

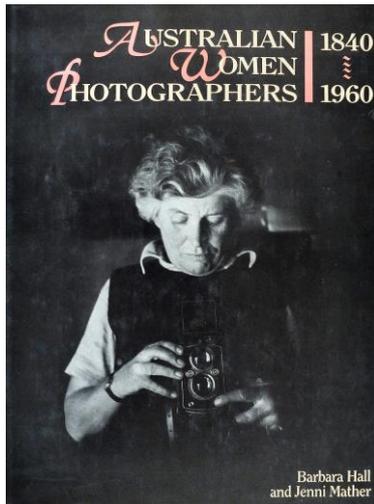
A Look at the **Feminine** Side of Photography. Roger Burrows

A French sea captain demonstrated the first photographic process the Daguerreotype in Sydney at the merchant store of Joubert and Murphy in 1841.

Louisa Anne Meredith who had seen the Louis Daguerre demonstration in Paris in 1839 came to Australia as an artist and was practising the Daguerre system in the 1840s although there are no known surviving works.

The earliest known Australian photograph is by an unknown photographer taken in 1847. Between 1840 and 1850 there were 15 professional photographers registered in the three colonies and by the 1850s there were 14 women registered as professional photographers among the forty or so registered photographers.

In 1856 a Madame Charpiot established a studio in Ballarat and in in the *Miner and Weekly Star* of November 1856 the editor stated 'Opposite to the office of this journal the admirers of the daguerreotype will find in the rooms of Madame Charpiot another Temple of Art and a large collection of specimens attests this ladies skill in the branch she has chosen to practice.'



Pic. 1. Book. 'Australian Women Photographers.'

The invention of the dry plate and marketing by Kodak of plates and equipment slanted to the amateur made photography more popular among women and the breaking down of social barriers to women joining and participating in photographic societies and clubs also helped to increase the output of women photographers all over the colonies.

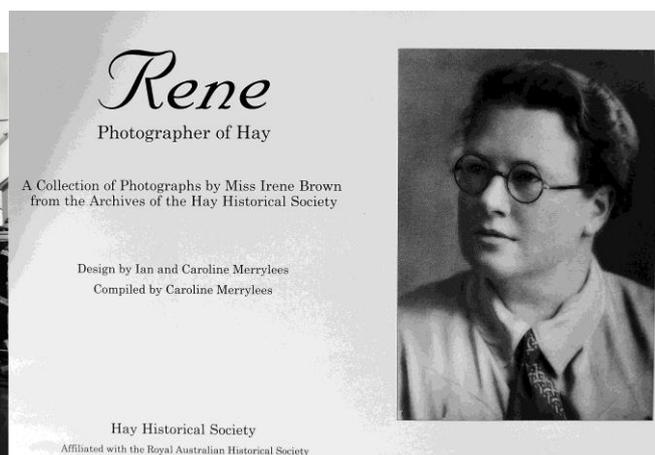
As well as clubs and societies, large exhibitions were all the go in the 1880s and 1890s and in 1888 at the Exhibition Buildings in Melbourne the first all-women's exposition was held: The 1888 Exhibition of Women's Industry. By the late nineteenth century women were not only practising the art of photography in amateur circles but also heavily involved in the professional side of the industry as it was seen as a respectable occupation for young ladies, especially portraiture and child photography. If you are lucky enough to travel to Hay be sure to look for the Historical Societies shop and find a copy of Rene's book of photos of Hay from the early days: a collection of superb photos taken by a talented lady using a Thornton

Pickard. The book contains some 75 plus photos well printed and presented and showing the indomitable late-Victorian spirit of the lady pioneers in the Australian outback and in photography. (Pic. 1.) shows the cover of an excellent book covering the early Australian women photographers.) I would recommend you seek it out. Pic. 2 shows Rene's book of photos of Hay and Pic. 3 a photo of Irene Brown or Rene as she was known locally.) I hope that this brief snapshot of Australian lady photographers has stirred enough interest for members to delve into some research into this fascinating area for themselves.

I would like to move to the international stage now and introduce you to some amazing ladies of the 1920s, 30s and 40s and some of the legacy they have left us. But first a technical note: the rise in the participation of ladies in photojournalism was in no small way helped by the arrival of



Pic. 2. Book. 'Photographs of Hay.'



Pic. 3. Irene Brown.

