



Jerome Hill Centennial Photography Exhibition 2005

Harry M. Drake Gallery  
St. Paul Academy and Summit School

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Harry M. Drake Gallery  
St. Paul Academy and Summit School  
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Celebrating the 100th anniversary of the birth of  
artist and philanthropist Jerome Hill '22

*St. Paul Academy and Summit School gratefully acknowledges  
the contributions of the many people who made this catalog of the works of  
Jerome Hill, St. Paul Academy Class of 1922, possible: the Jerome Foundation,  
the Minnesota Historical Society, photography historian and curator George Slade '79, and  
St. Paul Academy and Summit School Upper School art faculty Linda Brooks.*

*The photographs included in this exhibition are from the  
Jerome Hill Papers archive at the Minnesota Historical Society.*

## LIFE WORK: THE PHOTOGRAPHS OF JEROME HILL

When I was growing up, I didn't hear much about Jerome Hill. He died when I was 11. I never met him, or at least don't remember an encounter; from what other family members tell me, I probably would have.

My father, his siblings, and other more distant Hill cousins refer to Jerome with a mixture of amusement and bewilderment. Jerome was unconventional, "the one who had fun," and I sense a touch of envy and distance in that assessment. He apparently brought a touch of whimsy to every gathering, an unexpected treat in the form of some creative undertaking, whether it be a newly crafted poem, tune, painting, costume, dance step, or riddle.

He had fond, innately compatible relationships with some of his cousins' children, reflected in photographs and, later, archived letters. I've not seen my father (b. 1931) appear in them, perhaps because Jerome spent less time in Minnesota than in Cassis, New York City, California, or any of another half-dozen locations that recur in the 40-odd albums of his multi-volume photographic life work held in the Jerome Hill Papers at the Minnesota Historical Society.

Still, Jerome did make some delightful photographs of my grandparents — he and George Norman Slade '20 were first cousins — that reflect a lightness and humor that I don't remember well in the lives of these two people, despite what I do recall of them as fairly jovial individuals (especially my grandmother, Granny Slade, whose spirit was always engaging and amicable toward her numerous grandchildren).

Revisiting Jerome's autobiographical *Film Portrait* (1972) contradicts the conventional wisdom somewhat. The sense of play and speculation is there, amply. But it is tinged with melancholy and a hint of bitterness, as though this inventiveness was expressed at a price and that the life he was born into, which facilitated his accomplishments, deeply affected his psyche. His filmic, self-portrayed imaginings of alternative life scenarios — worse, derelict and asleep on a park bench, or better, arm in arm with a society matron outside the Plaza Hotel in New York City (Jerome ironically twists this tale to become the woman's horse-drawn carriage driver), or impossible, the Pope or the President (or, strikingly, the genetic source for a cluttered family portrait in which all the faces are his own), or

desired, a second Academy Award presentation — suggest a distinct self-consciousness at work, one sharply aware and often critical of his own life's conditions.

In the film he also tips his hat about his engagement with photography. As he notes at one point in the film, accompanying an image of his father with a tripod-mounted camera, "From the beginning I have an impression of my father with a camera constantly in hand." In one sequence he uses a series of photographs of himself to regress into the past, with approximately three years (by his claim) being shaved off his visage as each lap dissolve brings our view of Jerome all the way back to an extreme close-up of a baby's luminous, searching eyes.

Having thus turned back time, Jerome introduces us to a bedside clock, through which he discovered all his senses — the colors of the hand-painted face, sound of the chimes, smell of the oil, taste of the copper, feeling of the enamel (he notes that "the fact that it told time only interested me much later") — and to the shades in his mother's room in the house adjoining James J. Hill's mansion at 240 Summit Avenue in Saint Paul, through which he discovered the elemental phenomenon of photography, the projection and focusing of light through an aperture as witnessed in the camera obscura. Jerome offers a lovely narration of this discovery:

*Where do childrens' games lead? Alas, too often they are forgotten. At that period, my mother allowed me to take my daily nap in her room, on the chaise lounge in the bay window. These windows had two rolled shades. Mother would pull down first the outer, dark shade, and then the inner, white one, thus creating an artificial night. . . . Near the place where I was supposed to be sleeping there was a hole in the dark shade that created a bright spot on the light shade, like an eye that looked at me. With joy I discovered that in pulling the inner shade toward me the spot of light grew larger. Then, suddenly, there was the inverted image of my grandfather's house and garden. I was discovering, as many had before and after me, the principle of the camera obscura.*

Play intersects with life to form art; Jerome never forgot the directions childhood experiences offered him. Small wonder that an individual who bore this serious

<sup>1</sup>These negatives now reside in the collection of the Center for Creative Photography in Tucson, Arizona. One of the portraits of Jerome is reproduced on the cover of *Jerome Hill: Living the Arts*, Mary Ann Caws' biographical essay on Jerome (published by the Jerome Foundation, Saint Paul, 2005), and also in Amy Conger's 1992 catalogue of Weston's photographs at CCP.

<sup>2</sup>Nancy Newhall, ed., *The Daybooks of Edward Weston* (vol. II, California), New York: Aperture, 1990, p. 212.



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pursuit forward into his adult life might feel alienated from a family seriously pursuing more conventional goals.

