



視覺爆炸

EXPLOSIONS OF SIGHT

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Introduction

Welcome to this exhibition which takes you on a leisurely journey through the archives of a swiss photo reporter — René Burri — who made his mark on the twentieth century with his striking images. Dip freely into his photos, wherever your curiosity and interests take you, and lose yourself in his life story. Immerse yourself in his work, the way others before you experienced it. Like them, you will be unsettled by images that have no titles, documents that simply record a moment in a lifetime, objects that are unsettling, surprising, and fascinating. Their meaning lies elsewhere: in the details they record and sometimes, if René Burri was willing, in a caption added by himself. So, allow yourself to be surprised and beguiled by the way he built up his career and thought about his work as a photographer, while leaving lots of room for other activities such as drawing and collage. Take a wander and lose yourself in his story — our history!

The title "René Burri, Explosions of Sight" chosen for this exhibition conveys the extensive research that Photo Elysée team conducted in the archives René Burri bequeathed to his Foundation which are housed at the museum. It presents the first complete overview of his multiple creative activities. It also uncovers a more intimate section, including as yet unpublished documents: contact sheets, print runs, films, book dummies, exhibition projects, notebooks, collages, watercolours, drawings... This exhibition has been conceived along two main axes that unfurl a lengthy illustrated biography as his Lifeline. This runs through all the rooms in the museum and is punctuated by twelve thematic Focus points which cast light on the elements that determined René Burri's creative process.

Born in 1933 and passing away in 2014 in Zurich (Switzerland), René Burri spent his entire life at the outposts of world history. He joined Magnum Photos in 1955 and became a member in 1959. In the course of his almost sixty years' career, and thanks partly to his Swiss passport, he traversed Europe, the Middle East, North, Central and South America, Japan and China, recording with commitment and lucidity most of the events that marked the second half of the twentieth century. A great many famous people passed in front of his lens as well: Picasso, Giacometti, Klein, Tinguely, Le Corbusier, Barragán...

However, it was his portrait of “Che with Cigar”, taken in 1963, which made him famous round the world. In spite of all this, over and beyond the cult images, there lies another Burri, a Burri who was modern and inventive, committed and facetious and, especially, impetuous! “Photography, that’s nothing; what counts, is what you feel and express. It’s about raising awareness, saying ‘look!’. It’s the opposite of exploitation: it’s about going beyond yourself, sharing.” (RB)

All the documents in this exhibition (with two exceptions) were created while René Burri was still alive. They have been selected from his archive, deposited with Photo Elysée along with a few loans from his family, from the Zürcher Hochschule der Künste, and Magnum Photos Paris and New York.

Some items have been replaced by facsimiles for conservation reasons. The location of these items is indicated in the leaflet by an asterisk *.

The Musée de l’Elysée, opened in 1985, has changed its identity since 2022 and is now called Photo Elysée.



Marie Clérin, *Workshop report, Ivry-sur-Seine, France, November 2014*

Arilund

As a child, as soon as he'd collected a few coins, René Burri would rush to the cinema to watch the films he loved: the first Italian films of the post-War era, films by Jean Renoir, not forgetting Chaplin's silent movies, the German expressionist films, or Russian films by Pudovkin and Eisenstein. However, it was photography that he turned to at the age of 13, when he snapped his first photo during Winston Churchill's state visit to Zurich in the autumn of 1946.

A few years later, on entering the photography lecture room in the Kunstgewerbeschule Zürich which was filled with lamps, stands and projectors, René Burri felt he was in a film studio, and was hooked. That was how he discovered his path in life and he registered for the photography course taught by Hans Finsler. However, as soon as the opportunity arose, René Burri would grab the school's Bolex and shoot short clips on a whole range of subjects, such as a visit to the student group by Werner Bischof during his exhibition in Zurich about a trip to the Far East. Werner Bischof was an eminent member of the Magnum agency, and had studied in the same school; he went on to become one of Burri's mentors. A few months later, René Burri won a bursary at the end of his studies, which allowed him to shoot a film about his own school, a project which he completed in 1955.

Once he had obtained his diploma, René Burri secured a job as assistant operator with Ernst A. Heiniger, working on a documentary film about Switzerland for Disney Films. This episode put him off filmmaking, because he was dismayed by the celebrated American company's untruthful presentation of his country. However, his disillusionment did not prevent him, in the course of a very busy career, from continuing to make films for Magnum Photos and for himself (24 films counted so far); from setting up Magnum Films, together with Philip Gittelman, in New York in 1964; from getting regular invitations to work as a film set photographer on feature length documentaries, or from being assigned a dedicated seat at the Locarno Film Festival. One way of regularly re-living the profound sensations that the seventh art inspired in him as an adolescent, impossible as that is!



Studio photo in the Kunstgewerbeschule Zürich, Switzerland, c. 1950

What's on show:

René Burri's first forays with a camera (courtesy Archive ZHdK).

A few installations for a shoot which evokes film sets // his film about the Kunstgewerbeschule Zürich (courtesy Archive ZHdK).

René Burri as assistant operator for Disney Films // a few photos from the film shoot // the film *Land and Leute-Die Schweiz* (©Disney Film).

Three photos of René Burri shooting a film.

Five photos taken on the film set for *The Ernie Game* by Don Owen, shot in 1967, in Canada.

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1933

Birth of René Rudolf Burri, Sunday 9 April.

1 document

1940

Photographs of the Burri and Haas families, on René Burri's father's and mother's sides.

