

Chim's Photographic Style: Emotional Closeness

It is a great honor and delight to be here tonight at this remarkable exhibit opening. It was a thrill to sign the agreement for the return of the Mexican Suitcase and then to hold the negatives that my uncle David Seymour, known to all as Chim, had taken more than 70 years ago during the Spanish Civil War. Cynthia Young and the ICP curatorial team worked diligently to preserve and identify every image, which also included photos of my father as a young journalist working with Chim in Spain.

The satisfying family connections were enriched by the deeper understanding that I and others have gained about where Chim went, how Chim worked, and what kind of a person Chim was.

The most remarkable discovery was the image of the anguished nursing mother looking skyward at a political rally in Extremadura. The common version of this image, chosen by Time-Life as among the most important photos of the 20th century, shows the mother as a heroic individual. However, the original negative shows us Chim's view of her embedded in the community, typical of the socialist rally scenes Chim photographed in Paris.

As you scan the contact sheets in the skillfully produced exhibition book, take a careful look at Chim's photos. You will see how he consistently got close to his subjects, close enough to show the expression on their faces, as well as the emotion in the room. Chim's capacity to quickly gain the trust and participation of his subjects enabled him to tell their stories of suffering and fear, as well as pride and joy.

Later in life Chim refined these skills to record the glimmers of hope in the suffering faces of World War II orphans for a widely acclaimed UNESCO book. He complemented these troubling images with revealing portraits of Hollywood figures such as Sophia Loren, Joan Collins, Kirk Douglas, Ingrid Bergman, and Gina Lollobrigida.

Chim's capacity for personal closeness and warmth made him a beloved family member, especially for his older sister, who some of you knew as my mother Eileen Shneiderman. My sister Helen Sarid, also remembers Chim for his caring attention, training in how to be a young woman, and his charming stories. Other evidence for Chim's intense connection with people are in the numerous and warmly written condolence letters now in ICP's archives. British historian Michael Berkowitz wrote:

"It's been very interesting, and immensely sad reading through the condolence correspondence. Of course you've heard wonderful things about him over and over again. As a historian I can say he's not only one of the greatest and most significant photographers of all time, but an extraordinary, world-historical figure in the best sense. In all my years of research I don't think I've ever seen such testimonies to sincere friendship from such an incredibly broad range of humanity--across every apparent division."

I hope you will enjoy the exhibit, appreciate the scholarship, and take in Chim's message that emotional closeness makes us more human. Thank you.

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At Int'l Center of Photography, New York

At the occasion of the opening of the Mexican Suitcase exhibit