The elegiac, ruminative, leisurely tone of *Film Portrait*, which derives from editing Jerome's own voice over narration, and the soundtrack music Jerome composed for it, is truly a portrait, in cinematic syntax, of this artist's temperament. His photographs, while more limited and generally neutral-to-positive in their emotional scope, offer an important alternative perspective on this privileged life. Some early affirmation of Jerome's commitment to photography, and photography's place in his creative intelligence, was found in his relationship with a major photographer — Edward Weston.

When Jerome visited Weston's Carmel, California, studio in the spring of 1931, several lasting and insightful impressions were made. First, Weston made at least 55 separate negatives in commissioned portrait sessions with Jerome. Weston's response to his 26-year-old client was favorable on several counts; not only was the portrait order the largest he'd had for nearly a decade, but, as he wrote in his journal (later published as *The Daybooks of Edward Weston*), "Best of all I really approve of most of the prints ordered, and I like Jerome very much — a quite unspoiled rich boy, sensitive and intelligent." (I am thrilled that one of the portraits Weston made, of Jerome's cousin Georgiana — my great aunt and godmother — came to live with me several years ago.)

His estimation of the emerging aesthete grew further on April 13, 1931. For \$15 apiece Hill obtained 10 prints from the photographer's "personal collection" of still lifes of vegetables and natural forms; many of these are now recognized as being among Weston's most famous images. With the addition of three other purchases by his mother and brother, the total represented a record for single-day sales by Weston, who reiterated his admiration for Jerome's taste ("excellent selections") and for this "very intelligent boy, who thinks for himself."

This exchange between artistic temperaments offers early evidence of Jerome's generous patronage, which developed further in the 1930s as he bought a subscription to a series of prints Weston offered. (Many of the Weston prints Jerome acquired formed the basis of a gift to Lucien Clergue toward the founding of a photography collection at the Musée Réattu in Arles.) More significantly, Jerome's connection to Weston signals his interest in photography as an independent art form and as a medium uniquely suited for creating thoughtful,

expressive, candid records of one's passions, whether for inanimate objects or living persons. Though he never attained the singularity of style or content that would place him among the great photographic artists, Jerome's commitment to photography in the years to come abundantly revealed his appreciation for the medium's capacities.

Photography would also reflect back on the multifaceted character Jerome Hill became. Through his images we develop insights into the artist and his wide-ranging creativity. His photographs show many different subjects, and were made in the many places this itinerant gentleman called home — Cassis, New York, Paris, California, Minnesota. In less thoughtful hands such wide-ranging interests might signal undisciplined, shallow work, nothing more than a dilettante's snapshots. But Jerome was aware of photography's aesthetic and historic capacities and made good use of them over time.

The Minnesota Historical Society holdings of Jerome's archives include more than 40 bound albums containing Jerome's photographic enlargements, typically about eight inches square, dry-mounted to thick album pages, numbered sequentially with an ink stamp, and often hand-annotated. These albums, made from the mid-1930s until nearly the end of his life, reflect a methodical yet indulgent approach to one's personal history. There are also five unbound portfolios in the collection, containing several hundred gelatin silver prints, typically around 16 inches square, mounted on single ply mats. The diligence and thoroughness of this work, completed by Jerome in an ongoing fashion throughout his life, testify to his sense of the value of individual images as well as the collective impact of these artifacts.

Since Jerome's death in 1972, I have grown enormously in my own personal appreciation for, and professional commitment to, photography. Though it's only very recent news, I was thrilled to discover the extent of Jerome's engagement with photography; this has been part of my enduring connection to his legacy, and it pleases me to think that Jerome's work in some ways cleared a path within my family that I now can travel.

*George Slade '79 is a photography historian, curator, and writer. Like Jerome Hill, his first cousin (twice removed), he was born in Saint Paul, attended St. Paul Academy and Summit School and Yale University, and once lived in New York City. He now lives in Saint Paul with his daughters, Juliet and Laura.*

*Slade is the assistant curator of the Jerome Hill Centennial Photography Exhibition 2005.*



## JEROME HILL'S PHOTOGRAPHY: EXPLORING NEW GROUND

In 1922, when Jerome Hill graduated from St. Paul Academy, neither the first quality 35mm camera, the "Leica," nor the 120mm twin-lens reflex camera, the "Rolleiflex," had been introduced to the public.<sup>1</sup> It was nearly a decade later when Jerome<sup>2</sup> began experimenting with several types of modern cameras, became seriously interested in filmmaking and photography, and took the pictures selected for this exhibition. Jerome's study of photography coincided with an abundance of artistic and photographic activity both in the United States and Europe. Photographers engaged in documentary projects, 'straight photography,' and much experimentation against the backdrop of the Great Depression and the political situations that led to World War II.

Once in Europe, Jerome was excited to be surrounded by and immersed in the cutting edge of modern art. But that was not always the case. In the poetic narrative of his 1972 memoir *Film Portrait*, Jerome reflected on his early years with an awareness that he "Realized he led a life apart. . . Alone for awhile. . . In the realm of the unconscious. . ." Recounting in biographical fragments, referring to the ages from 13 to 23, Jerome recalled "He hadn't begun to live. . . To experience the present and await the future."