The photographer's sister (1953) and parents (1977).

1 contact sheet

2 photographs

1945

Secondary school exercise book.

1 drawing

1946

Winston Churchill in Zurich.

René Burri's first photo, taken at the age of 13, using his father's camera.

1 photograph

1949

Entrance to the Kunstgewerbeschule Zürich (School of Applied Arts).

1 document

1 student card

1 document

1949-1953

Various documents and photographs that refer to his professional education: His teachers, Hans Finsler for photography and Alfred Willimann for typography //

Drawing technique //

René Burri retouching a photograph (©Zoé Binswanger, courtesy ZHdK) // Encounter with Werner Bischof in his exhibition (film) //

Working on light //

A text with a comment by Hans Finsler // Portrait Studies //

First photocollage //

Nude (drawing and photograph) //

During a study trip: street scenes in Paris

6 photographs

1 photocollage

2 contact sheets

2 drawings

1 film

*1 document with handwritten text**

Structure

It's not easy to try and define René Burri's visual world, because he was so suspicious of stylistic effects. When he started at the Kunstgewerbeschule in Zurich, he turned to Hans Finsler's photography courses. In the wake of the New Objectivity movement, he was careful to emphasise clear vision, defined values, explicit contrasts and precise lighting.

For René Burri, context and form were visual structures that serve to open up the viewer's gaze to other fields in the image. Thus, the eye must look beyond them the better to venture within the photo. Thus, he seeks a means, or signs, to help the viewer's gaze to understand the context... Furthermore, his photographic representations are never, here, restricted to a single theme; they are dense and many-layered, horizontally (reminiscent of the cinematographic process), vertically (in terms of a caesura in time or the space within which the photographic act takes place) or in depth (like the viewing depth in a cinema). This way of structuring the image has been present in René Burri's work right from the start, as his student contact sheets demonstrate.

One of his primary structural principles is articulated in his use of the "double plan", emblemised by his famous image of men on a roof that he took in São Paulo in 1960. However, for all that his viewfinder imposes a frame on a reality that does not belong there, reality itself produces frames, interplays between surfaces, frontal and secondary planes, which render it more ambiguous, surprising and mysterious. Sometimes, the effect is like a cut-out, at other times, like a real collage involving two set pieces that appear unconnected, while belonging within the same space and moment.

A second principle is defined by René Burri's entirely novel manner of playing with the dots, lines, and planes that occur in front of his viewfinder. We also need to add light to this brief list, since he makes magnificent use of it, in every possible way: in luminous rays, like brilliant white lines, in high contrast, in transparent layers, in mist... With René Burri, dots, lines, planes and lights are, right from the start, much more than the bones of a grammar for his images; they are the very script of photography, its rhythm and melody. Sometimes, his subjects are photographed beneath overhead lighting, or lit from below, and form lines, dots, and planes which frame or slice the framework in unexpected ways,

as exemplified by his famous images, taken at the Ministry of Health in Rio de Janeiro, of two young women crossing a square that is paved with a random pattern of luminous shadows.

A third principle is borrowed directly from film sets, this being the process of blurring the foreground. His portrait of Archbishop Makários III at the podium, taken from a low angle, in Cyprus in 1959, provides the ultimate example of this: impossible to tell if the white cross in the foreground really exists, but by framing the face of the Primate of the Orthodox Church in the background, it exemplifies the reality and earnestness of his faith with an incredible intensity. In the same way, the rather fuzzy brilliance of a white and yellow flower in front of a well-defined image of Juf – the highest village in Europe – serves simultaneously to reinforce and contradict the clichéd image of Switzerland and its Alpine regions.



Contact sheets, photography course taught by Hans Finsler in the Kunstgewerbeschule Zürich, between 1950 and 1953

What's on show:

Photographs taken between 1950 and 2004 in 16 countries: Korea, Germany, United States of America, Argentina, Brazil, Italy, Switzerland, Mexico, France, Cyprus, Czechoslovakia, Japan, Australia, Greece, Cuba, Nagorno-Karabagh.

302 Gallery

1953

First published reportage “Treize Regards sur Notre Pays en Sept Jours”, about a group of American students travelling around Switzerland.

*1 publication
1 contact sheet*

1953

Guernica, Palazzo Reale, Milan.

1 photograph

1954

René Burri’s military service.

2 photographs

1955

Reportage about a special school for deaf-mute children. This was published in *Science et Vie* and *Life*.

*1 photograph
1 letter*
2 publications*

1955

La Chapelle Notre-Dame-du-Haut designed by architect Le Corbusier at Ronchamp.

*1 publication
1 contact sheet
1 drawing*

1956

René Burri’s first interview, published in *Camera* magazine.

1 publication

1955

The crowd at a football match in Bratislava, Czechoslovakia

1 photograph

1956

Reportage on the Suez Canal, published in *Sie und Er* magazine, 16 August. The Magnum agency takes advantage of his Swiss passport to send him to countries that are at war.

1 accreditation

1 passport

1 publication

1957

Pablo Picasso in his villa La Californie in Cannes, teaching his children and their friends how to draw.

1 collage

2 photographs

1958

Cover for *Du* magazine, designed and conceived by René Burri.

1 publication

1958

Reportage on the Gauchos of Argentina.

