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New Museum to Present Gustav Metzger's First US Solo Exhibition
The Artist's Complete "Historic Photographs" Series Will Be On View

New York, NY... "Gustav Metzger: Historic Photographs" is the first US solo museum exhibition of the work of Gustav Metzger and highlights the influential eighty-six-year-old artist and activist's long engagement with historical trauma and representation.

Metzger was born in Nuremberg, Germany in 1926 to Polish-Jewish parents. He and his brother escaped to England, but his parents remained behind and perished in the Holocaust. This first-hand experience of displacement and destruction shaped Metzger's subsequent outlook on the relationship between art and society. Best known for his theory of Auto-destructive art, pioneered in the 1960s, Metzger has consistently viewed the artist's role to be one that embraces political activism and seeks radical social change. During the past forty years, his work has touched on issues of nuclear disarmament, war, consumerism, and environmental destruction.



Gustav Metzger, *Historic Photographs: To Crawl Into—Anschluss, Vienna, March 1938*, 1996. Black-and-white photograph on PVC and cotton cover, 124 x 167 1/2 in (315 x 425 cm). *Historic Photographs: To Walk Into, Massacre on the Mount, Jerusalem, 8 November, 1950*, 1996. Installation view, General Foundation, Vienna. Courtesy General Foundation, Photo © Werner Kaligofsky, 2005

"Gustav Metzger: Historic Photographs" will be on view at the New Museum from **May 19–July 3, 2011**, and is curated by Massimiliano Gioni, Associate Director and Director of Exhibitions. The exhibition at the New Museum will feature, for the first time in its entirety, Metzger's complete series of **sculptural installations** titled **"Historic Photographs."** This series confronts the viewer with some of the most powerful and tragic images of twentieth-century history, which Metzger has enlarged, obscured, or hidden in a variety of ways. The resulting works invite interaction and provoke powerful physical experiences that transmit the emotional and intellectual weight of history.

Begun in 1990, Metzger's "Historic Photographs" span a range of historical events including the destruction of the Warsaw ghetto in 1943, the horrors of the Vietnam War, the Oklahoma City bombing, and environmental destruction in contemporary England. Metzger reconfigures the physical conditions of viewing a photograph, obscuring or concealing them from the spectator through a variety of sculptural means. In *To Crawl Into—Anschluss, Vienna, March 1938* (1996), a photograph, which depicts a group of Viennese

Jews being forced to scrub the pavement, lies flat on the ground covered by a sheet. To see the image, viewers are forced to crawl underneath the sheet, and in the process, assume the same prostrate position as the individuals in the photograph. In *Historic Photographs: Hitler-Youth, Eingeschweisst* (1997/2009), a terrifying image is sealed between two sheets of metal and casually propped up against a wall; in *Historic Photographs: Fireman with Child, Oklahoma 1995* (1998–2007) an iconic photograph is hidden behind a wall of concrete blocks. The series as a whole confronts the ubiquitous nature of these iconic photos and constructs a relationship between the viewer and the image that is intimate, performative, and sustaining of historical memory. Metzger’s “Historic Photographs” force the viewer to reengage with historical trauma and speak to the inescapability and inevitability of evil.

Initially trained as a painter in the 1940s and '50s, Metzger quickly developed more radical strategies towards artistic production. In 1959, Metzger published the *Auto-Destructive Art Manifesto*, which called for the production of artworks with industrial materials and a limited lifespan which, in his words, “reenacts the obsession with destruction, the pummeling to which individuals and masses are subjected.” These ideas were most dramatically realized in his South Bank Demonstration in London in 1961, where sheets of colored nylon were sprayed with hydrochloric acid, burning them to tatters. At the same time, he proposed a theory of Auto-creative art, experimenting with scientific processes to creating light installations and the colorful and immersive *Liquid Crystal Environment* (1964–65).



Gustav Metzger, Detail of *Historic Photographs: No.1: Liquidation of the Warsaw Ghetto, April 19-28 1943*, 1995/2009. Photograph mounted on Foamex board and rubble, 150 x 211 cm. © 2010 Gustav Metzger. Courtesy Serpentine Gallery. Photo: Sylvain Deleu

Metzger has consistently pushed his fellow artists to take on radical political positions and change their behavior in meaningful ways. Metzger’s project *The Years Without Art—1977–1980*, a three-year cessation of all artistic activities, sought to encourage other artists to undertake a period of research and reflection on contemporary political problems and social issues. More recently, Metzger’s initiative *Reduce Art Flights* promoted awareness of the environmental impact of an increasingly global art world by calling for arts professional decrease their dependence on air travel. These works, as well as his more traditional art objects, are concertedly optimistic proposals for living in and improving an increasingly complex and challenging world.

Metzger was born in Nuremberg, Germany in 1926. The artist currently lives and works primarily in London. His work was the subject of the recent exhibition “Gustav Metzger—Decades: 1959–2009” at the Serpentine Gallery, London. Solo exhibitions of his work have also been held at the Zacheta National Gallery, Warsaw; Westfälischer Kunstverein, Munster; Lunds Konsthall, Sweden; and the Generali Foundation, Vienna. Metzger’s work included in the 2009 Tate Triennial, the 2008 Yokohama Triennial; the 2007 Skulptur Projekte Münster; and the 2010 Gwangju Biennale, “10000 Lives.”

Exhibition Support

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About the New Museum

The New Museum is the only museum in New York City exclusively devoted to contemporary art. Founded in 1977, the New Museum was conceived as a center for exhibitions, information, and documentation about living artists from around the world. From its beginnings as a one-room office on Hudson Street to the inauguration of its first freestanding, dedicated building on the Bowery designed by SANAA in 2007, the New Museum continues to be a place of ongoing experimentation and a hub of new art and new ideas.

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Gustav Metzger, *Historic Photographs: Trang Bang, Children Fleeing South Vietnam, April 1972, 1998*. Photograph on aluminum, bamboo screen, lights and timer, dimensions variable. © 2010 Gustav Metzger. Courtesy Serpentine Gallery. Photo: Sylvain Deleu