



**Inside the “Mexican Suitcase”:  
International Center of Photography Announces the Completion  
of the Digitization of Lost Spanish Civil War Negatives  
by Robert Capa, Gerda Taro, and David Seymour**



Robert Capa  
[Distribution of food at Spanish refugee internment camp,  
Bram, France], March 1939  
© Cornell Capa/International Center of Photography/Magnum



Gerda Taro  
[Air raid victims in the morgue, Valencia], May 1937  
©International Center of Photography/Magnum



David Seymour  
[Dolores Ibárruri speaking before a crowd of  
Republican soldiers and civilians, Spain], July 1936  
© David Seymour Estate/Magnum

New York, May 1, 2009—In December 2007, three cardboard boxes were delivered to the International Center of Photography (ICP, 1133 Avenue of the Americas at 43rd Street). It was widely reported that this “Mexican Suitcase” contained long-lost negatives of the Spanish Civil War taken by Robert Capa, Chim (David Seymour), and Gerda Taro, three leading twentieth century wartime photographers. Left behind when Capa and Chim were forced to flee Paris for America in 1939, it was presumed lost until it resurfaced in Mexico in 1995.

ICP is pleased to announce that all of the Mexican Suitcase negatives have been scanned using state-of-the-art processes. Their contents reveal surprising new discoveries, leading to a more thorough understanding of the work of these important photographers. Of the approximately 4,300 frames in 126 rolls of 35mm film, roughly a third are attributed to each Chim (46 rolls), Capa (45 rolls), and Taro (32 rolls), and three rolls are currently jointly attributed to Capa and Taro. Additionally, the suitcase contains two rolls of portraits of Capa, Taro, and their friends attributable to the photographer Fred Stein. Taken between May 1936 and March 1939, almost all of the images are from the Spanish Civil War with the exception of Stein’s film taken in Paris in 1935, and two rolls from Capa’s trip to Belgium in May 1939. Previously unknown photographs of Capa and Taro have also been found. ICP continues research on the negatives in preparation for an exhibition and publication planned for the fall of 2010.

The number of previously unknown images by Chim is perhaps the greatest revelation from the discovery of the suitcase. Until this identification, the known number of vintage prints and contact books created by Chim were far fewer than those of Capa and Taro. The completion of the scanning of the Mexican Suitcase allows us to further appreciate the career of this celebrated photographer, whose images included pictures of daily life and Republican parades, as well as still lifes and portraits taken prior to the arrival of Capa and Taro in Spain. Many of these never-before-seen images will be in ICP’s upcoming exhibition of Chim’s work scheduled for the fall of 2010.

The Chim rolls provide a greater picture of his coverage of the Basque area where he visited in January 1937 (14 rolls). Other negatives by Chim show portraits of important political personalities of the Spanish Republican cause including President Manuel Azaña, Federico García Lorca, Dolores “La Pasionaria” Ibárruri, Basque politician and later Basque President José Aguirre, and Prime Minister Francisco Largo Caballero. Another story that Chim covered in depth is that of refugees in the Monjuich refugee center in Barcelona at the end of 1936 (5 rolls).

Many negatives shed new light on some of the most important stories shot by Capa and Taro. Though no negatives for Capa’s “Falling Soldier,” or any photographs relating to that story from September 5, 1936 were found in the suitcase, negatives for other important events were found. Two of the largest stories by Capa are the Battle of Teruel from late December 1937 through early January 1938 (14 rolls), and the internment camps for Spanish refugees in Argelès-sur-Mer, Le Bacarès, and Bram in the south of France (10 rolls), where Capa photographed in March 1939. Both of these stories were previously known through vintage prints, but now these rolls allow us to sequence his images and see the full extent of his documentation. Another little-known story by Capa is the arrival of the US ship SS Erica Reed to Barcelona in November 1938 to distribute clothing and food to its citizens, particularly children (4 rolls).

In the Taro film, there are three rolls of her final days shooting in Spain before she was killed by a tank during the Battle of Brunete in July 1937. There are also her dramatic images of the training of the new People’s army in the fields and stadium in Valencia in March 1937 (4 rolls), as well as her macabre images of the morgue following the deadly attack in Valencia in May of that same year. With the complete rolls of film of these and other stories, we can now more accurately identify vintage prints in the Taro collection that were formerly identified only as having been shot in Spain.

Most of the rolls in the suitcase can be identified through handwritten names or initials on the actual film leader, or through cross-referencing with vintage prints and published sources. Negatives in fifty-six rolls have a direct correlation to contact notebooks made by Capa, Taro, and Chim. These small notebooks of tiny contact prints pasted on the page are now understood to function as contact sheets or, in some cases, the photographer’s edits, and were used by the studio in Paris or sent to the agencies or magazines to show the extent of the reportage. One of these notebooks is in the ICP collection, while eight additional notebooks—confiscated just before World War II—are held at the Archives nationales in Paris.

The cut, flat film was scanned using a Nikon film scanner, while the uncut rolled negatives were digitally photographed with a Canon digital camera using the Planar Film Duplicating Device 2 (PFD2), designed by a team led by Grant Romer at the George Eastman House in Rochester, NY. The PFD2 gently holds small sections of the film for digital capture, allowing researchers to view and preserve the images contained in the delicate nitrate-based film, a combination of Agfa, Agfa Isopan, Kodak Super X, Kodak Pancro, Kodak Panchromatic, and Gevaert film stock. Selected images are on view on the ICP website ([http://museum.icp.org/mexican\\_suitcase/](http://museum.icp.org/mexican_suitcase/)), with more images to be uploaded in the coming months.

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