

Kádár Lynn, Katalin, ed. *Through an American Lens, Hungary, 1938: Photographs by Margaret Bourke-White.*

Trans. Mario Fenyő. Essays by: Károly Szerencsés, Katalin Kádár Lynn, Péter Strausz. East European Monographs. Boulder: Columbia UP, Distributor, 2010. 111 pp. ISBN: 978-0-88033-678-9.

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Reviewed by Joyce Berczik Corbett, Curatorial Consultant.

This large format book features photographs taken in 1938 in Hungary by Margaret Bourke-White while on assignment for *Life* magazine. Their publication follows the recent discovery of an important photographic archive relating to WWII by Katalin Kádár Lynn who compiled and edited this book of those photographs, which had been entirely forgotten, lost in archival obscurity.

Historian Kádár Lynn was searching in various photo archives for photos of Tibor Eckhardt whose biography she was writing, when she discovered a photo of Eckhardt taken in what appeared to be the late 1930's in the Time-Life photographic archive owned by Getty Images. When she looked at the photo credit she realized it was taken by Margaret Bourke-White, the most prominent female photo journalist of the day, and the photo was dated 1938. Since Kádár Lynn knew that Eckhardt did not visit North America in 1938, she realized the photo must have been taken abroad by Bourke-White and if so, there had to be a larger body of work taken at the same time as she would not have traveled to Hungary (or the continent) merely to take a portrait of Eckhardt or any other individual Central European politician. Upon investigation Kádár Lynn found about a hundred photos taken by Bourke-White in Hungary when she spent a month there in 1938 after a five month-long trip to the Soviet Union. As she was working for Life Magazine, she had access to all the important personages of the day and managed to take photos of most of them, from the far left to the far right. Such photos were of great importance because most of the news images seen by the public during the 20th century, until the advent of television news, were the products of photojournalism. Newsreels were shown in movie theaters, but widely circulated picture magazines brought world and national events right into the home.

The book has 43 large and six small photographs, with a short essay explaining each of the large photographs. The six small portraits are head shots of politicians whose full page photographs are also included. The introductory first chapter of the book is an essay by Katalin Kádár Lynn about the life and work of Margaret Bourke-White. Three of the best known photographs, taken outside of Hungary, of Bourke-White are included in this introduction.

Most of the Hungarian photographs taken by Bourke-White are incisive, unsparring, and sometimes devastating portraits. The subjects included the most important

establishment political figures in Hungary, including two portraits of Regent Horthy, and former Prime Ministers such as Pál Teleki, Béla Imrédy, and István Bethlen, Social Democrats such as Anna Kéthly, and Fascist Arrow Cross members Ferenc Szalási, and Kálmán Hubay, the only fascist member of parliament in 1939. Other photographs of notable figures in the collection are that of Tibor Eckhardt, a founder of the Independent Smallholders Party, liberal journalist Károly Rassay, and Miklós Kozma, the founder of Hungarian radio and the head of the Hungarian News Agency, the head of the Hungarian General Staff, General Jenő Rácz, as well as representatives of the most affluent aristocratic families of Hungary, Prince György Festetics and his cousin Count Sándor Festetics also are included.

Bourke-White's images of Regent Horthy and those of palace guards were used for the LIFE cover article, published on the September 12th, 1938, and were referred to: "A Prussian - in Hungary" (which refers to the Hungarian being fierce fighting people "the Prussians of the south"). The subtitle of the article was "Hungary: The Kingless Kingdom, Wooed by Germany, Clamors for Lost Lands."

While the bulk of the photographs in this album are political portraits, twelve feature locales in Hungary, and five are perceptive portraits of village people, and five are portraits of unidentified militia.

The photographs in the volume are accompanied by Károly Szerencsés's evocative short essays, written in a stream of consciousness style, that are addressed simultaneously directly to Bourke-White and to the reader as an explanation to her photographs. The first essay is titled "Margaret in Potato Land." Where this term refers to the previously mentioned Life magazine article in which several of Bourke-White's photos from this visit appeared. The nation of post-Trianon Hungary, is compared to a potato in which two-thirds of its substance has been peeled away. Szerencsés's other essays also have whimsical titles: "The Shadow of Ghosts," "The Old Red Buzzard," "The Clown at the Head of the General Staff," and "The Parade Coachman Meets the Martians." These essays -- often mystical, frequently lyrical -- are the unexpected gems of this photographic tribute. In "Histories", the last chapter of the book, Péter Strausz provides the coda to the text in the form of concise biographies of the subjects photographed by Bourke-White.

The text by Kádár Lynn was written in English. The texts by Szerencsés and Strausz were ably translated from Hungarian to English by Mario Fenyő. The legion of Bourke-White aficionados will delight in the discovery of a new and previously unpublished addition to her oeuvre.