

MEDIA RELEASE

CAMERA OVER HOLLYWOOD

PHOTOGRAPHS BY
JOHN SWOPE, 1936-1938



On view: September 2 to October 28, 2000

Using a Leica and his inside advantage as a close friend and confidant of Henry Fonda and Jimmy Stewart, John Swope documented Hollywood in the late 1930s, not as an idealized landscape but as a working town full of struggle, hope and success. He saw the men and women who make the movies as regular folk, be they Fonda, Stewart or the would-be actors and film grips waiting for their unemployment checks. Hollywood was a town in the very real business of creating the unreal 'elsewhere'.

Swope shows us Hollywood's underbelly. He shows cinematographer giant James Wong Howe dwarfed beneath his camera rig, seemingly more at its mercy than of its command. John Barrymore motors by, the celebrity of a Hollywood Shriners parade, only to be shown in Swope's view as a disembodied carnival clown being wheeled past the public dais. Swope also shows us moments of genuine tenderness. Jimmy Stewart and Olivia de Havilland are supine and napping on the grass in the late day sun.

Hollywood sets are seen more from their backside than their façade. An extra sleeps on the grass between takes with his whisky bottle, actors play poker as they wait for the next shoot, an actress washes her laundry in the sink of her tiny apartment. John Swope shows us the Hollywood of labour as well as glamour, the stars and the ever-hopeful.

Heralded as a masterwork of behind-the-scenes documentary, *Camera over Hollywood* was first published by Random House in 1939. Its re-publication coincides with the exhibition tour of this important and until recently forgotten body of work. Presentation House Gallery is the only Canadian venue on the tour.

John Swope's entry into the world of film and theatre began in the early 1930's. While as a student at Harvard University he joined the University Players theatrical group, where Henry Fonda, Josh Logan and Jimmy Stewart also participated. Taking up photography in 1936, he used his position as production assistant to Leland Hayward to photograph behind-the-scenes Hollywood. After his book *Camera over Hollywood* was published, he collaborated with John Steinbeck to produce a book about the Navy's pilot training program called *Bombs Away* (Viking, 1943).

In 1944, photographer Edward Steichen selected Swope as one of the elite members of his U.S. Navy photographic unit assigned to cover the war in the Pacific. During this time Swope documented the Declaration of Surrender of Japan and the release of American and Allied POWs. He went on to make an extraordinary portrait of the peoples of this war-torn country.

After the war, he joined *LIFE* magazine's stable of freelance photographers, and concentrated his work between the film industry and travel assignments to foreign countries. During his lifetime, Swope's work was exhibited at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, the Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles.

Camera Over Hollywood: Photographs by John Swope, 1936 – 1938 will be shown at Presentation House Gallery from September 2 to October 28, 2000. It is curated by Graham Howe, and organized and circulated by Curatorial Assistance in Los Angeles. All images are courtesy of the John Swope Trust. Funding for the exhibition tour has been graciously provided by the Gerald and Virginia Oppenheimer Trust. The book, with a foreword by Dennis Hopper and an essay by Graham Howe, is available in the Gallery Bookstore.

Mark Swope, son of John Swope and Dorothy (McGuire) Swope, will give an informal talk on Tuesday, September 26, 7:30 pm, at the Emily Carr Institute of Art & Design, in the Lecture Hall, Granville Island. Mark Swope was born in 1953 and studied at the San Francisco Art Institute. He was a furniture designer in the 1980s and early 1990s, and is now a practicing artist as well as Director of the John Swope Trust and Photographic Collection. The talk is co-presented with the ECIAD School of Media Arts. It will be followed by a reception and book signing. A free PHG event.



Check out Hollywood yourself!

Presentation House Gallery is organizing a raffle ticket fundraiser with the prize being a trip for two to sunny Los Angeles, three days and nights at the Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel, site of the first Academy Awards ceremony, and free admission to some of the world's finest museums. Tickets only \$5 each! Call 986-1351 for details.

Gallery Hours: Wednesday to Sunday, 12 – 5 pm, Thursday, 12 – 9 pm.

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Photos: John Swope, front, *Jimmy Stewart and Olivia de Havilland lying in grass*, 1938, and above *Fun in Movieland*, 1938. Courtesy the John Swope Trust and Curatorial Assistance, L.A.

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