

la Repubblica.it

Ultimo aggiornamento **domenica 27.01.2008 ore 10.56**

PERSONE

Gli scatti del grande fotografo di guerra erano nella casa di un ex diplomatico messicano
Tra le pellicole scomparse 70 anni fa, la Caduta del soldato scattata a Cordoba

Robert Capa, ecco le valige segrete Recuperati in Messico mille negativi



Robert Capa in una foto di Ruth Orkin scattata a Parigi nel 1952

WASHINGTON - Secondo la leggenda, il negativo del miliziano spagnolo ucciso a Cordoba durante la guerra civile, fu dimenticato da Robert Capa in una camera oscura di Parigi e da allora se ne erano perse le tracce. Dopo 70 anni, l'Internation Center of Photography di Manhattan ha recuperato il negativo. E insieme alla Caduta del soldato, altre migliaia di pellicole sono riemerse dall'oblio. Erano in tre valige custodite a Città del Messico nella casa che fu di un ex diplomatico messicano che combattè ai tempi del generale Pancho Villa.

L'ufficializzazione del ritrovamento riportata oggi sul *New York Times*, ha messo in fibrillazione l'intero mondo della fotografia. Si spera che i negativi possano permettere di stabilire, una volta per tutte, se la famosa immagine del miliziano che muore sia stato o no uno scatto autentico. In questi anni non sono mancate le polemiche circa l'autenticità di quella foto. C'è stato pure chi ha sostenuto che lo scatto fosse stato "costruito".

le foto

Robert Capa è considerato il pioniere della fotografia di guerra e più in generale uno dei capisaldi della storia della fotografia del XX secolo. Il suo motto era: "Se le tue foto non

sono abbastanza buone è perchè non sei abbastanza vicino".

Un altro grande fotografo, Henri Cartier-Bresson, lo definì "un avventuriero con un'etica". Capa, di avventure, ne ha attraversate molte, da quando se ne è andato a diciassette anni, nel 1930, dalla sua tranquilla posizione di figlio della borghesia ungherese diventando, da Endre Friedman che era, Robert Capa. Ha solo venticinque anni quando scatta le sue famose undici foto dalla Spagna repubblicana in guerra pubblicate appunto da *Picture Post*.

Tra molte birre e molti gin, tra molti amici meravigliosi e molte guerre, Capa nel 1938 è in Indocina a fotografare la resistenza del popolo cinese contro l'invasione giapponese; poi di nuovo in Spagna, e in Francia. Emigrò pure negli Stati Uniti, dove gli negano il passaporto ma lo mandano a documentare lo sbarco in Normandia.

E' sua la foto del contadino che indica al soldato americano appena sbarcato in Sicilia, la strada che hanno preso i tedeschi in ritirata. Infine il Vietnam, e la mina che, nel '54, uccide Capa a soli quarant'anni.

(26 gennaio 2008)

Divisione La Repubblica

Gruppo Editoriale L'Espresso Spa - P.Iva 00906801006

January 27, 2008**ART**

The Capa Cache

By RANDY KENNEDY

TO the small group of photography experts aware of its existence, it was known simply as “the Mexican suitcase.” And in the pantheon of lost modern cultural treasures, it was surrounded by the same mythical aura as Hemingway’s early manuscripts, which vanished from a train station in 1922.

The suitcase — actually three flimsy cardboard valises — contained thousands of negatives of pictures that Robert Capa, one of the pioneers of modern war photography, took during the Spanish Civil War before he fled Europe for America in 1939, leaving behind the contents of his Paris darkroom.

Capa assumed that the work had been lost during the Nazi invasion, and he died in 1954 on assignment in Vietnam still thinking so. But in 1995 word began to spread that the negatives had somehow survived, after taking a journey worthy of a John le Carré novel: Paris to Marseille and then, in the hands of a Mexican general and diplomat who had served under Pancho Villa, to Mexico City.

And that is where they remained hidden for more than half a century until last month, when they made what will most likely be their final trip, to the International Center of Photography in Midtown Manhattan, founded by Robert Capa’s brother, Cornell. After years of quiet, fitful negotiations over what should be their proper home, legal title to the negatives was recently transferred to the Capa estate by descendants of the general, including a Mexican filmmaker who first saw them in the 1990s and soon realized the historical importance of what his family had.

“This really is the holy grail of Capa work,” said Brian Wallis, the center’s chief curator, who added that besides the Capa negatives, the cracked, dust-covered boxes had also been found to contain Spanish Civil War images by Gerda Taro, Robert Capa’s partner professionally and at one time personally, and by David Seymour, known as Chim, who went on to found the influential Magnum photo agency with Capa.