His life changed dramatically after he received a B.A. in music from Yale University in 1927. He moved to Italy and later France, where he dove fully into the study of painting. Near the end of his life, at the age of 67, Jerome described himself as "An eternal student of the past." He engaged in the study of architecture, literature, music, dance and Chinese porcelain. He had been introduced to the arts through his family, especially his father, who had an avid interest in photography and film. However, Jerome's education in the visual arts largely took place after he graduated from St. Paul Academy and Yale.

From the founding of SPA in 1900 until 1967, visual art classes were not considered appropriate for the curriculum of a boys' college preparatory school. In contrast, Miss Loomis' School for Girls, predecessor to Summit School, the sister school of SPA, began offering art classes to its female students in 1909. While drawing, painting and/or printmaking were the extent of a typical visual arts curriculum, photography classes were not commonly offered in high school until the 1960s or later. One reason is that photography struggled to become recognized as a

legitimate art form throughout most of the first half of the century. In fact, the first college art program in photography had not begun until 1937 at the Institute of Design in Chicago by Hungarian-born Bauhaus instructor and artist László Moholy-Nagy.

When Jerome attended SPA, under the leadership of Headmaster John deQuedville Briggs, fine arts of any kind were intentionally excluded from the curriculum. However, the boys and the faculty occasionally staged dramatic performances. In one such production of 1920, Jerome did the scenic paintings for the student-written one-act plays that served as a fundraiser for the baseball team's trip to Kansas City. Recognizing Jerome's potential in painting, the following year Briggs suggested Jerome 'decorate' the chemistry and physics laboratory. Beginning in 1921, and periodically for the next 40 years, Jerome painted the frescoes in what is now English classroom 322. Jerome added the last section in 1964 with a painting of Einstein.

According to the St. Paul Academy student newspaper *Now and Then*, Jerome's composition for Einstein was based on Antonello da Messina's *St. Jerome in his Study*, painted around 1476. This painting of the monk and scholar who compiled the standard Latin translation of the *Bible* is used as a classic example of how artists use a border to define the space seen by the viewer. Jerome used characteristics of the room, seated figure, small animals and stone arch border from the Messina painting as a reference for his own painting of Einstein. Jerome's technique of defining space by using borders in his own paintings could probably be traced back to his studies at the British Academy of Painting in Rome during the years 1927-28. What remains fascinating is that Jerome's eye as a painter informed how he saw his images and framed his compositions in the camera's viewfinder throughout his career as a photographer and filmmaker.

While looking at Jerome's photographs, the images *he* chose to print, mount and place in the archived albums, I was struck by the strong qualities of the images.<sup>3</sup> Jerome utilized photographic techniques that I tell my beginning photography students to be aware of as they look through the viewfinders of their cameras. He positioned the camera and himself at interesting, sometimes radical, vantage points in relation to the subject. Several of the photographs were taken from angles above or below the subject, leaning out a window, standing on steps, ledges, ladders, or

<sup>1</sup>Both cameras used roll film, rather than single sheets of film, and enabled photographers to become more spontaneous. The Leica was marketed in 1924 and Rollei introduced the Rolleiflex in 1928. The camera Jerome preferred was a Rolleiflex, identified by the images with a square format. The rectangular images in the exhibition were most likely taken with a 35mm Leica camera.

<sup>2</sup>Jerome is used in place of Hill because he wanted a separate identity from his father and grandfather.

<sup>3</sup>Jerome describes how exciting it is to enlarge his own photos in a letter to his mother with no date, but likely between 1932 and 1934.





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perching on hilltops. While positioning himself in strategic positions — a boat deck or the front seat of a car — Jerome was intentional about including the mast and sail cables or the hood of a car in the foreground of the picture to define the space and frame the scene.

In one of Jerome's most delightful photographs, a reflective triangular-shaped car hood at the bottom of the frame points to two men on ladders painting the 'G. Dumel Plomberie Zinguerie' sign, surrounded by a small group of curious children, some staring back at the photographer. The sign painters, in their long, white paint smocks, illuminated by bright sun low in the sky, appear almost as circus performers teetering above, entertaining the children and us, the viewers.

A young girl approaching from the right directs our eyes in a triangular movement, adding visual tension as she is about to affect what will happen in the following minutes. The middle and background space, extending to the edges of the frame, are filled with bright or shadowed architectural facades, adding to the dramatic backdrop. This photograph has all of the important formal pictorial elements — extraordinary available light that abstracts the forms and spaces, textures, subjects, and the spatial relationships that move the viewer's eye through and around the space, which make for an aesthetically pleasing composition on a flat piece of photographic paper.

This image is also memorable because it captures the 'decisive moment,' a term coined by legendary French photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson. The technique is described as waiting, with an open eye pressed to the viewfinder, for that split-second of time when everything — the formal elements, ephemeral movements, facial expressions and body gestures within a scene — come into a stunning visual juxtaposition and a magical moment of meaning is fixed in the image. Beyond that, a mysterious quality engages our wonder and curiosity. This photograph has it all.

Jerome probably used the square format Rolleiflex to take this picture. It is interesting to note that with a twin-lens reflex camera he could not look directly at his subject. He had to look down onto the ground glass to see the image that was reflected upward and backward by one lens. The other lens recorded a slightly

different scene on the film when the shutter button was pressed.

