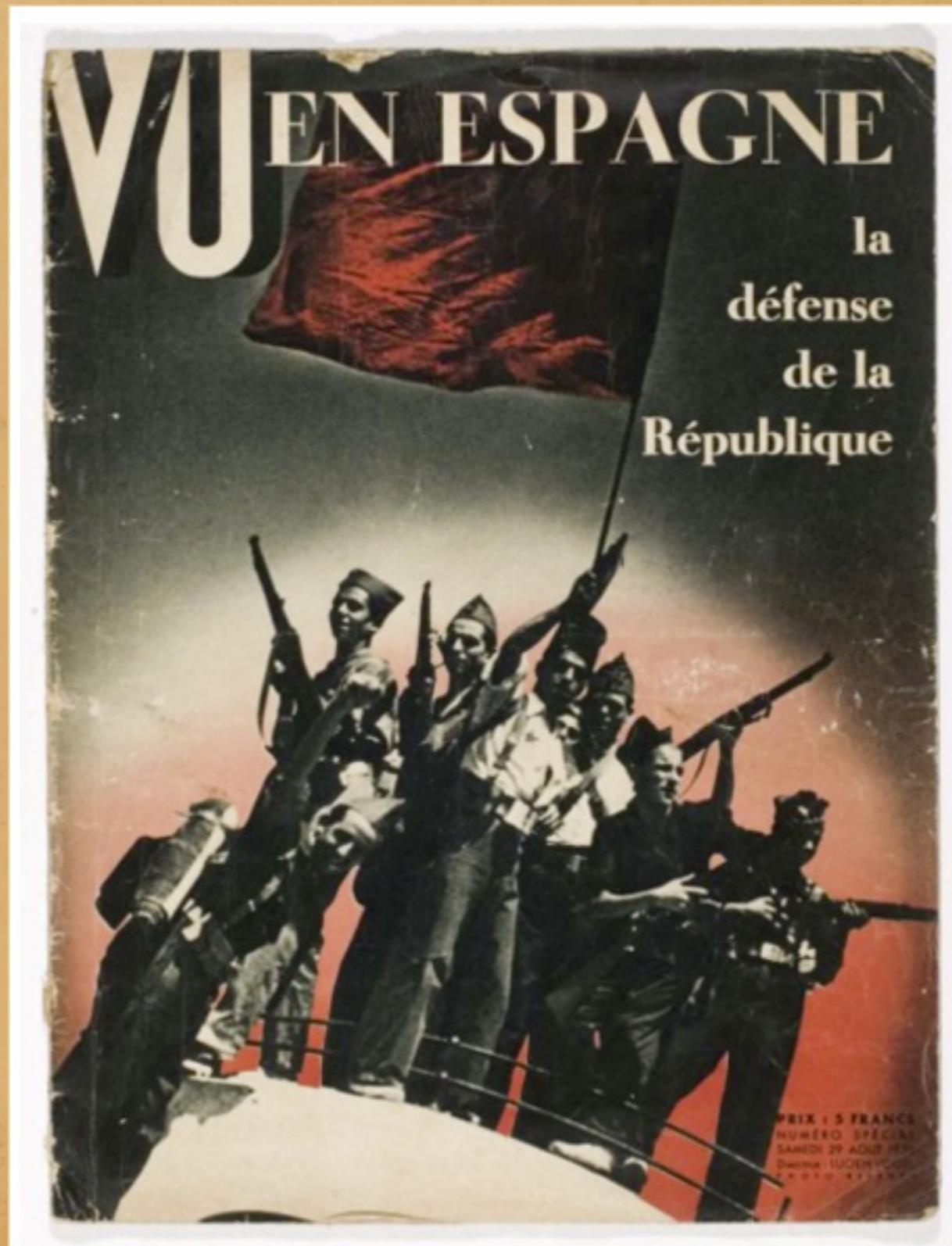
Otros antecedentes y observaciones que hace .....