1 contact sheet

1 accreditation

1 publication

René et les autres

Myself and the others

René Burri presents us with a paradox: for all that he often hid behind the situations and individuals he photographs, placed himself at the service of the greatest artists and architects of his age, and even took on a managerial role, dedicating a great chunk of his life to Magnum Photos, he never actually stopped putting himself in the picture, and practising what looks almost like an unusual cult of the personality — albeit one tinged with a great deal of irony and self-mockery. It is true that he made his stage debut during the 1940s and early 1950s, at the Zurich Theatre, as an extra; he retained a great regard for Bertolt Brecht, and a taste for literature. Furthermore, as a student, he used to photograph himself in various guises around his apartment, posing in front of the viewfinder.

In the course of his career, he produced multiple self-portraits in very farcical and unexpected situations, acting the “press report photographer” with no fewer than four cameras slung around his neck, or the “conflict photographer” with a gun in his hand. In other images, he melts into his environment like a chameleon. Thus, we find him as a Native American in the United States, as a guerrilla fighter in South America, an Emperor in China, a Bedouin in the middle of the desert, etc.

While always respectful of others and of human and social relationships, it's clear that these continual self-portraits were more of a distraction than a form of posturing, maybe even a permanent form of self-criticism. After all, a more careful reading of some images shows that he has often turned his camera towards the people he has photographed and posed among them. Some of them were even handed polaroid photos — a souvenir that they surely treasured. Thus, whatever image René Burri has taken, he returns it to the individuals involved, as a specific way of saying thank you.

Furthermore, when alongside very great individuals from the political, social and economic, artistic and cultural spheres of the twentieth century he rarely photographs himself next to them, since he was definitely not seeking to profit from the association. Conversely, he would respond kindly to many of

his fans and admirers hoping for a material souvenir of their meeting in the form of a joint portrait — thereby creating a precursor to the “selfie”...



Xerox, Los Angeles, United States, 1971

What's on show:

A cloud of portraits and self-portraits of René Burri from 1958 to 2000. Here, the actual place is not nearly as important as the setting.

René Burri acting as himself in a range of different settings*.

René Burri as an actor in Zurich // Contact sheet in his student digs // Polaroid given to family members (courtesy Burri family) // A selection of images from contact-sheets (montage produced by Photo Elysée) // Self-portrait study.

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1959

A couple watching a performance at a flea show, New York.

1 photograph

1959

Newly married couple, New York.

1 photograph

1959

René Burri joins Magnum Photos as a full member (he started as an associate member in 1956).

*1 press card
1 document**

1959

Meeting Le Corbusier.

*2 photographs
1 letter**

1959

Reportage on the return of Archbishop Makários III to Cyprus, published in *Paris Match*.

1 publication

1960

Reportage in São Paulo.

1 photograph

1960

Reportage on the founding of Brasilia, the new capital of Brazil.

*1 publication
1 photograph*

1960

Meeting Alberto Giacometti in his workshop.

2 photographs

1961

Meeting Yves Klein in his workshop (courtesy Magnum Photo Paris).

*1 photograph
1 contact sheet*

1961

Young man arrested for smoking an American cigarette, South Korea.

3 photographs

1961

Trip to Japan and reportage about Zen monks in Kyoto.

*1 publication
1 photograph*

1962

Material related to René Burri's first publication after 4 years of research:

Die Deutschen

Letter from William Vandivert //

First German language edition of the book //

First French language edition of the book //

Letter from Sergio Larrain //

Photograph of the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church, destroyed during the War and never restored.

West Berlin, Federal Republic of Germany (1959) //

René Burri at work in Berlin (1961) //

*2 books
2 letters*
2 photographs*

1962

Aswan Dam and Abu Simbel temple, Egypt.

*3 photographs
1 drawing*

1963

Portrait of Ernesto "Che" Guevara, Minister for Industry, Havana.

1 photograph

1963

Fidel Castro speaking at the Congress of Latin-American Women, Chaplin Theater, Havana.

1 photograph

1963

Marriage of René Burri and Rosellina Bischof.

1 photograph

1963

Vietnam War.

3 photographs

At the end of 1962, just after the Cuba missiles crisis, Laura Bergquist, special envoy of *Look* magazine, is seeking a photographer to travel with her to Havana. She had met Ernesto “Che” Guevara a year ago, in October, at the United Nations. At the time, he was Minister for Industry and Director of the Banco Nacional. He responded to her insistent demands by saying: “If you can get permission from the CIA or the Pentagon, you are invited to Cuba and I’ll show you what’s really going on there.”

As the visas came through, René Burri left his New Year’s Eve party and his guests and rushed to Cuba. Che received them in his office on the eighth floor of the hotel Riviera in Havana, with the curtains drawn, almost in the dark; she smoked cigarette after cigarette, he puffed on his cigar and the two of them stared unceasingly into each other’s eyes. In spite of all these constraints, René Burri had a free hand and captured Che from every angle, expressing an extraordinary range of emotions: attentive, lost in thought, charming, arrogant, smiling, exasperated, from above, from below, from in front, and from behind. He took almost 500 images during that interview, and is the only person to have photographed Che in an almost natural state, given that he was so sure of himself in his single-minded attempt to convince the young American journalist of the benefits of the Cuban revolution’s social and economic model.

However, although *Look* used several dozen pages to publish Laura Berquist’s reportage on 9 April 1963, René Burri’s portrait of Che was only used on an eighth of page 27, in cropped form. It was only after the death of Ernesto Guevara, on 9 October 1967 in La Higuera (Bolivia), that his photo, entitled “Che with Cigar” became a global icon. This image was distributed so widely that, as far as the photographer was concerned, it definitely ceased to belong to him. So he’s bequeathed it to the world. That said, while the public assumed ownership of a single photo from among the four rolls of film that he had taken, the entire collection of contact sheets was then increasingly distributed around the world of photography, as if to prove that this historical session really had taken place. However, a closer look shows that almost all the contact sheets that were published on the covers of magazines, books, posters, and invitation cards, are either cut-outs or revisions of the original plates, as if seeking to reconstitute a perfect plate.