It is probable that Jerome also began using the smaller 35mm camera in the '30s, indicated by the rectangular format of some of the photographs in the exhibition. Several other pictures by Jerome have a similar sense of waiting for the 'decisive moment,' such as the group of bathers on steps at the water's edge and the group of people reading and reclining on rocks, framed by low-growing trees, also on the edge of a body of water. Cartier-Bresson also began using the 35mm Leica rangefinder camera around the same time in 1932 and continued using that format for more than 60 years.

Jerome's photographs of historical architecture, small towns, skiers in the Alps and views of Cassis (France) along the Mediterranean coast followed in the direction of 'straight' photography championed by Paul Strand and Alfred Steiglitz in the early decades of the 1900s. In contrast to the photographs of the late 19th and early 20th century 'Pictorialists,' who used allegorical themes and soft-focused lenses emulating painting styles, 'straight' photographers' images were characterized by specific qualities unique to the medium, including the use of more depth-of-field. The sharper lenses rendering greater areas of focus and detail enhanced the images of photographers discovering a sense of place, as well as the 'common place' within a particular environment.

French photographer Eugene Atget documented the streets, buildings and landscapes in and around Paris and was considered one of the earliest practitioners of modern documentary photography. Although most of his photographs were made during the first two decades of the 20th century, Atget's work was unknown when he died in 1927. It was not until American photographer Bernice Abbott discovered his negatives and exhibited and published his photographs that the importance of Atget's work became recognized.

His documentary projects later influenced Abbott, who in the 1930s documented historic architecture in New York City that she knew would later be razed or altered. It is possible that Jerome learned about Atget's and Abbott's work, as they shared with Jerome an interest in photographing the architectural details of historic sites and a keen sense of observation. Along with other photographers experimenting



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with this new art form, Jerome was interested in photographing street scenes while including activities from day-to-day life.

While Jerome was extremely serious about his study and practice of various art disciplines, he loved having fun with people. He often took photographs of his friends and relatives during these leisure times and comic episodes. Some of these images are not unlike those of Jacques Henri Lartigue, who at a young age in the early 1900s photographed family members racing cars, flying kites, and floating, fully clothed, on water in a tube. Jerome clearly staged scenarios specifically for the camera. One photograph in the exhibition catches two men about to embark on a game of golf inside the Hills' North Oaks glass greenhouse. In another image, a young woman with deer legs stands in front of a piano.

It is not known whether Jerome had early knowledge of the artists in Europe who experimented with photography in the 1920s and '30s. They included Man Ray, the American painter living in France, and László and Lucia Moholy-Nagy, known for their camera-less light images made in the darkroom, called 'rayographs' and 'photograms.' However, it was the unmanipulated photographs Jerome took of street scenes from above, with a bird's-eye perspective or vantage point, that bear a striking resemblance to images made in the late 1920s by Moholy-Nagy and Russian artist Aleksandr Rodchenko.

Jerome was familiar with the work of Group f/64, formed by California photographers Ansel Adams, Imogen Cunningham and Edward Weston in 1932. Most of their photographs were taken with larger format view cameras and lenses that could be stopped down to an aperture of f-64, resulting in large negatives with great depth-of-field. Their photographs of landscapes, portraits, nudes and natural objects set unprecedented high standards for the modern 'fine art' silver print.

Also in the United States, Farm Security Administration photographers, including Dorothea Lange and Walker Evans, documented people and living conditions throughout the country during the Depression from 1935 until 1942.

While I do not want to suggest these examples of widespread artistic activity in photography be reduced to one single style, much of this work can be nonetheless characterized by strong graphic elements, high contrast, rich texture and tonal

values, dramatic angles and abstraction. In addition, there is a distinctly modern sensibility of form and the relationship to human scale that is especially apparent in Jerome's photographs, as well as in those of some of his contemporaries.

In fact, the human element in Jerome's photographs is often what sets them apart from other images of landscapes or architecture. In many of the images from these albums where natural or man-made structures dominate, there are subtle or extraordinary references to human scale and presence. This relationship between the place and the human presence adds new meaning and context by adding another layer of history and specificity. In adding to the complexity of the image, the photographer removes any appearance of objectivity. The image becomes personalized and unique.

We wonder not only about the relationships of the people to the places in the photographs, but also about the photographer's relationship to what and who is included in the frame. Jerome's juxtaposition of animate and inanimate objects appears often enough to be intentional. Perhaps this practice resulted from situations of convenience. Jerome led a gregarious life and was often accompanied by friends and family during his frequent travels. He may have directed people in close proximity, or he may have patiently waited for the 'decisive moment.' Whatever prompted him to consistently rely on placing at least one human figure somewhere within the frame, Jerome was exercising his cleverness. He gave us visual clues to the subtext of the images while contributing an elusive quality that keeps the viewer engaged and wanting to know more.

A few images in the exhibition are self-portraits that also reveal clues about more personal aspects of Jerome's life. One of the most intriguing images is one of the many staged photographs in Jerome's album. However, it is different than some of the other set-up stills in that it seems to have a serious, rather than a humorous, narrative. Jerome positioned a side view of his head and shoulders beside a large seashell and a seemingly random stack of playing cards beneath the queen of hearts.

The very same seashell and cards were used to suggest a relationship between the characters in one of Jerome's earlier films, *La Cartomancienne (The Fortune Teller)*.<sup>4</sup> In the short, melodramatic, experimental film, the main female character visits a

<sup>4</sup>Jerome describes the slow progress of making the film in letters he wrote from Cassis, France, to his mother in Saint Paul during the summer and fall of 1934.