25, de *Febrero*, de 19*37*

(Firma) *Gerta Pohorylle*

*Antonio Luengo Plois*

ALIANZA DE INTELLECTUALES  
ANTIFASCISTAS PARA  
DEFENSA DE LA CULTURA  
MADRID





In early 1937, Gerda visited the Spanish Levant. Both she and Robert covered the Republicans' departure from Málaga to Almería. Despite the tragedy of some civilians, shot from a German plane while they were being evacuated, Gerda's camera also recorded the moments of relaxation and enthusiasm that continued to be experienced by those defending the republic.

*GERDA IN ALMERIA, 1937*



In Valencia, the photographer recorded one of the most dramatic sequences as a testimony, of course, but also as a reflection of her own view on events: at the central hospital morgue after a bombing, she not only captured the drama of the dead but also the tragedy of those waiting for news of their loved ones behind the institution's bars. The photographs show the full tragedy of war through the destroyed bodies and the anxious, expectant faces of those waiting. This angle of Gerda's work showed aspects of the war related to the inability, until then, to record any triumph of the republic, whose difficulties were becoming increasingly obvious.



*AFTER BOMBING - VALENCIA 1937*

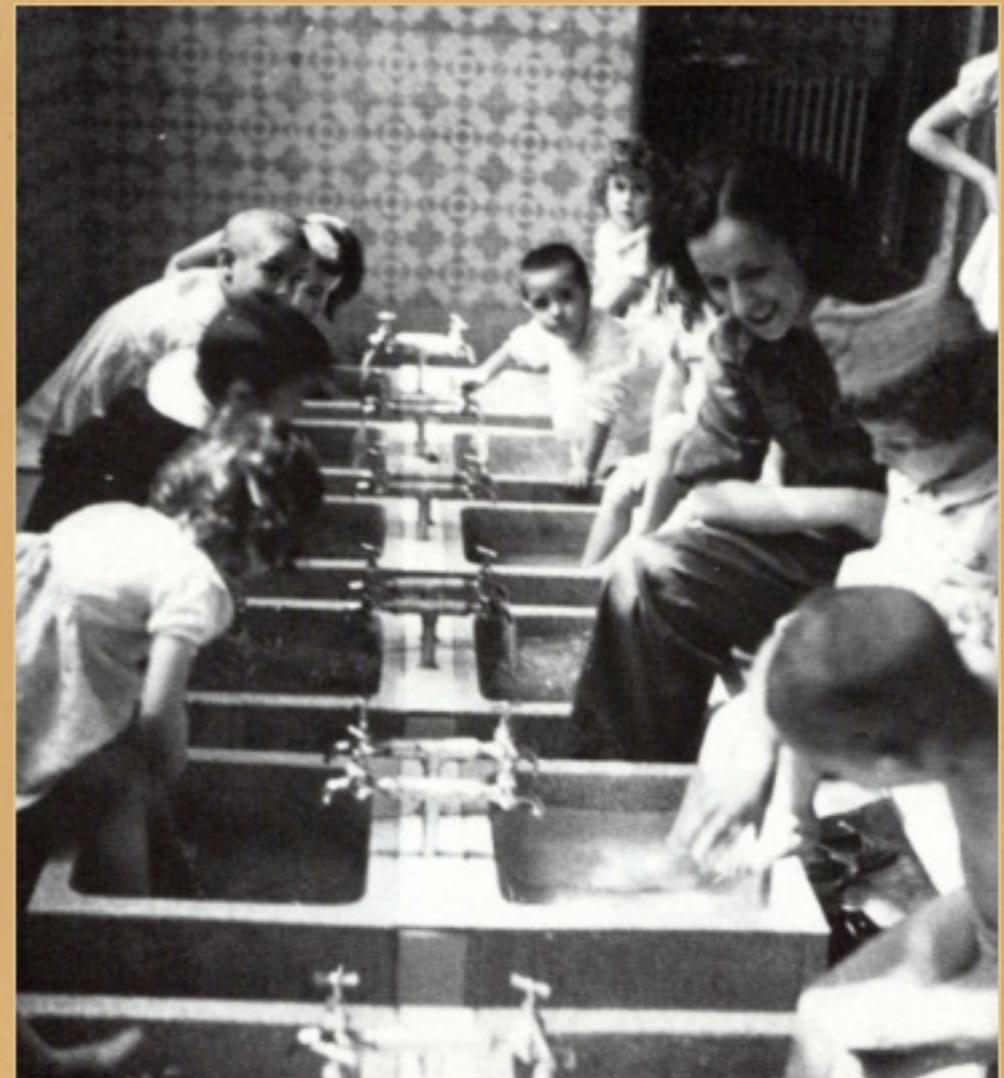


Back in Madrid, Capa decided to set off for Paris. Gerda would remain in Spain until March 1937. She began to reduce her dependence on Capa in a city under constant siege yet where, paradoxically, life went on. Those few weeks saw the Republic's greatest triumph in Guadalajara. Gerda, like other photographers and reporters, toured the streets of the Castilian province to record events. She did so with more enthusiasm than ever because of a victory that would turn out to be pyrrhic. She also returned to the neighboring fronts of the city and portrayed figures in the war that was becoming increasingly dense and had already claimed thousands of innocent lives.

## GERDA IN MADRID



Blind musicians liven up a holiday at children's shelter in Madrid



Children washing in Madrid shelter

*AT THE FRONT*



After a short stay in Paris, Gerda returned to Madrid, together with Capa in early April of 1937 for a few days. She had the opportunity to meet Ernest Hemingway, who had come to Spain as a war correspondent and in search of a plot for a novel that would eventually become his masterpiece, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. She and her companion collaborated with Joris Ivens, who produced the documentary *The Spanish Earth*, which would be shown worldwide later that year, moving vast audiences.