Du Magazine, December 1993

What's on show:

Since everyone is familiar with this iconic image, we have opted to tell the story of this photograph here, by showing its context and the ways it has been used:

Press cards, passport, agenda, documents* and photographs relating to the organisation and deployment of this reportage in Cuba in 1963 //

The 4 contact sheets that are known from this iconic reportage (two of these iconic photos: courtesy Magnum Photos New York, Paris*) //

Look Magazine and document confirming postage of this reportage to the magazine (courtesy Magnum Photo New York) // Various examples of how this contact-sheet was subsequently used // René Burri playing about with his own icon.

304 Gallery

1963-1964

Photograph taken in Pakistan, loaned by the Museum of Modern Art in New York (MoMA).

*1 photograph
1 letter**

1964

Launch of Magnum Films by René Burri and other agency members.

1 photograph

1965

René Burri and Rosellina Burri-Bischof travelling around China.

1 letter
1 contact sheet*

1965

Electricity blackout in New York: Blackout series.

*2 photographs
1 letter (Marc Riboud)*

1966

The first of René Burri's personal exhibitions: flyer for his China exhibition in Galerie Form, Zurich.

1 document

1966

Reportage at Salvador de Bahia, Brazil.

*1 document
1 publication*

1966

René Burri's first personal exhibition outside of Switzerland: Chicago Art Institute.

*2 documents**

1967

Meeting sculptor Jean Tinguely at the Universal Exposition of Montréal (Canada).

*1 photograph
1 publication*

1968

South Africa.

1 photograph

1969

San Cristóbal stables, designed by architects Luis Barragán and Andres Casillas, Mexico City. (Luis Barragán © Barragan Foundation, Switzerland).

2 photographs

1970

Kenzo Tange, architect for the construction of the Expo '70 World Fair at Osaka (Japan), and a view of the Swiss Pavilion with its 35,000 light bulbs.

2 photographs

1971

Reportage on the Xerox Company's Annual Report.

1 publication

4 photographs

Television

It is the 1st of March 1959, the scene an impersonal hotel room in Athens. You are exhausted, working flat out on the captions for the images you took three hours earlier, the only photojournalist on the spot, sent by *Paris Match* to capture the return to Cyprus of Archbishop Makários III, Primate of the Orthodox Church, after three years in exile. To your astonishment, the television is already broadcasting “your” scene, the one you haven’t even had time to send express to Paris. What’s the point of this huge rush anyway after the event that has motivated you on for the last four years? These are the thoughts rushing around René Burri’s head and those of many other photographers of the time. It means he will have to start behaving “differently”: stop simply transcribing whatever appears in his viewfinder, and start capturing a situation and rendering the state of affairs at a given moment, and become an “author.”

Like his colleague at Magnum Photos, Martine Franck, Burri condensed a situation in each of his photographs, whereas television simply either brought it swiftly to a close or spun it out to the point of insipidity. Burri often photographed the many television screens around him, conscious of their ability to fascinate and transform society, like human beings. He devoted entire plates to the “face” of on-screen celebrities, seeking the most incongruous or most outlandish uses or locations of the television as “object,” and ending up being photographed himself live.



The trials of the Tiananmen Square protesters seen on television in a room at the Peace Hotel, Shanghai, China, 1989

What's on show:

Arrangement of 9 televisions.

Stills: Martin Luther King's speech in Washington from a hotel room // Contact sheet showing the launch of the Apollo rocket // René Burri being interviewed, photograph taken by James A. Fox.

Slide shows: showing a number of television screens in black and white and in colour // uses of the "television" as object around the world.

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1971

Reportage in Chicago.

*1 notebook
1 publication
2 photographs*

1971

Reportage in Vietnam.

*1 press card
1 notebook
1 photograph*

1974

“Photography in Switzerland from 1840 to Today”
Niggli, Teufen.

*1 document**

1974

Re-opening of the Suez Canal, photograph of
Anwar Sadat on the cover.

*1 photograph
1 publication*

1974-1975

Reportage on the Oil Monarchies: Oman //
Kuwait // Abu Dhabi.

*2 photographs
1 publication
1 photograph*

1977

Brasilia, 17 years on.

*1 publication
9 slides*

Magnum

In January 1955, René Burri published a series of photographs in an edition of *Science & Vie* devoted to a school for deaf-mute children in Zurich. This reportage changed the course of both his life and his career for ever. He went to Paris hoping to meet Picasso (but was thwarted), and went to the Magnum Photos office to try and interest them in the article. The agency sold it immediately to *Life*, one of America's leading contemporary magazines, and enormously prestigious. Burri received a copy on his return to Zurich, from which he learned of his acceptance into the most highly regarded agency of the time. Following the death of his mentor, Werner Bischof, in May 1954, two of the agency's founders, Henri Cartier-Bresson and David "Chim" Seymour, took him under their wing. It was not until 1959, however, that he became a full member of Magnum Photos.

