

National Gallery of Art

NEWS RELEASE

Deborah Ziska, Information Officer

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CONTACT: (202) 842-6353
Patricia O'Connell, Publicist

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART PRESENTS BRASSAÏ: THE EYE OF PARIS, **FIRST MAJOR U.S. RETROSPECTIVE OF THE CELEBRATED PHOTOGRAPHER**

Washington, D.C. -- Brassaï: The Eye of Paris, the first major exhibition in more than twenty years to examine the artist's entire career, will be on view in the West Building at the National Gallery of Art from October 17, 1999 through January 16, 2000. This retrospective celebrates the centenary of the birth of Brassaï (1899-1984) with approximately 115 photographs, including works from his best known *Paris de nuit* (*Paris by Night*) series, studies of high society, portraits of friends and colleagues, and haunting studies of graffiti made before and after World War II. The exhibition comes to the National Gallery of Art, its final venue, after showings at The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (December 6, 1998 - February 28, 1999), and the J. Paul Getty Museum (April 13 - July 4, 1999).

"One of the most celebrated photographers of the twentieth century, Brassaï captured every facet of society with the vision of a poet and the skill of a master storyteller," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "The exhibition at the Gallery will be the last chance to see this remarkable retrospective of Brassaï's images from more than thirty-five public and private collections in the U.S. and Europe."

Dubbed "the eye of Paris" in an essay by Henry Miller in 1934, Brassaï captured the essence of the city in his photographs. His *Paris de nuit* series, photographed during his nighttime wanderings with the famous Parisian poet Léon Paul Fargue, the writer Henry Miller, as well as many others, is a highlight of the exhibition. Selections from the series will include Pont Neuf at Night, Paris (1929), Brassaï Photographing the Parisian Night on Boulevard Saint-Jacques with his 6 x 9 Voigtländer (1931-1932) and Shop Window, Paris (1931-1932).

Brassaï ardently explored all aspects of contemporary Parisian life. Although he is celebrated for his photographs of Paris at night, including the activities of its demimonde, this exhibition reveals that he also made conscious efforts to present Parisian high society, ballet, and opera. Photographs of urbane social soirées such as Evening at Longchamp Racetrack, Paris (1938), Gala Soirée, Maxim's, Paris (1949), and Parisian, Masked Ball at Pré Catelan, Bois de Boulogne, Paris (1946),

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Fourth Street at Constitution Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20565

(202) 842-6353, *Facsimile* (202) 842-2403

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provide a telling counterpoint to works such as Backstage at the Folies-Bergères, Paris (1930-1932) and Conchita with Sailors, Place d'Italie, Paris (c.1933).

Brassaï's captivating portraits of his friends—artists, writers, and intellectuals of Paris—will also be on view. In these portraits, Brassai captures the character and intensity of such artists as Salvador Dali, Alberto Giacometti, Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, and such writers as Jean Genêt and Henry Miller. While Brassai photographed Parisian intellectuals, as well as its high society, he delighted in the commonplace and his compassion for the man on the street is reflected in such works as Napoleon in Front of an Antique Shop, French Quarter, New Orleans, Louisiana (1957), in which a Rubenesque passerby gives a sideways glance to a diminutive statue of Napoleon.

Brassaï, born Gyula Halász in Brasso, Transylvania, Hungary (now Romania), on September 9, 1899, changed his name to Brassai, which means "from Brasso." After emigrating to Paris in 1924, he worked as a journalist and began taking photographs in 1929. His first book, *Paris de nuit*, was published in 1932. Except for an interlude during World War II, he worked for much of his life as a freelance magazine photographer and writer for publications such as Le Minotaure, Verve, Coronet, Picture Post, and Harper's Bazaar. Brassai was the recipient of numerous awards including the first Grand Prix National de la Photographie in Paris (1978). By the time of his death in 1984, he had published seventeen books and hundreds of articles, held numerous exhibitions of his photographs, sculpture, and drawings, and won the prize for the Most Original Film at the 1956 Cannes Film Festival.

The curator for the exhibition is Anne Tucker, the Gus and Lyndall Wortham Curator of Photography at The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Sarah Greenough, curator of photographs, National Gallery of Art, has coordinated the exhibition in Washington. The exhibition catalogue features an extensive essay written by Anne Tucker and illustrates many works in the exhibition. A softcover catalogue is available for \$45.00 in the Gallery Shops and through the Gallery Web site at www.nga.gov. To order by phone, call (301) 322-5900 or (800) 697-9350.

The exhibition is organized by The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, with funding provided by The Brown Foundation, Inc., Houston Endowment, Inc., and The Wortham Foundation.

The National Gallery of Art, located on the National Mall at Fourth Street and Constitution Avenue, N.W., is open Monday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. Admission is free. For general information, call (202) 737-4215; call the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176; or visit the National Gallery's Web site at www.nga.gov. To receive the Gallery's free bimonthly Calendar of Events, call (202) 842-6662.

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