Hemingway



Ivens



The destruction of Guernica, by Nazi planes, in late April of 1937 caught them in Paris to which they had returned due to the inactivity of the fronts near Madrid, since war operations had concentrated along the Cantabrian coast. Until the so-called "northern offensive," for a few weeks, the war seemed to have entered a state of dead calm. Back in Barcelona in May, Gerda found the city in a very different situation from the one it had been in during her first visit. confrontation between anarchists and communists had produced a civil war within a civil war and this fight would become one of the main obstacles the Republic would have to surmount.



Movie Image



*April 1937 Guernica*





*MAY 37 IN BARCELONA: CIVIL WAR IN THE CIVIL WAR*





Nevertheless, Gerda, who was increasingly mature and professional, continued working and traveling around the country's various war zones: she returned to Córdoba, went back to Madrid, visited the offensives on the sierra of Madrid, met figures from Spanish life and portrayed them; tracked the movements of the international brigades and accompanied the troops' movements... In June, she and Capa had to interrupt their work and travel to Valencia for the funeral of General Lukacz, the Hungarian commander of International Brigade No. XII. It was an opportunity to photograph the Spanish people, whom Gerda had begun to regard as her own.

*PROTAGONISTAS DE LA VIDA ESPAÑOLA*



The poet Rafael Alberti, Miaja General - Madrid defender-, and María Teresa Leon, wife of Alberti. Photo of Gerda Taro. Madrid, June 1937

VALENCIA AGAIN



The inauguration in this city of the Second Congress of Anti-Fascist Writers, which attracted some of the most prestigious intellectuals in the world, such as Neruda, Octavio Paz, Ilya Ehrenburg, Andre Gide, Andre Malraux, Cesar Vallejo and Vicente Huidobro, among others, brought Taro and Capa back to the city. The congress was held in Barcelona, Valencia, Madrid and closed in Paris. After covering an event that captured the headlines of newspapers and journals in non-fascist countries, a short holiday in the French capital served as a prologue for what would be Gerda's last trip to Spain.