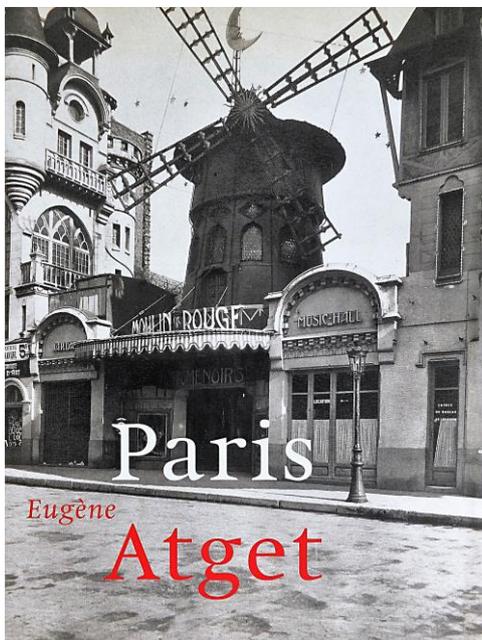
roll film, sheet film and 35mm film along with the Leica, Contax, and Rolleiflex although Lee Miller and Margaret Bourke-White would probably disagree, since both were noted devotees of the Speed Graphic. The ladies are Berenice Abbot, Lee Miller, Gerda Tarot and Margaret Bourke-White.

First let us talk a little of Berenice Abbot. (Pic. 3a.) She was born in Springfield, Ohio, in 1898 and lived till 1991. She was educated in New York and like a lot of American artists went to Paris in the early 1920s. She worked for Man Ray in the darkroom and later the studio where she impressed so much he allowed her to use his studios under her name and soon they became the place to have your portrait done in Paris. In 1925



Pic. 3a. Berenice Abbot.

she was introduced to Eugene Atget by Man Ray and did Atget's portrait in 1927 shortly before his death. It was Berenice who had already acquired some of his work that persuaded the French Government to buy a lot of his archives: approx. 2621 negatives. In 1928 she was able to buy substantially more of his work and quickly started on its promotion with a book 'Atget, *Photographe de Paris*' in 1930. 'The World of Atget' in 1964 and 'A Vision of Paris' in 1963. Her sustained efforts on his behalf finally gained him the recognition he deserved internationally. So who was Atget? Eugene Atget was born in 1857 and he went to sea as a cadet at a young age. He tried to be an actor but failed in his studies due to the time spent in military service. He tried his hand at being an artist but that too was unsuccessful. Then he found photography and in particular architectural work where he was highly successful. He realized that the Paris he knew and loved was being destroyed before his eyes by developers. So, for quite a long time, he rose early each morning and systematically photographed the streets of Paris. The early mornings explain the lack of people in his street scenes and this gave us the beautiful records of that early Paris. Inspired by Atget's work Berenice returned to New York and created two books of her own that are highly regarded and sort after today. 'Changing New York' in 1939 and 'Greenwich Village, Today and Yesterday' in 1949 published by Harper Bros. First editions of these volumes are fetching many thousands of dollars each on the book market. So, to sum up Berenice, what has she left us? It was her constant promotion and lobbying



Pic. 4. Book. 'Atget's Paris.'

that got Atget the recognition he deserved and the world a priceless record of Old Paris, but seeing Atget's work inspired her to go back home to New York and do a similar study of her own city. To this day a lot of her work is the only record of buildings as they were in whole sections of New York. Her work showed how important architectural records of our cities are and inspired others to carry the tradition on. (Pic. 4) cover of Paris Eugene Atget)

The next group of ladies were totally different in style and outlook. They are Gerda Taro, Margaret Bourke-White and Lee Miller. Their only connecting link was that they were all frontline war photographers who never shirked the hard yard and, whatever the soldiers went through, so did they. Gerda Taro was born Gerda Pohorylle in Stuttgart in 1910 of a Jewish family. She grew up in Leipzig. Gerda was talented in sciences and languages and attended a Swiss finishing school in Geneva in 1927. On 30 January 1933 Hitler came to power and by 19 March Gerda was in prison for distributing anti-Nazi leaflets. The Nazis targeted all democratic clubs, societies and of course all Jewish

societies. Like most artists and intellectuals of the time Gerda was on the left in her politics. At the end of summer in 1933 Gerda was in Paris and joined in the café society with flair along with other luminaries of the period: Brecht, Heartfield and the eventual Chancellor of Germany, Willi Brandt. In September 1934 she met a young Hungarian photographer, Andre Friedman. She also met some of his friends including David Seymour or Chim, as he became known, and Henri Cartier-Bresson. In 1935 she got her first full time job at the Alliance agency where her language skills were invaluable. Working at the agency she learnt her printing techniques and also photography from Andre. In 1936, after a brainstorm, she came up with an idea, simple but stunning in its outcome:

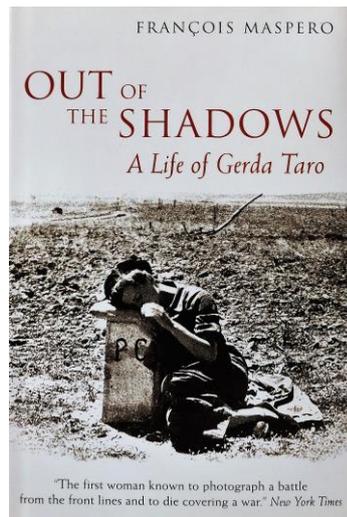
they would change their names from being obviously Jewish to something that was untraceable in its ethnicity. So Gerda Taro and Robert Capa were born. Her life lasted until one evening in July 1937 when Stukas attacked a column of soldiers on the road from Brunete to Madrid during the Spanish civil war, it was the 25 July. Her death left Capa inconsolable and her funeral back in Paris, the city she adored, was huge, bringing together all the various factions of anti-fascism in a march to honour their champion, the first woman photojournalist to die whilst working. **(Pic. 5)** Gerda Tarot and **(Pic. 6)** Gerda's biography: a very difficult book to find.) Gerda left us a fairly large volume of work of the Spanish war. Her preferred camera was the Rolleiflex. She was the first female war correspondent to die on duty but not the first female war correspondent: I think that honour would go to our next lady.

Margaret Bourke White – born on 14th June 1904, died 27th August 1971

She was born in the Bronx to an Irish mother and a Jewish father. Her father was successful in high



Pic. 5. Gerda Tarot.



Pic. 6. Book. 'Out of the Shadows, Gerda's story.'

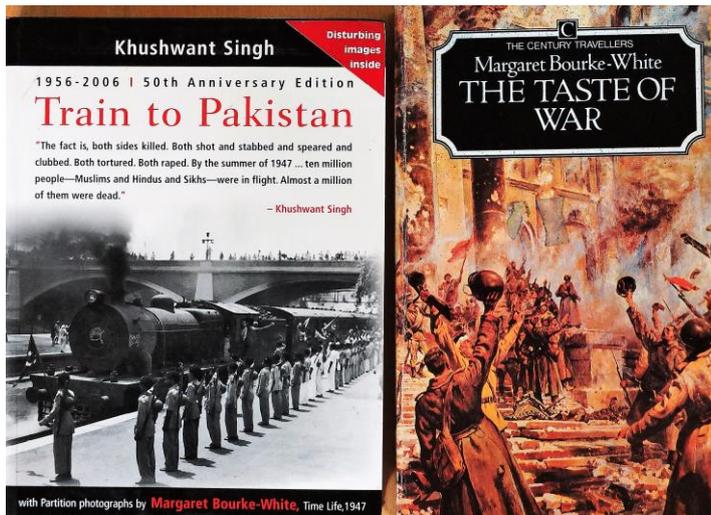
tech industries and her sister was a member of the Chicago Bar Association. Margaret graduated from Cornell University in 1927. She then moved to Cleveland, Ohio, and started a commercial photography business. She covered steel production at Otis Steel Works with the best results to that date by overcoming a problem, namely films' insensitivity to the red spectrum. In 1929 she was asked by Henry Luce, founder of *Time* magazine, to join *Fortune* magazine as staff photographer and assistant editor. In 1930 she was invited to photograph Russian industrial

production by Stalin and, in doing so, took his favourite portrait shot and produced the book *Eyes on Russia* in 1931. In 1936 she joined *Life* magazine, one of the first four photographers to be employed by the magazine and she stayed there until 1957. Margaret married Erskine Caldwell in 1936 at the time his novel and play *Tobacco Road* were in great demand and this introduced her to the injustices of share cropping in the Deep South. She and her husband collaborated on a book called *You Have Seen Their Faces*, recognized as one of the most important social documentaries of the 1930s.