The discovery has sent shock waves through the photography world, not least because it is hoped that the negatives could settle once and for all a question that has dogged Capa’s legacy: whether what may be his most famous picture — and one of the most famous war photographs of all time — was staged. Known as “The Falling Soldier,” it shows a Spanish Republican militiaman reeling backward at what appears to be the instant a bullet strikes his chest or head on a hillside near Córdoba in 1936. When the picture was first published in the French magazine *Vu*, it created a sensation and helped crystallize support for the Republican cause.

Though the Capa biographer Richard Whelan made a persuasive case that the photograph was not faked, doubts have persisted. In part this is because Capa and Taro made no pretense of journalistic detachment during the war — they were Communist partisans of the loyalist cause — and were known to photograph staged maneuvers, a common practice at the time. A negative of the shot has never been found (it has long been reproduced from a vintage print), and the discovery of one, especially in the original sequence showing all the images taken before and after the shot, could end the debate.

But the discovery is being hailed as a huge event for more than forensic reasons. This is the formative work of a photographer who, in a century defined by warfare, played a pivotal role in defining how war was seen, bringing its horrors nearer than ever — “If your pictures aren’t good enough, you’re not close enough” was his mantra — yet in the process rendering it more cinematic and unreal. (Capa, not surprisingly, later served a stint in Hollywood, befriending directors like Howard Hawks and romancing Ingrid Bergman.)

Capa practically invented the image of the globe-trotting war photographer, with a cigarette appended to the corner of his mouth and cameras slung over his fatigues. His fearlessness awed even his soldier subjects, and between battles he hung out with Hemingway and Steinbeck and usually drank too much, seeming to pull everything off with panache. William Saroyan wrote that he thought of Capa as “a poker player whose sideline was picture-taking.”

In a Warholian way that seems only to increase his contemporary allure, he also more or less invented himself. Born Endre Friedmann in Hungary, he and Taro, whom he met in Paris, cooked up the persona of Robert Capa — they billed him as “a famous American photographer” — to help them get assignments. He then proceeded to embody the fiction and make it true. (Taro, a German whose real name was Gerta Pohorylle, died in Spain in 1937 in a tank accident while taking pictures.)

Curators at the International Center of Photography, who have begun a months-long effort to conserve and catalog the newly discovered work, say the full story of how the negatives, some 3,500 of them, made their way to Mexico may never be known.

In 1995 Jerald R. Green, a professor at Queens College, part of the City University of New York, received a letter from a Mexico City filmmaker who had just seen an exhibition of Spanish Civil War photographs sponsored in part by the college. He wrote that he had recently come into possession of an archive of nitrate negatives that had been his aunt's, inherited from her father, Gen. Francisco Aguilar Gonzalez, who died in 1967. The general had been stationed as a diplomat in the late 1930s in Marseille, where the Mexican government, a supporter of the Republican cause, had begun helping antifascist refugees from Spain immigrate to Mexico.

From what experts have been able to piece together from archives and the research of Mr. Whelan, the biographer (who died last year), Capa apparently asked his darkroom manager, a Hungarian friend and photographer named Imre Weisz, known as Cziki, to save his negatives in 1939 or 1940, when Capa was in New York and feared his work would be destroyed.

Mr. Weisz is believed to have taken the valises to Marseille, but was arrested and sent to an internment camp in Algiers. At some point the negatives ended up with General Aguilar Gonzalez, who carried them to Mexico, where he died in 1967. It is unclear whether the general knew who had taken the pictures or what they showed; but if he did, he appears never to have tried to contact Capa or Mr. Weisz, who coincidentally ended up living the rest of his life in Mexico City, where he married the Surrealist painter Leonora Carrington. (Mr. Weisz died recently, in his 90s; Mr. Whelan interviewed him for his 1985 biography of Capa but did not elicit any information about the lost negatives.)

“It does seem strange in retrospect that there weren't more efforts to locate these things,” Mr. Wallis said. “But I think they just gave them up. They were lost in the war, like so many things.”

When the photography center learned that the work might exist, it contacted the Mexican filmmaker and requested their return. But letters and phone conversations ended with no commitments, said Phillip S. Block, the center's deputy director for programs, who added that he and others were not even sure at the beginning if the filmmaker's claims were true, because no one had been shown the negatives. (Saying that the return of the negatives was a collective decision of the Aguilar Gonzalez family, the filmmaker asked not to be identified in this article and declined to be interviewed for it.)

