

Moderna Museet opens the first major Brassai exhibition in Sweden:

Brassai

The Secret Signs of Paris

28 March–4 October 2026

Brassai is one of the most famous photographers in the history of photography. In the early 1930s, he set out with his camera on long nocturnal walks through Paris. Revolving around this treasure of images, the exhibition at Moderna Museet includes over 160 black-and-white photographs and is the first major presentation of Brassai in Sweden.

Brassai (1899–1984) is a pseudonym for Gyula Halász, who grew up in Brassó in Transylvania, then Hungary. After studying in Budapest and Berlin, he moved to Paris at the age of twenty-five. There he became part of the Humanist Photography that emerged during the interwar period. The street and the life that unfolded on the sidewalks and cafes became typical motifs for the genre.

Paris, Portraits and Graffiti

The exhibition "Brassai – The Secret Signs of Paris" includes more than 160 vinted gelatin silver prints, made by the photographer himself.

The audience encounters three central themes in Brassai's photographic production: the city of Paris with its inhabitants and environments, the portraits of artists and their works, as well as his extensive documentation of the city's graffiti.

The title of the exhibition alludes to how Brassai opens up a hidden world with the help of his camera, his curiosity and his artistic practice, curator Anna Tellgren says.

– His photographs invite us to decipher signs – the traces of events and human presence – and to search for the answer to the city's many mysteries. Here, the extensive series of photographs of graffiti becomes an important part of understanding what Brassai saw and how he moved in the city. In the exhibition, we follow in his footsteps.

In the exhibition, Brassai's short film "Tant qu'il y aura des bêtes" (As long as there are animals) from the mid-1950s is also shown. At the Cannes Film Festival in 1956 it was named the most innovative short film.

The Environments and People of the Night

Brassai's major breakthrough as a photographer came with the book "Paris de nuit" ("Paris by Night"), published in 1933. The black-and-white photographs with motifs in soft tones were the result of his long nocturnal walks through Paris – a city in

transition between history and modernity. His camera lens captures environments and people in the light of street lamps and the light falling from the city's most characteristic buildings.

After the success of "Paris de nuit", Brassai received requests to publish the material that includes his more intimate photographs of Paris by night – the bars, dance halls, gay clubs and brothels. But at that time, in post-war Paris, censorship had become stricter and publication had to wait.

It was not until about forty years later, in 1976, that the book "Le Paris secret des années 30" (The Secret Paris of the 30's, 1976) was published, based on Brassai's large collection of photographs. In the book, he himself wrote and told the stories behind the images and about the personalities he had met and portrayed.

Curators and partnership

Curator: Anna Tellgren, Moderna Museet, in collaboration with Philippe Ribeyrolles, Estate Brassai Succession.

The exhibition is organised by Moderna Museet, Stockholm in partnership with Estate Brassai Succession, Paris and Silvana Editoriale, Milan.

Exhibition Catalogue

An extensive catalogue accompanies the exhibition, published by Moderna Museet and Silvana Editoriale, Milan. Design: Malmsten Hellberg, Stockholm.

The catalogue reproduces all of the more than 160 photographs included in the exhibition and features, among other texts, a piece by Brassai himself, one by his nephew Philippe Ribeyrolles, along with a newly written essay by the French author Nina Bouraoui.

Location in Moderna Museet

The exhibition is shown on Floor 2

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