She travelled with Dorothea Lange to photograph the dust bowl victims and travelled to Europe to cover life under Nazism in Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia. She was the first American woman war correspondent and photographer, and the only foreign photographer in Moscow during shelling by Germany. She was attached to the US Air Force in North Africa and the US Army in Italy. She arrived at Buchenwald Concentration Camp with George Patton and was deeply affected by the horrors that she saw but, like the true professional she was, continued taking pictures. The sights and horrors stayed with her the rest of her life. During the Italian campaign she discovered a useful attribute of the Rolleiflex that she took with her for the rest of the war. Imagine this scenario, you are covering street to street fighting and want some action shots and you are using a Speed Graphic. To get your shot you will have to break cover to frame, focus and shoot giving the enemy plenty of time to aim and shoot at you. Now if you are using a Rolleiflex you can use it like a periscope: upside down over your head, over a wall or side-ways around a corner, each method giving the enemy very little to fire at, but one anecdote says she had one shot out of her hands. After her tour of duty in WWII was over she covered the partition of India and Pakistan and took the iconic photo of Ghandi with his spinning wheel. She was present when he was shot. She also covered the Korean War. The volume of work she produced was enormous and it included the following books: '*Shooting The Russian War*' in 1942, *Purple Heart Valley* in 1944 on the American campaign in Sicily and Italy; *Dear Fatherland, Rest Quietly* in 1946; *The Taste of War* from 1985 covers most of her exploits, but there is an autobiography called *Portrait of Myself* from 1963. In collaboration with Khushwant Singh the book *Train to Pakistan* was produced telling the separation story of India and

Pakistan. (Pics. 7 & 8) In 1957 she was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease and she died in 1971. She was a ground-breaking role model for any young lady wishing to take up such a career.

Elizabeth Lee Miller or Lady Penrose was born on 23 April 1907 in Poughkeepsie, New York. Her father was a photographer and she his model, but she also learned her darkroom skills from him. At the age of nineteen in New York City and probably stargazing at the time, she stepped in front of a car but was saved by Condé Nast, the publisher of the magazine *Vogue*. This connection saw her launched as a fashion model and for two years she was highly sought after. In 1929 she went to Paris and worked for and with Man Ray, eventually taking over the fashion side of his business. The art scene in Paris at that time was, to say the least, dynamic, and among her friends were



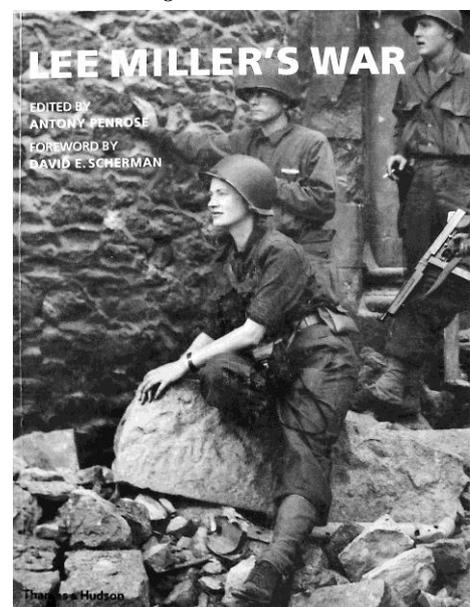
Pic. 7. Books by and of Margaret Bourke White.

Pablo Picasso, Paul Eluard and Jean Cocteau. She frequented the same cafés as Miller, Hemingway, and many other luminaries of the time. She was working in London for *Vogue* at the time of the Blitz: the only American to do so. Her coverage was so well received that she was made the accredited war photojournalist for Condé Nast magazines. At the lead up to D-Day she tried to get permission to travel to France and cover the landings and aftermath but Eisenhower was not allowing women anywhere near the front line. Undeterred, she wangled a lift over the channel and, when she heard Ike was coming, got herself in position to photograph him close up and calling out 'Hi Ike, remember me?' He nearly swallowed his cigar. She went on to make excellent coverage of the liberation of Paris and travelled with General Patton into Germany. The shock of Buchenwald and Dachau affected her deeply. After the war she married Roland Penrose and, when a son was born, she retired to the country estate and became a recluse suffering depression. All her cameras and photos were stored in the attic. Years later her son found them and since then has been promoting her work. She died on 21 July 1977, still badly affected by what she saw and experienced. (Pic. 9)

What I have attempted to do in the limited space we have is to show how important a part ladies played in the development of photography and photojournalism and how quickly they have been forgotten. Without stretching the bow too far, if Madame Daguerre hadn't been nagging her husband to come to lunch and him rushing off and leaving the mercury unstoppered, or if Lady Elizabeth Theresa Fox Strangways had been less of a bossy bristles, pushing her son mercilessly in his studies, then young Henry Fox Talbot might never have grown up to be so clever and we wouldn't have photography at all. So thank you ladies, one and all.



Pic. 8. Margaret Bourke White.



Pic. 9. Lee Miller on cover of book by her son.