Deeply humanist and embodying the cooperative spirit of the agency, Burri took on several roles: organiser, creator-founder of the Film department, editor, director-founder of the agency's gallery and even vice-president of Magnum Europe from 1982 to 1984. Once a year, all the members of Magnum Photos assembled in Paris, London or New York for interminable strategic discussions. During these "Magnum Meetings" René Burri often acted as stage manager and his task of official photographer quickly gave way to setting up jokey photoshoots, inspiring him to put together some particularly astonishing collages.

Burri kept a close eye on the changing role of the photographer, and knew he would have to adapt. He quickly broke with black and white tradition and developed a particularly significant body of work in colour. Also, thanks to the graphic skills honed under Alfred Willimann at the Kunstgewerbeschule Zürich, he was one of the first to respond to corporate orders, demonstrating their potential for creativity. His clients included Pakistan International Airlines, Rank Xerox, NASA and the Schlumberger oilfield services group.



Magnum Meeting, Paris, c. 2000

What's on show:

Magnum Photos photographs taken during the “Magnum Meetings” or in the agency office between 1959 and 1993, in Paris or New York.

René Burri photographed some of the “Magnum Meetings”: groupings and collages between 1972 and 2012, in Paris, Arles or New York. (film ©Chien-Chi Chang / Magnum Photos, courtesy of the artist).

René Burri has fun: Postcards* sent to the agency // Triptych montages of Magnum Photos photographs.

At work: Josef Koudelka ready to leave // Elliott Erwitt, Marc Riboud, Wayne Miller, Burt Glinn and Cornell Capa (1966) // Back of press prints.

306 Gallery

1978

Reportage on "The Ruins of the Future" in the United States:

NASA press passes //

Old rocket launch site //

Collection of colour slides //

Rocket launch test sites //

Publication, "Ruins of the Future" //

Abandoned buildings //

Publication, *Les Armes Mortes* (1980) //

Abandoned buildings //

7 photographs

5 press passes

2 publications

3 documents

1978

Gauchos, Argentina.

1 photograph

1979

Reportage on the "Car Culture" in the United States.

1 drawing

7 photographs

2 publications

1979

Reportage on the Apollo mission astronauts.

10 photographs

1 publication

1 photograph

CHINA

René Burri finally set foot in China, a country that had long fascinated him, in 1964. On his very first trip he was invited to the May Day banquet at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, where he met the First Minister Zhou Enlai. He then visited other historic sites such as the Forbidden City and the Great Wall of China. His daughter Yasmine was born in July, her name inspired by the flowering jasmine he had recently discovered. In late 1964, he went back to China to work on a documentary film to be shot the following year. All the images he brought back from his 1964 and 1965 trips captured both the essence of a centuries-old China through its particularly graphic landscapes, its statues, its street scenes... and a new young generation galvanised by political slogans, pioneering spirit and the promises of the future. It is fair to say René Burri had always been drawn towards flamboyant destinies and the overthrow of power...

René Burri travelled through China in a bid to track down Mao Zedong's birthplace, an expedition that gave him a unique opportunity to observe the diversity and immensity of a rural and industrial territory as-yet unmarked by the impending cultural revolution.

In 1965, in collaboration with his wife, Rosellina Burri-Bischof, he shot his film *The Two Faces of China* which was put together in New York several months later, in the studio belonging to his colleague Elliott Erwitt. Once back in Zurich, images from his trip to China were shown at the Galerie Form in 1966, his first one-man show in Switzerland and the first of a long list of exhibitions all over the world; the original prints were carefully preserved intact. It was not until 1972, however, that the definitive version of his film was presented to the wider public at the exhibition "Behind the Great Wall of China: Photographs from 1870 to the Present", organised by the Metropolitan Museum in New York.

René Burri made several more trips to China: in 1985 for the 50th anniversary of the Long March; in 1989 for the demonstrations in Tiananmen Square; and in 2004-2005 for more personal projects.



Map of China brought back from a trip, 2004-2005

What's on show:

5 original prints pasted on wood from René Burri's first one-man show at the Galerie Form (1966).

7 press prints from the René Burri Collection.

Film about China by René Burri put together in 1965.

307 Gallery

1979-1980

Reportage on the Cape Canaveral Space Center in the United States .

*3 photographs
2 notebooks
2 photographs
1 publication*

1980 (c.)

René Burri in full swing.

1 document (6 photographs)

1981

First article in which René Burri talks about his collages.

1 publication

1981

Journalist reporter's pass issued by the Fédération Française des Associations de Photographes Créateurs.

1 photo reporter's pass

1981

Reportage on Sarah Moon / shooting at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris.

2 photographs

1981

Reportage on the dancer Rudolf Nureyev.

1 publication

1982

Reportage on the Belgian writer Georges Simenon, seen here with his wife Teresa in Lausanne.

1 photograph

1982 (c.)

Creation of the Magnum Gallery on René Burri's initiative.

*1 drawing**

1982

René Burri is appointed Vice-President of Magnum Photos. This photograph shows the members of the cooperative assembled for the annual Magnum Meeting.

1 photograph

1983

Independent filmmaker's pass issued by the Interassociation Suisse pour Film et Audiovision.

1 professional pass

1984

Restoration of the Statue of Liberty to mark its 100th anniversary.

3 photographs

1984

An extract from "Les Ruines du Futur" (Ruins of the Future), presented at Zurich Airport during the "One World" exhibition at the Kunsthaus.

1 photograph

1984

Zoom magazine. Cover and portfolio on the "One World" exhibition and book.

1 publication

(1989)

"One World" exhibition at the Burden Gallery in New York.