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fortune teller and has flashbacks of her male lover swimming in the sea and climbing along a cliff. We can only surmise that there was a parallel narrative in Jerome's love life, also symbolized by the queen in the still image. Whatever meaning Jerome had in mind when he took the photograph, it remained significant. Not only did he enlarge, mount and include it in one of his albums, he also included the still image in a segment of his experimental memoir, *Film Portrait*, that he completed shortly before his death in 1972.

Like many other well-known artists of his time, Jerome clearly used the new medium of photography to engage in complex visual, social and personal explorations. Be mindful that this exhibition deals with only a short period of Jerome's involvement with photography, his photography tangentially related to his other artistic activities, and that this centennial project is not nearly comprehensive. It is hoped that this exhibition and catalog bring more insight to Jerome as an artist and as a celebrated alumnus of SPA. At the same time, it is hoped that Jerome's practice of and contributions to the history of photography will continue to be studied and recognized more widely.

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*Linda Brooks, artist, photographer and member of the Fine Arts faculty at St. Paul Academy and Summit School, has been involved with the production and study of photography since graduate school and her participation in alternative gallery spaces in Buffalo, New York, in the mid-1970s. Her interest in the life and work of Jerome Hill '22 began when she read that avant-garde filmmaker Stan Brakhage had benefited from their friendship and Jerome's philanthropy. Brooks and her husband, Joe Panone, have two children, Aaron '02 and Ana '06.*

*Brooks is the lead curator of the Jerome Hill Centennial Photography Exhibition 2005.*