## SECOND INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF WRITERS. JULY 1937

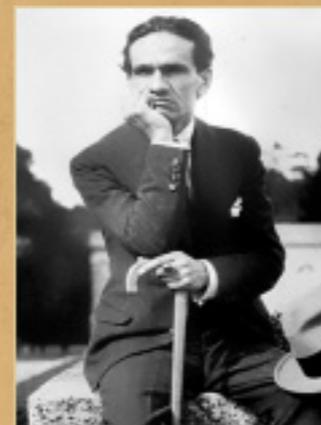
*Barcelona – Valencia – Madrid*



Ilya Ehrenburg



Pablo Neruda



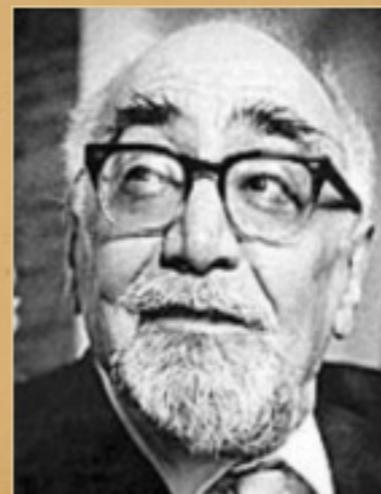
Cesar Vallejo



Vicente Huidobro



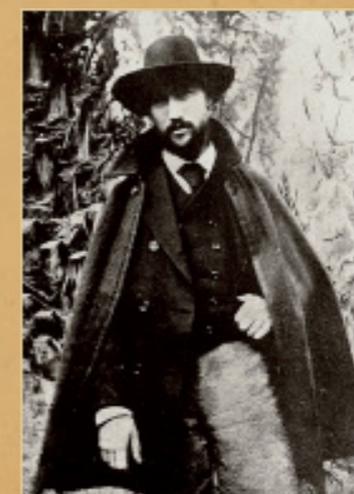
Carlos Pellicer



Ramón J. Sender



María Teresa León



André Gide



*OPENING OF THE SECOND CONGRESS OF WRITERS ANTIFASCIST (GERDA TARO)*



In the beginning of July, in order to distract the attention of the northern army and reduce the pressure it was exerting on the Basque country, the Republic launched an offensive on the outskirts of Madrid that would become known as the Battle of Brunete. The Sierra de Guadarrama, which served as a backdrop to the Madrid scenery, was the theater of operations. Throwing caution to the winds, Gerda Taro, who was alone in Spain at the time, because Capa had had to return to Paris, set off to the front to cover the attack, which turned into another defeat for the republican troops. The so-called *Mexican Suitcase* contained several photographs taken by her during the offensive, including a sequence of the preparation of the battle from the rearguard.

## THE BATTLE OF BRUNETE



International Brigades in Brunete



Valentin Gonzalez leads the offensive near Brunete

*ASPECTS OF THE BATTLE*



*AT THE BRUNETE FRONT (GERDA TARO)*



Her last report was published in late July by the "Regards" magazine in Paris, in which she documented the recapture of the town of Brunete by the Republicans, in the middle of one of the skirmishes of war. This document contains a photograph showing a militiaman repainting the wall of the town hall with the Republican symbols that had been replaced by the yoke and arrows, the emblems of the Fascist Falange.

*GERDA TARO'S LAST REPORT, PUBLISHED IN THE JOURNAL PARISIEN «REGARDS»*



Gerda Taro's activity in the battle was so intense that there is an anonymous photograph of her, the last one ever taken, showing her dressed in a militiawoman's uniform, lying asleep, exhausted, with a milestone as a pillow, very near where the offensive was being launched. This may be the most eloquent testimony of a graphic reporter's capacity for involvement in war.