2 photographs

1985

René Burri and Charles-Henri Favrod at the opening of the first exhibition at the Musée de l'Elysée in its new role as a "museum for photography".

1 photograph

1985

Reportage on The Long March in China.

1 publication

BOOK

Thanks to his lessons with Alfred Willimann at the Kustgewerbeschule Zürich, René Burri received a good grounding in advertising, graphic design, photomontage and layout. Burri not only brought back photographs from his study trips to Paris, Italy and central France, he also presented them in the form of extraordinarily meticulously assembled books that were conceived and made entirely by him. The photographs of individuals it contains are bold, and the reframings radical, in a bid to bring more dynamism to the page. What is believed to be his earliest maquette, on Venice, is still conserved in the school (ZHdK) archives.

In 1958, he not only provided several photographs for the inside pages of a special edition of *Du*, the leading Swiss-German magazine, entitled “Das Lebendige Museum” (The Living Museum), he was also responsible for the cover design for the first time.

Almost all Burri’s major reportages thereafter were used for brochure or book projects. Some were never published, including several on Japan and Berlin, while other, even more secret ones, appear alongside his drawings, or his lists of subjects or chapters in the pages of his notebooks. Other published photographs appeared in several different variations, taken by Burri alone or in collaboration with fellow travellers. As well as the Magnum Photos group, Burri also surrounded himself with long term associates — a virtual tribe — including of course Rosellina Burri-Bischof and then Clotilde Blanc-Burri, but also Marco Bischof, the son of Werner Bischof, Manuel Gasser, the editor-in-chief of *Du*, the graphic designer Werner Jeker from Lausanne, the art historian and exhibition commissioner Guido Magnaguagno, the German writer and art critic Hans-Michael Koetzle and the publisher Dino Simonett...

The René Burri Collection thus contains some particularly valuable graphic works that have been unveiled for the first time in this exhibition.



Book outline for Photographies with notes, c. 2004

What's on show:

7 stands displaying: His earliest book maquettes on his trips to Paris and Venice // Several maquettes linked to his trips to Japan // His book on the Gauchos (Argentina) // Cover maquettes // The map of an unidentified book // Some of the work on the book *Impossible Reminiscences* // Some mini maquettes that open out accordion-style.

Cover maquette of the book *Die Deutschen*.

307 Gallery

1985

Letter from a young Chinaman who met René Burri at Chengdu Airport.

1 letter

1985

René Burri and a friend (?) in Beijing, China.

1 photograph

1986

Death of Rosellina Burri-Bischof on 30th January.

1 photograph (1956)

1987

An American Dream exhibition at the International Center of Photography. Decorated flyer.

*1 document
1 photograph*

1987

"Dans la Familiarité du Corbu" and "Les Ruines du Futur exhibition" at the Musée de l'Élysée.

2 documents

1988

René Burri covered the summit between the President of the United States Ronald Reagan and the General Secretary of the USSR Mikhail Gorbatchev in Washington D.C., then in Moscow.

*3 press passes
2 photographs*

1989

René Burri was present at the fall of the Berlin Wall.

2 photographs

1989

This image from 1964 was used to illustrate the student protests in Tiananmen Square.

1 publication

1990

René Burri at work.

1 photograph

1990

Reportage in Jordan.

*1 colourised photograph**

1990

Magazine carrying a 1974 picture of René Burri to illustrate an article on “Oil”.

1 publication

1990

Second meeting with the filmmaker Akira Kurosawa in Japan (they first met in 1961).

2 photographs

1991

Impressions jotted down on slide covers from a reportage in French Guyana.

3 documents

1991

Sketch of a project installation with the couple Anne and Patrick Poirier, Paris-Beirut.

1 drawing

1991

Beirut centre ville 1991 (© Tanino Musso, courtesy of the artist).

1 film

1992

On a New York–Paris flight.

1 collage

1993

Return to Cuba, 30 years after his reportage on Che Guevara.

5 photographs

1994

Birth of Léon Ulysse, son of Clotilde Blanc and René Burri.

1 photograph

1994

At the Beau-Rivage Palace in Lausanne.

1 drawing

One World

1983 marked exactly thirty years since René Burri embarked on his career as a photographer. His first reportage on a group of young Americans travelling through Switzerland was published in *Die Woche* in 1953. From then on, he travelled all over the world, armed with his precious Swiss passport and his ability to speak fluent French, English and German, allowing him to do as he pleased, making anything possible!

In 1983, working closely with his wife, Rosellina Burri-Bischof, he put together his first comprehensive retrospective, causing him to revisit his entire collection of contact sheets. One World — his own world, as in addition to a group of previously unseen photographs, he also unveiled drawings, collages and multimedia installations which he called *MegaPhotoMobil*. One World — the world of photography, which was being totally redefined in the face of the omnipotence of television — Burri, who had presaged it as early as 1959, — and the dwindling influence of the great magazines that had built his career along with that of the other members of Magnum Photos. One world — the one he had already trawled several times, bearing relentless witness to the spectacular events that turned the planet on its head, bringing to them his personal vision, engaged with its constituent societies.

The retrospective, which opened first of all in his own city of Zurich, was inaugurated at the Kunsthaus on 13th January 1984. It then travelled to the Centre National de la Photographie in Paris, then the Pavillon d'Art Contemporain in Milan and finally to the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Lausanne. While the iconic image of the four exhibitions is a 1960 photo of São Paulo, the catalogue cover was more unusual — René Burri's hand holding his own passport photo amid a multitude of other, anonymous ones. "The world"?...

