

EDWYNN HOUK GALLERY

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PRESS RELEASE

BRASSAÏ PARIS IN THE 1930's EARLY PRINTS

10 September – 17 October 2009



Thirty-eight exceptional early prints from one of the twentieth century's foremost photographers will be on view at Edwynn Houk Gallery from September 10, 2009 through October 17, 2009. Featured will be images from the series *Paris by Night*, *Secret Paris of the 30s*, and *Paris at Day*.

Brassai (1899 – 1984) was born Gyula Halász a century ago in the Transylvanian town of Brassó (hence Brassai, meaning "of Brassó"). After attending art school in Berlin, Brassai moved to Paris in 1924. He was immediately caught up by the city's effervescent bohemian life. Supporting himself as a journalist, Brassai took up photography in 1930, initially to illustrate his articles. His fascination for the hidden face of the city of light as it unfolds in the dark culminated in

1932 with the publication of his first book, the classic *Paris de Nuit (Paris by Night)*.

Brassai's subject matter was often candid. His approach however was at an opposite pole from the then emerging genre of photojournalism. The key to his art was patience and long exposures. Using makeshift and cumbersome tools - a wobbly tripod, a piece of string to measure the distance of object to camera, and the noisy, smelly bang of magnesium at a time when faster film had outdated it - Brassai carefully composed each picture, turning his subjects into archetypes.

Unlike many of his contemporaries (such as Lartigue and Doisneau) who were portraying the fashionable and romantic sides of Paris, Brassai was enraptured by the seedy underworld that could only be seen after hours. It was in the bistros, cafes and bars that Brassai discovered his most fascinating subjects. And it was in their backrooms and back alleys where Brassai captures prostitutes, nightclub entertainers, transvestites and their patrons in all stages of revelry.

Brassai's extensive bibliography comprises seventeen books, including *Paris by Night*, *The Secret Paris of the 30s*, *The Artists of My Life*, *Graffiti*, *Conversations with Picasso*, two portraits of Henry Miller and an essay on Marcel Proust and photography.