Meetings with the man were scheduled, but he would fail to appear. “And then communications broke off completely for who knows what reason,” Mr. Block said. Efforts were made from time to time, unsuccessfully, to re-establish contact. But when the center began to organize new shows of Capa and Taro's war photography, which opened last September, it decided to try again, hoping that images from the early negatives could be incorporated into the shows.

“He was never seeking money,” Mr. Wallis said of the filmmaker. “He just seemed to really want to make sure that these went to the right place.”

Frustrated, the center enlisted the help of a curator and scholar, Trisha Ziff, who has lived in Mexico City for many years. After working for weeks simply to track down the reclusive man, she began what turned out to be almost a year of discussions about the negatives.

“It wasn’t that he couldn’t let go of this,” said Ms. Ziff, interviewed by phone from Los Angeles, where she is completing a documentary about the widely reproduced image of Che Guevara based on a photograph by Alberto Korda.

“I think it was that no one before me had thought this through in the way that something this sensitive needs to be thought through,” she said. The filmmaker worried in part that people in Mexico might be critical of the negatives’ departure to the United States, regarding the images as part of their country’s deep historical connection to the Spanish Civil War. “One had to respect and honor the dilemma he was in,” she said.

In the end Ms. Ziff persuaded him to relinquish the work — “I suppose one could describe me as tenacious,” she said — while also securing a promise from the photography center to allow the filmmaker to use Capa images for a documentary he would like to make about the survival of the negatives, their journey to Mexico and his family’s role in saving them.

“I see him quite regularly,” Ms. Ziff said, “and I think he feels at peace about this now.”

In December, after two earlier good-faith deliveries of small numbers of negatives, the filmmaker finally handed Ms. Ziff the bulk of the work, and she carried it on a flight to New York herself.

“I wasn’t going to put it in a FedEx box,” she said.

“When I got these boxes it almost felt like they were vibrating in my hands,” she added. “That was the most amazing part for me.”

Mr. Wallis said that while conservation experts from the George Eastman House in Rochester are only now beginning to assess the condition of the film, it appears to be remarkably good for 70-year-old nitrate stock stored in what essentially looks like confectionery boxes.

“They seem like they were made yesterday,” he said. “They’re not brittle at all. They’re very fresh. We’ve sort of gingerly peeked at some of them just to get a sense of what’s on each roll.”

And discoveries have already been made from the boxes — one red, one green and one beige — whose contents appear to have been carefully labeled in hand-drawn grids made by Mr. Weisz or another studio assistant. Researchers have come across pictures of Hemingway and of Federico García Lorca.

The negative for one of Chim’s most famous Spanish Civil War photographs, showing a woman cradling a baby at her breast as she gazes up toward the speaker at a mass outdoor meeting in 1936, has also been found. “We were astonished to see it,” Mr. Wallis said. (The photograph, often seen as showing the woman worriedly scanning the skies for bombers, was mentioned by Susan Sontag in “Regarding the Pain of Others,” her 2003 reconsideration of ideas from her well-known treatise “On Photography,” a critical examination of images of war and suffering.)

The research could bring about a reassessment of the obscure career of Taro, one of the first female war photographers, and could lead to the determination that some pictures attributed to Capa are actually by her. The two worked closely together and labeled some of their early work with joint credit lines, sometimes making it difficult to establish authorship conclusively, Mr. Wallis said. He added that there was even a remote possibility that “The Falling Soldier” could be by Taro and not Capa.

“That’s another theory that’s been floated,” he said. “We just don’t know. To me that’s what’s so exciting about this material. There are so many questions and so many questions not even yet posed that they may answer.”

Ultimately, Mr. Wallis said, the discovery is momentous because it is the raw material from the birth of modern war photography itself.

“Capa established a mode and the method of depicting war in these photographs, of the photographer not being an observer but being in the battle, and that became the standard that audiences and editors from then on demanded,” he said.

“Anything else, and it looked like you were just sitting on the sidelines. And that visual revolution he embodied took place right here, in these early pictures.”

