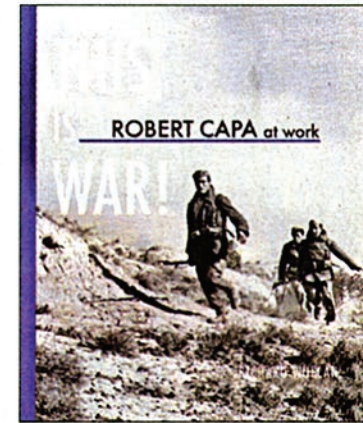
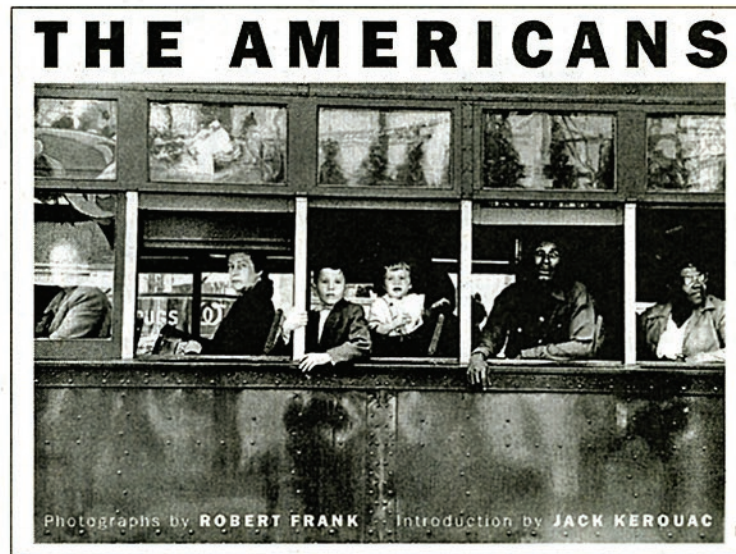


think!

ARTS & CULTURE

# STORY OF THE EYE



**THE STEIDL COLLECTION** is a rare insight into 150 years of photographic history. And now, the famous arthouse has arrived in India

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For most, photography would be abstract art if it weren't filled with people. Like hotel mirrors in an unfamiliar city, which has seen many faces, photographs, sometimes, do not show your reflection. But when they do, they restore you to yourself.

Gerhard Steidl, a one-man institution, who's been publishing cutting edge books on photography, art, fashion, ethnography and literature since 1972, has, by opening his first bookshop, moved over 150 years of photographic history and the history of ideas into Delhi's Photoink gallery. This is the 14th 'edition' of the Steidl bookshop in the world. And 'getting' Steidl, pardon the hysterics, is like getting Werner Herzog (a fellow-German and

a leading light of the New German cinema) to say he will make a film and put you in it. So, how did this happen?

"The answer is before you," says Devika Daulet-Singh, director, Photoink, pointing to the *Blue Book* by Dayanita Singh, India's distinguished documenter of families. Singh, all of whose work — except *Myself Mona Ahmed* — has been published by Steidl, made the introductions. Besides Singh's city memoirs, *Sent A Letter*, the photo-book exhibition, *Steidl-The Published Image* which times with the opening of the bookshop, has other 'classics'.

What's on display, and now on sale? Books of war photographers Gerda Taro, Robert Capa's companion, who covered the Spanish Civil War with him and *The Americans*, Robert Frank's disapproving diary of a road journey through America in the late fifties.

Joakim Eskildsen's *The Roma Journeys* (left) through Europe and Asia, and Robert Frank's *The Americans* are classic examples of photography of 'the road'



The life of a policeman and life on the Tokyo street are both subjects of classic Steidl books, *On Duty* (left) and the *Asakusa Portraits* (right)

Also, there's a collection of thirties' prodigy Berenice Abbot's photo essays of New York before World War II, and of Continental literature's *enfant terrible* Jean Cocteau in bed with a mask. Richard Avedon's *Portraits of Power*, Walker Evans' book on picture postcards and Bruce Davidson's circus pictures — all occupy pride of place on the bookshelves.

The exhibition has also brought into focus the close relationship between image and text. A good foreword really helps. *The Americans* is a book as much of art as literature. Go through it just for the pleasure of Jack Kerouac's prose and his 'message' to the photographer. "Robert Frank, Swiss, unobtrusive, nice, with that little camera, he sucked a sad poem out of America...

The war in Spain, China, Normandy. Robert Capa had covered them all



Visitors browse the books from the Steidl collection at the Photoink gallery, Delhi. (Top right) Malick Sidibé's *Photographs* is an important Africa book SUSHIL JOSHI / HT

## GREAT PHOTOGRAPHS, ACTUALLY, ARE NOT THE ONES IN WHICH THE PEOPLE IN IT ARE THE MOST EXPRESSIVE

Robert Frank, you got eyes". Then there is Nobel laureate Gunter Grass's tribute to the gypsies as a people "who should be the first to be granted a passport" in *The Roma Journeys*.

Great photographs, actually are not ones in which the people in it are the most expressive. 'Expression' is playing the social game, an exercise in remaking oneself — first, according to what one thinks. Second, according to what the photographer thinks. And how you want society to look at you. Roland Barthes in his seminal book *Image, Music, Text*, admitted as much: "When I pose, I transform myself in advance into an image."

## INDIA IN FOCUS

- *Sent a Letter* - Dayanita Singh's seven photo journals on Calcutta, Varanasi, Bombay, Allahabad, Deigarh, Padmanabhapuram and her mother Nony Singh.
- *The Roma Journeys* - Danish photographer Joakim Eskildsen went in search of the gypsies in seven countries 2000-'06. Read about Sewa Singh Nat, an Indian gypsy and his family in Rajasthan.
- *Moksha* - New Yorker Fazal Sheikh's meditative portrait of Vrindavan and its widows.

This exhibition is a story of the eye and an experience in the many ways of seeing. Don't miss it.

The exhibition *Steidl-The Published Image*, is on till September 5 at the Photoink gallery, Jhandewalan, New Delhi  
Call: (011) 28755940/41/42