## TANK DEATH

Unfortunately, the last day of the Battle of Brunete would also be the last day of Gerda Taro's life. On July 25, as the troops were disbanding, she managed to hop onto the footboard of General Walter, Karol Swierczewski's car. However, some low-flying enemy planes, Heinkes and Stukas terrified the convoy and a sharp turn by the vehicle in which she was traveling threw Gerda onto the ground, behind a small mound. At that moment, a Republican tank reversed over the mound and onto Taro, crushing her. Although she was immediately taken to a clinic in the nearby town of El Escorial, not much could be done for her and after a night of agony, she died the following morning.



Asdrúbal González and a Russian comrade led a tank that rolled over Gerda Taro

THE NEWS ON CE SOIR, JULY 28, 1937

*“Notre reporter photographe Mlle. Taro a été tuée près de Brunete où elle avait assisté à la bataille. Un tank républicain tampona la voiture sur le marchepied de laquelle elle était montée pour quitter le village tombé aux mains des insurgés.”*



Capa found out about the death of his companion through the French press and set off immediately to Spain to recover Gerda's body and return it to the city that had taken her in after she left Germany. She was buried there on 1 August, the day she would have turned 27. In the 97th division of the Père Lachaise cemetery, the French Communist party assigned a grave for her, where she was laid to rest under a dove carved by her friend, sculptor Alberto Giacometti.

Life magazine published a report on Gerda's death. A collection of cards circulated in England at that time, which turned the death of this unusual woman into little more than an anecdote. She undoubtedly made an extremely significant contribution through her camera and her attitude to history, to the fight for democracy and the enrichment of photography as a form of testimony. Gerda was subsequently almost forgotten until the publication of the biographies I referred to earlier and of course, the discovery of her photos in the famous *Mexican Suitcase* in 2008, which earned her, and both Capa and Chim several exhibitions.

