

Tribute to Kryn Taconis



Underground photographer Kryn Taconis displaying his Rolleiflex camera hidden in a briefcase, as used during the Hunger Winter 1944-45.

This photo taken in Amsterdam in 1950 by Hans Bethlem.

PA-169949

The Canada House Gallery in Trafalgar Square is to present a retrospective exhibition of work by Kryn Taconis, the eminent Dutch-Canadian photojournalist.

Work from the three main periods of his career will be featured: his time as a member of the Underground Photographers' group during the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands; his years as an international photographer in Europe, first with Time-Life and then with Magnum; and his last two decades as a photojournalist in Canada.

Taconis was born in Rotterdam in 1918, the son of a fruit importer, and was educated at the Montessori school, where self-discipline, liberalism and imagination were encouraged. He studied the basics of photography with Professor Paul Guernonprez, who was later executed during the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands.

Although a pacifist at heart, Taconis became active in the Resistance, helping Allied pilots and Jews to escape to France. In 1944 he joined 'Ondergedoken Camera' group which documented the destitution of the citizens of Amsterdam during the 'Hunger Winter' of 1944-45. This was a risky activity, so to avoid detection Taconis used a camera concealed in a briefcase. He took some 500 negatives during this period.

Time-Life, Picture Post and Magnum

After the war Taconis went to the United States to perfect his English, and then returned to Europe where he became a freelance correspondent for Time-Life in the Benelux countries. During this time his photographs appeared in a number of publications, including *Picture Post*.

In 1950 Robert Capa invited him to join the prestigious Magnum agency in Paris. This had been founded in 1947 as a photographers' cooperative by Capa and three others who were all anxious to establish their intellectual independence. (A book on Magnum entitled *In Our Time* has just been published by André Deutsch, and a related exhibition is due to open at the Hayward Gallery on March 8.)

During the 1950s Taconis covered a wide range of subjects for Magnum, notably international conferences, NATO, immigration and a flood disaster in the Netherlands. His work was published in leading magazines, such as *Paris Match*, *Scientific American* and the *New York Times* magazine. His coverage of a mine disaster at Marcinelle in Belgium in 1956 won him the Art



Directors' Club of New York Award in 1957.

The following year, Taconis undertook a number of assignments in the Middle East. However, his photo-essay on the Algerian National Liberation Front provoked much controversy at Magnum. As a result, he slowly severed his connection with the agency and emigrated to Canada in 1959.

The Canadian decades

His arrival in Toronto could not have been better timed. A new editorial team at *Star Weekly*, the weekend magazine of the *Toronto Star*, wanted top-rate photo journalists to cover stories that were mainly Canadian in content. The 1960s were to prove the most vibrant period of photo-reporting in Canada, and Taconis was at the forefront of the movement pioneering new standards of quality and winning several awards.

As a newcomer to Canada, Taconis was fascinated by what the country had to offer. During the two years he was under contract to *Star Weekly*, he travelled on assignments from Newfoundland to the Yukon. For most of the time, however, he worked as a freelance preparing more than 230 stories for *Star Weekly*, between 1959 and 1978, and also working for *Maclean's*, *Seventeen* and *Chatelaine*.

In the mid-1960s he became a film producer and director with the National Film Board of Canada. His first film was a ten-minute, black-and-white documentary, entitled *Labrador Hospital*, about new methods of providing emergency medical care in scattered communities in the North. His next film - *Celebration*, directed by Rex Tasker - consisted of hundreds of 'animated'



2

1 Massacre in Dam Square, Amsterdam, May 7, 1945

PA-169959

2 German soldiers leaving the Netherlands after the surrender, May 15, 1945

PA-169960

3 Barry Schuer reading a volume of the World Book Encyclopedia in braille, Buffalo, New York, 1961

PA-169986

4 Greek Orthodox church, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 1965

5 Fishermen on the Maas River, Netherlands, 1978

6 Hosts at Canada Place, Expo 67



3