[Copyright 2008 The New York Times Company](#)

[Privacy Policy](#) | [Search](#) | [Corrections](#) | [RSS](#) | [First Look](#) | [Help](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Work for Us](#) | [Site Map](#)

El hilo de la "maleta mexicana" de Robert Capa

Kristen Lubben investiga para desentrañar los enigmas de la caja perdida del fotógrafo y de Gerda Taro

CATALINA SERRA
Barcelona

Acaba de llegar de Nueva York hace unas horas, pero el *jet-lag* no parece hacerle mella. Kristen Lubben, conservadora en el Interntional Center of Photography (ICP) de Nueva York, se apasiona cuando habla de la "maleta mexicana", la extraordinaria caja con 3.500 negativos sobre la Guerra Civil Española de Robert Capa, Gerda Taro y David Chim Seymour hallada en México y que ahora atesora el ICP. Explica que "en los círculos conocedores de la obra de Capa se sabía de esta maleta desde hace más de diez años, pero las negociaciones han sido lentas". Lubben, que hoy participa en Barcelona en unas jornadas sobre la "representación de la memoria histórica", recuerda que, pese a haberse iniciado los contactos, el material no se pudo incorporar a

las exposiciones dedicadas a Capa y a Taro que organizó el pasado otoño el ICP, aunque posiblemente sí pueda hacerse en su itinerancia ya que en otoño podrán verse en el Barbican Center de Londres para viajar luego a Italia, Holanda y, seguramente, España. El ICP está en contactos con un museo de Barcelona para presentarlas.

La "maleta mexicana" estuvo perdida durante casi setenta años. Al parecer, Emérico Chiki Wisz, amigo y ayudante de Capa,

la había entregado en 1940 al general mexicano Javier Aguilar González, entonces diplomático en Francia, para que la pusiera a buen recaudo. Allí estuvo, a buen recaudo en México, hasta que ya en los noventa, tras la muerte del general, sus familiares encontraron la maleta con estas tres cajas de las que dos contenían 127 rollos de películas y la otra una serie de sobres con negativos cortados, que son los primeros que se

hay tres personas trabajando exclusivamente en el proyecto y otras siete que colaboran en aspectos parciales. En el futuro habrá una publicación y una exposición que permitirá conocer algunas imágenes inéditas, sobre todo las de 1939 realizadas por Capa en los últimos días de la guerra, y también comprobar cómo la selección de las imágenes que se positivarón no siempre se corresponde, según Lubben, con las fotografías más interesantes.

"Lo más misterioso es que no se sabe porqué este material está junto, porqué éste y no otro. Parece como si fuera una preselección para un proyecto conjunto que al final quedó truncado", afirma Lubben, que indica que en el caso de las fotografías de Capa y Taro sólo hay negativos a partir de 1937. "No están los negativos de la famosa foto del mili-



Sobres con algunos de los negativos de la "maleta mexicana".

están escaneando. Los rollos están en buen estado, pero necesitan de la construcción de un aparato especial para poder escanearlos sin peligro.

Una vez esta parte del trabajo esté hecho empezarán a estudiarse las imágenes, un trabajo que Lubben asegura que enseguida se dará a conocer porque el ICP pretende abrir "un escaparate" en Internet para que se conozcan las investigaciones y las imágenes "casi al momento". Ahora, señala,

ciano caído, que es de septiembre de 1936", afirma. "Hemos mirado si hubiera imágenes de la serie en algún otro fragmento de película, pero no hay nada. Habrá que continuar buscando".

Lo que está claro, afirma, es que la imagen la hizo Capa y no Taro, aunque ella estaba también allí en aquel momento ya que se conservan fotografías paralelas realizadas por ella en la cámara Rolliflex de 6 x 6. "Taro no empezó a utilizar la Leica hasta 1937",

Kri
rec
ven
de
do
dad
par
cie
cio
el f
no'
gui
ta,
en



Kristen Lubben, conservadora del ICP, ayer en Barcelona. / TEJEDERAS

recalca Lubben, que mantiene la versión oficial del gran biógrafo de Capa, Richard Whelan, fallecido a finales de 2007, sobre la "verdad" de la foto del miliciano. "Al parecer los milicianos estaban haciendo unas maniobras y ejercicios justo antes de que empezara el fuego real que mató al miliciano", explica Lubben.

Sea como sea, ésta historia seguirá siendo un misterio. La maleta, pero, permitirá ahondar más en la forma de trabajo de Capa y,

sobretudo, de Gerda Taro, a cuyo estudio ha dedicado Lubben muchos de sus esfuerzos. Taro marcaba las fotografías no con el típico corte en forma de cuña en el negativo sino con un hilo de coser. "Parecía que era un gesto femenino, pero no, era algo corriente entre los cineastas para marcar un rollo largo de película": Cuando murió, atropellada por un tanque en el frente de Brunete, llevaba una cámara de 16 milímetros. Nunca se ha encontrado.