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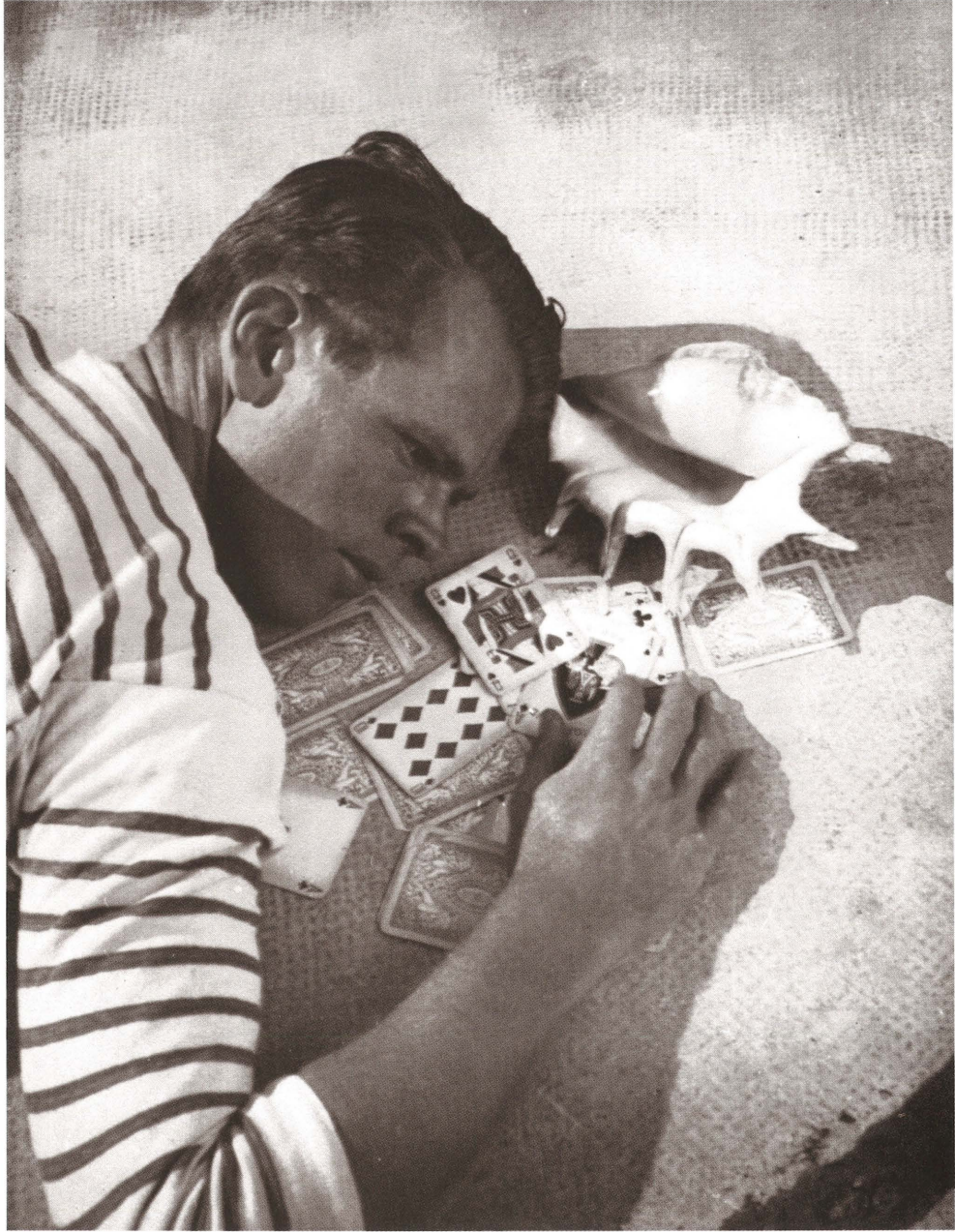
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