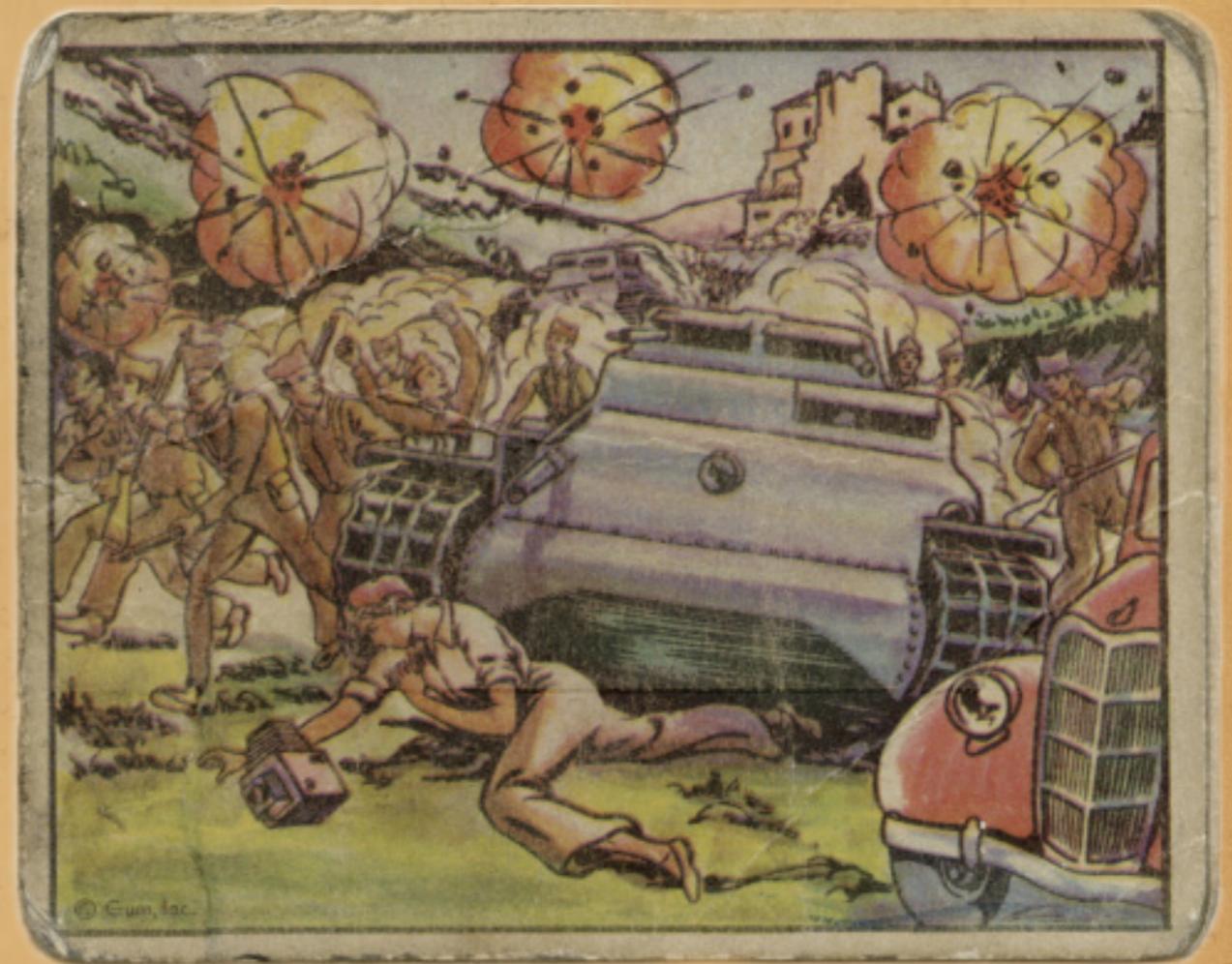


Life Magazine. August 1937

«PHOTOGRAPHER HIT BY A TANK LEAL»: LEGEND IN A CHROME COLLECTION

**89** **Woman Photographer Crushed by Loyalist Tank**  
Probably the first woman photographer ever killed in action, pretty Gerda Taro covering the Spanish Civil War for the Paris "Ce Soir," was crushed by a Loyalist tank during the great battle of Brunete on July 26, 1937. The Loyalists had taken Brunete, lost it, taken it again, and then lost it. Gerda Taro had left Brunete once in the retreat, and then decided to join the Loyalist rear guard in the city. For almost an hour she had crouched with a remaining battalion under Rebel bombardment. Finally she hopped on the running board of a press car. Suddenly, as part of a Loyalist counter attack, a tank, cruising blind, careened into view. With an unexpected swerve the creeping, shell-spitting monster bumped the daring young woman from her perch and crushed her beneath the revolving tugs! She died the following morning in the Escorial Hospital her husband-photographer, Robert Capa, at her side.

To know the HORRORS OF WAR is to want PEACE  
This is one of a series of 240 True Stories of Modern Warfare.  
Save to get them all. Copyright 1938, GUM, INC., Phila., Pa.



Nowadays, Gerda Taro is a legendary figure, the prototype of a rebel with a cause, of a woman who bore witness with her with her own perspective. Perhaps the best way to pay tribute is through this beautiful phrase by another photographer, Tina Modotti, which suits her work perfectly and highlights photographic art's function of becoming a historical statement:

*"Photography serves to register objective life in all its expressions. If one adds sensitivity and the competence of the subject, with a clear idea of the place it must occupy in history, it is worthy of playing a role in the social revolution to which we must contribute."*

*Tina Modotti*

# GERDA TARO

*AN unusual WOMAN*



*LECTURE DELIVERED BY FERNANDO TOLEDO DURING THE  
4TH FOTOGRAFICA BOGOTÁ ON 11 MAY 2011*

ZoneZero 2011

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Web Design Elisa Rugo

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