As the prospectus for *Life* magazine had previously set out in 1939: "To see life; to see the world; to eyewitness great events; to watch the faces of the poor and the gestures of the proud; to see strange things — machines, armies, multitudes, shadows in the jungle and on the moon; to see man's work — his paintings, towers and discoveries; to see things thousands of miles away, things hidden behind walls

and within rooms, things dangerous to come to; the women that men love and many children; to see and take pleasure in seeing; to see and be amazed; to see and be instructed.”



René Burri in his One World exhibition in the Zurich Kunsthaus, 1984 (©Michael von Graffenried)



Mock-up for One World, c. 1983

What's on show:

On one side, the exhibition with the image layout from the Kunsthaus museum, along with the preparatory work for the *MegaPhotoMobil*.

On the other, the catalogue with its original maquette, along with the final print proof for the cover.

309 Gallery

1995

"Le Paris de René Burri" exhibition at the Centre Culturel Suisse.

1 montage with contact sheet

1 document

1996

Card from Henri Cartier-Bresson sent to René Burri.

1 document

1997

Return to Bolivia, 30 years after the death of Che Guevara.

3 photographs

1998

1957 picture of René Burri, published in an edition of *Du* magazine devoted to Picasso.

1 publication

1998

René Burri receives the Salomon Preis (©Frank Wegner).

2 photographs

1 photograph

1998

Presentation of the book and the exhibition *77 Strange Sensations*.

5 photographs

2000

Marriage of Clotilde Blanc and René Burri on 29th September.

1 photograph

2000

Luis Barragán exhibition at the Architekturmuseum in Basel (Luis Barragán © Barragan Foundation, Switzerland).

4 photographs

1 document

2002

Collage.

1 collage

2003

Two friends: René Burri and Henri Cartier-Bresson.

1 photograph

2004

Conference on Le Corbusier at the EPFL in Lausanne.

1 document

COLOR!

All through his life, René Burri used both colour and black and white photography. He was, therefore, mostly to be seen with a number of cameras slung around his neck, corresponding to the number of films needed for his photo reportages. Leaving aside the photographs commissioned by magazines, which published Burri's colour photographs from the 1950s, it was in his books that this side of his practice was presented. His first monograph, *René Burri One World* contains only fourteen colour photographs, however, and, for the first time, eighteen collages. *Impossible Reminiscences*, published in 2013 on the other hand, was entirely devoted to his work in colour. It is also fair to say that, while his photo reportages on the leading artists of his time, ranging from Picasso to Tinguely, were mostly in black and white, those on architects were in colour, Luis Barragán in Mexico and Niemeyer in Brazil, in particular.

While he pretty much replicated the same image in black and white and in colour several times, René Burri's work in colour is out of this world. Colour, after all, is a question of planes, of contrasts, of perspectives, of available space, of exposure and depth of field, optical illusions even. Black and white focuses on the structures, the lines and the details... It was no mere chance, either, that Burri was chosen to take part in the "50 Years of Modern Colour Photography" exhibition at the 1986 Photokina in Cologne — he was one of the undisputed masters. The 2013 "Doppelleben" exhibition at the Museum für Gestaltung in Zurich, was its high point.



What's on show:

Slide show made up of slides from René Burri's last selection of colour photos for his book *Impossible Reminiscences* (2013), and then for the "Doppelleben" exhibition (2013) with corresponding colour and black and white images.

309 Gallery

2004

Trip to China.

3 photographs

2004 (c.)

Preparation of the book *Photographs*
(©Frank Wegner).

3 photographs

2004

"Retrospective 1950-2000" at the Musée de l'Elysée.

1 maquette

1 video (©RTS)

1 document

2004 (c.)

Reportage in Brazil.

9 photographs

2005

"René Burri: Fotografien von Jean Tinguely & Co
exhibition" at the Musée Tinguely in Basel.

1 document

1 maquette

2006

"Retrospective 1950-2000" at the Museum für
Gestaltung in Zurich.

1 document

1 photograph

2006

Habana, Cuba.

1 collage

2007

René Burri in Havana, Cuba (©Frank Wegner).

1 photograph

2008

Publication of the book *Nous Sommes Treize à
Table.*

2 documents

2008

"Un Mundo" exhibition at the Museo de Bellas Artes in Caracas.

*1 document
1 photograph*

2009

Ivry-sur-Seine.

1 collage

2010

Publication of *Blackout* the book, and opening of the "Blackout New York" exhibition more than 40 years after the images were acquired.

*1 document
1 book*

2010

"René Burri — Vintage Prints — Le Corbusier" exhibition at the Museum Bellerive in Zurich.

1 document

Collages

René Burri often said that for him, the practice of collage gave him a way of getting over his fear of flying, especially during his first flight to Prague at the behest of the New York Times in 1956, and then during a perilous flight over the Argentinian Pampas in 1959. But the importance he attributed to it over time puts the original anecdote into perspective; his sketchpads, his pot of glue and his coloured pencils were always with him, so that he could instantly work his magic on whatever printed medium was at hand. We must remember that his lessons at the Kunstgewerbeschule Zürich with Alfred Willimann introduced him to the secrets of photomontage, as the topsy-turvy montage of a fragment of his portrait on the mirror of the comedienne Miriam Spoerri shows. Also, on the basis of lessons well-learned, he consistently asked for working copies in order to cut them up, mix them up and rearrange them, almost always adding colour, sometimes external elements such as magazine extracts, writing paper, menus, labels, travel tickets, cigar bands, etc., — all jumbled together...