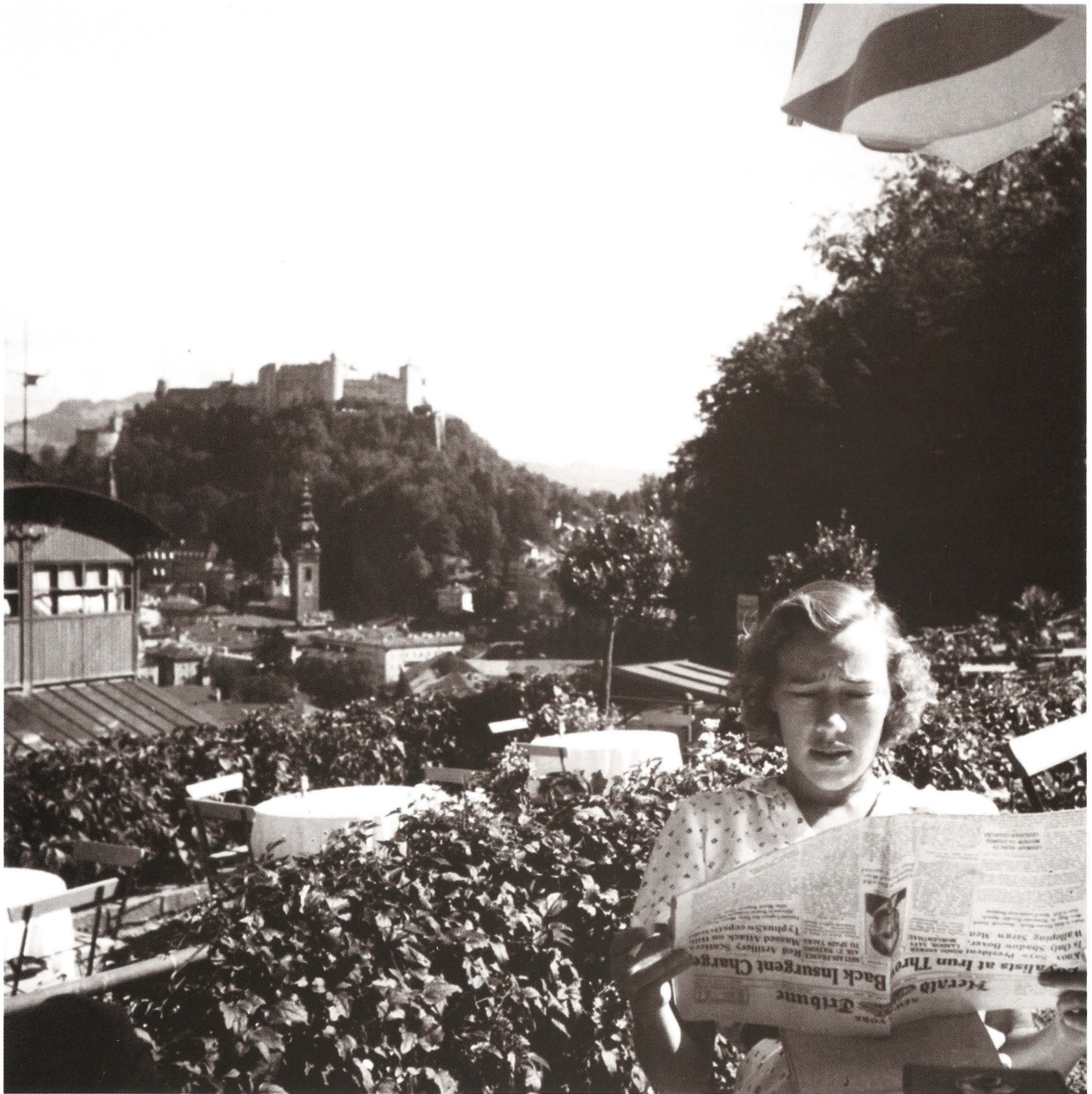
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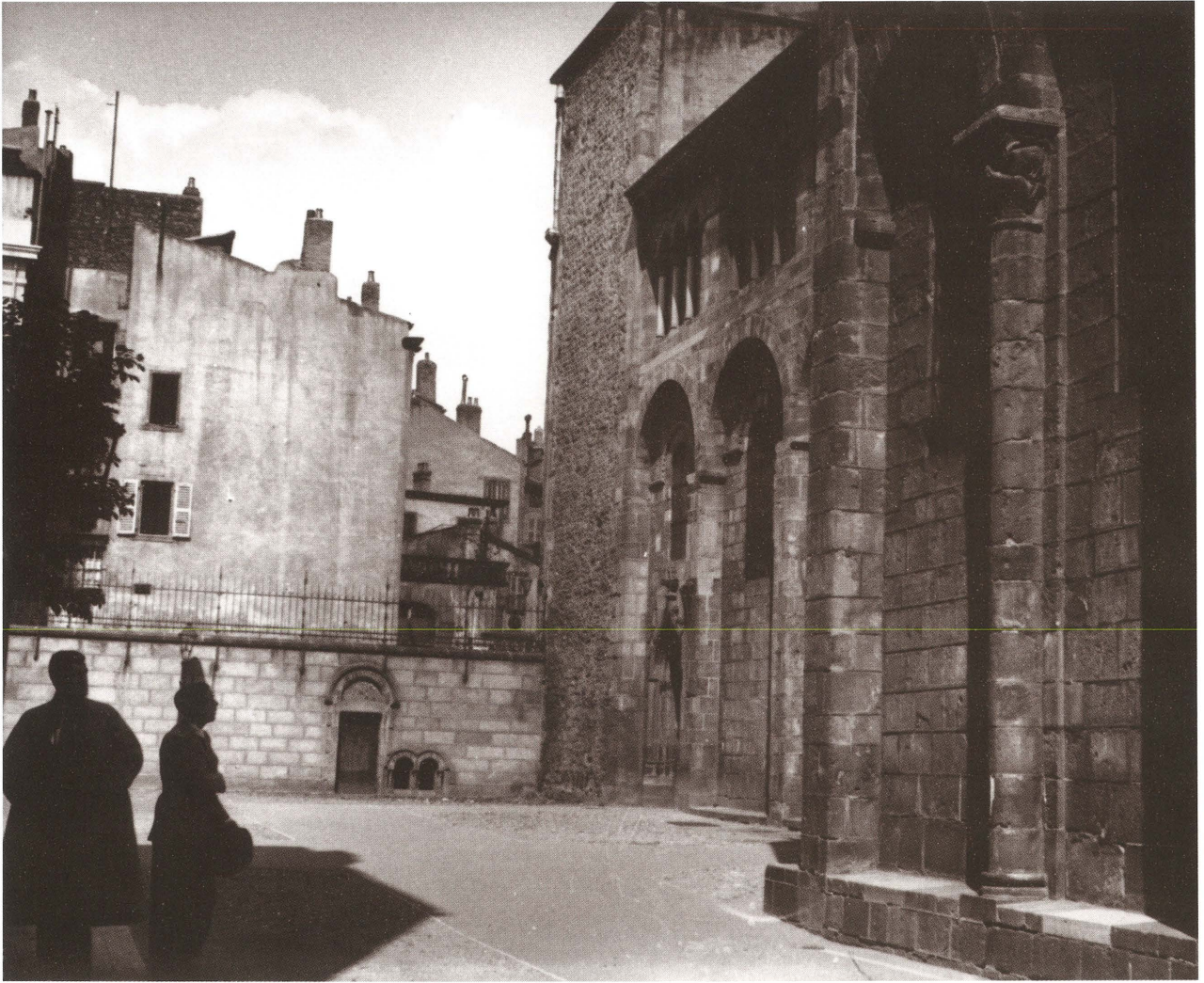










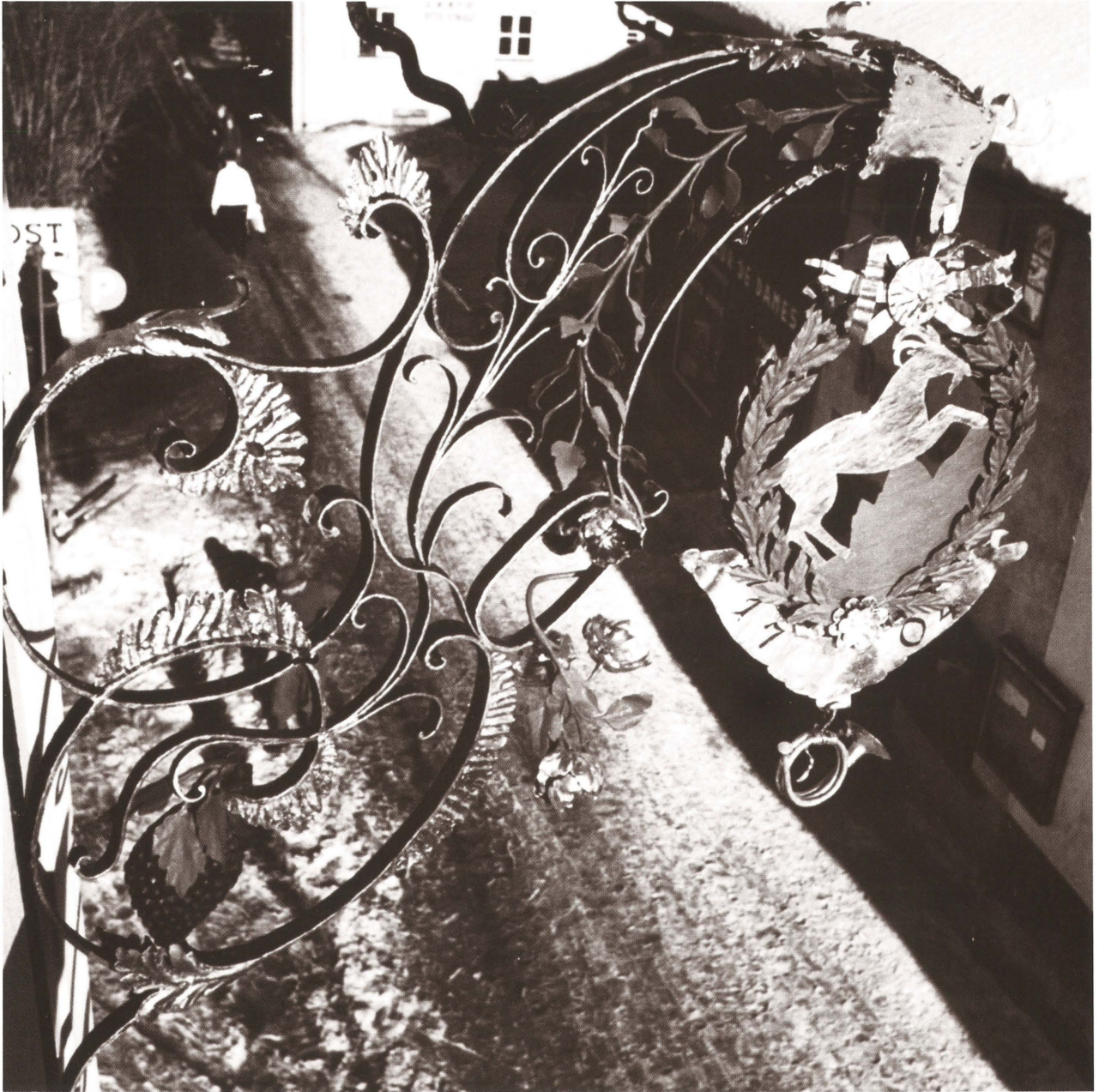








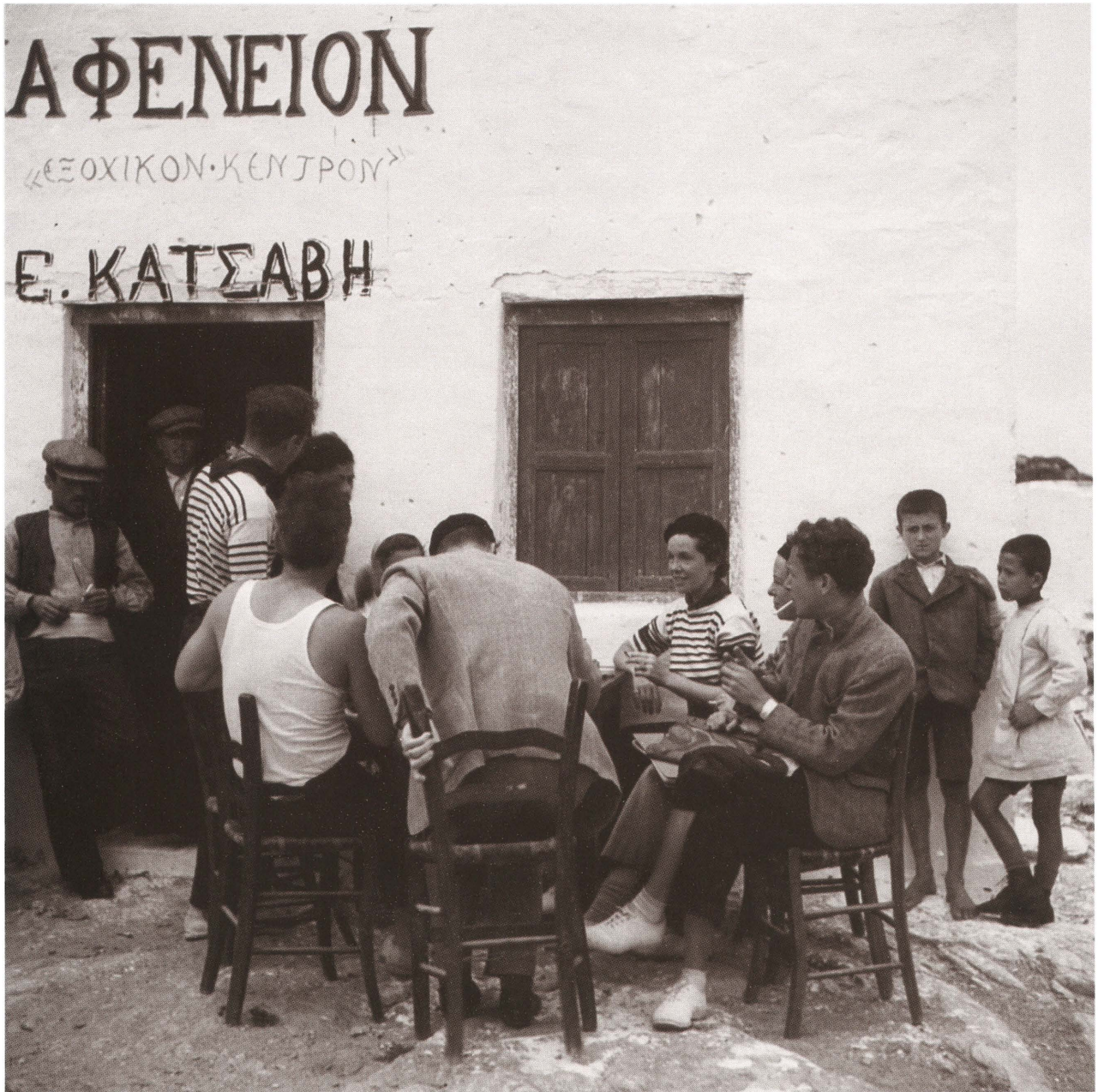




















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