Kept secret for years, his collages were printed for the first time in *Du* magazine in 1981, then showcased at the "One World" exhibition of 1984. A whole new side of Burri's work, known only to his most intimate circle, had been brought out into the open. It is true that he visited Le Corbusier at length, one of the most eminent 20th century architects, as well as an exceptional painter, sculptor and draughtsman. His closest companions knew of the existence of Burri the artist, not least thanks to the annotated postcards forwarded to his family, to his friends, to Magnum Photos or its members, testament to his relaxed and frank take on the things of the world. But he managed to imbue this apparent irreverence and this lightness with sincere admiration and profound gravity when it came to dedicating one of his works, or redesigning the covers or the first few pages of his bedside reading matter.



René Burri's hands, 20 July 2006

What's on show:

A number of collages put together during the course of his life.

An extract from the slide holdings in the René Burri Collection: The plates on show were chosen at random and give some idea of the huge cache of colour photographs yet to be explored.

311 Gallery

2010

Publication of the book *100 Photos de René Burri pour la Liberté de la Presse*, published by Reporters Sans Frontières.

1 letter

2011

Portrait of René Burri and Marco Meier.

An image from this series taken in Cuba in 1993 was used on the 70th anniversary cover issue of *Du* magazine.

1 document

1 publication

2011

"Project Corrida" exhibition at the Ammann Gallery of Modern Art in Tessin. The book was published two years later.

1 document

2 photographs

2011

René Burri "Le Corbusier Intime" exhibition at Villa Le Lac, Corsier-sur-Vevey.

1 document

2012

Book, *Impossible Reminiscences*.

3 maquettes

Herminus

Drawings

Amid the rough and tumble of childhood, René Burri claimed quite openly that his youth was spent drawing on bits of paper. One after the other, his primary school teachers passed on his drawing books, commenting that he would undoubtedly become a famous artist. When he enrolled in the Kunstgewerbeschule Zürich foundation course, it was the basic techniques of line drawing and colour drawings on which he former Bauhaus teacher Johannes Itten focused. This meant painting colour charts in order to better study the phenomenological properties of colours; which undoubtedly served Burri well when he decided to use colour in its own right, in tandem with his black and white photographic work. The René Burri Collection contains unbelievably high quality drawings from this period, in both graphite pencil and black ink.

Once he became the photographer we all know, this facility for and dexterity in drawing freely and spontaneously seems never to have left him, given the abundance of notebooks in the Burri Collection, ordered by the dozen, although sometimes only a few pages appear to have been used. They bear witness to a huge variety of techniques, either used alone or in combination: drawings in graphite pencil, in ink, in ballpoint pen, in felt tip, in watercolour... Sometimes, too, there were also collages made up of different sorts of paper.

The motifs and the subjects are equally varied: views from planes or trains, relaxing during holidays in the canton of Tessin (Switzerland) or Jullouville (Normandy, France), notes from his lectures or conferences he attended, sketches for papers or initial ideas for book maquettes, exhibition layouts or future reportages. By their very nature these sum up the exhaustivity and multiplicity of his creative life far better than his entire photographic oeuvre, which was nevertheless exceptional in more ways than one. What his notebooks show is not just the background to his work, but especially the trains of thought of a mind constantly on the alert, indefatigable and curious about the slightest thing or least important event in the world. He would summarise and translate it onto the page in just a few perfectly precise and masterful lines or patches of colour. His virtuosity was matched by his creativity and the accuracy of his lines by the sharpness of his analysis.



Drawing book, 1997

What's on show:

On one side, the sketchbooks from 1960 to 2014, on the other are one-off drawings made between 1939 and 2010, including some childhood drawings that he himself later selected, signed and filed*.

311 Gallery

2012

Ermitage menu with a drawing by René Burri, Clarens.

1 drawing

2012-2013

"Burri in Motion Fotografien aus 50 Jahren Cinéma" exhibition at the NOMOS Glashütte in Zurich.

1 document

2012

René Burri takes part in the "Festival Images of Vevey" with his installation *Révolution à Vendre* (©Samuel Rouge).

1 photograph

2013

Exhibition at the C/O Berlin, list of subjects.

1 document

2013

René Burri signs the agreement for setting up his Foundation at the Musée de l'Elysée in Lausanne. People directly involved: Clotilde Blanc-Burri, Werner Jeker, Anne-Catherine Lyon, Pascal Broulis and Sam Stourdzé.

4 Passport photos

2013

René Burri takes part in the "Nuit des Images" in the gardens of the Musée de l'Elysée with a view to celebrating his 80th birthday all together.

1 document

2 drawings

2013

Ivry-sur-Seine.

1 drawing

2013

Postcard sent by René Burri to the Musée de l'Elysée team.

1 postcard

2014

"Mouvement" exhibition at the Maison Européenne de la Photographie in Paris. This was the last exhibition of his work during his lifetime.

1 maquette

2014

Death of René Burri on 20th October (unknown author and date).

1 photograph

2014

The photographer Marie Clérin photographed her neighbour and friend's studio for the last time a month after Burri's death (©Marie Clérin).

1 photograph

This guide book is published for “René Burri · Explosions of Sight”. The exhibition runs from March 18 to June 18, 2023 at 3A, 3B galleries of TFAM. An exhibition produced by Photo Elysée, Lausanne in collaboration with Taipei Fine Arts Museum.

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