

Gerda Taro (1910–1937)

In 1933, Gerta Pohorylle emigrated from Leipzig to Paris. There she met the Hungarian photojournalist André Friedmann, also from a Jewish background, who introduced her to the principles of photography. The couple started working together in 1936 under the pseudonyms Robert Capa and Gerda Taro. They first used Taro's ties to the Alliance Photo agency to propagate the name Robert Capa more widely. When the Spanish Civil War broke out in the summer of 1936 and Nationalists under General Francisco Franco tried to topple the Republican government, Capa and Taro travelled to Spain to document the events and thus make a contribution to the anti-fascist resistance. Taro's photographs were much in demand especially by the French press thanks to the intense media interest in the war, and also because she was one of the few photographers to work directly on the front lines and thus able to convey a supposed immediacy of the war events. In July 1937, Taro was fatally wounded at the Brunete front near Madrid. After her death, many newspapers celebrated her as a selfless hero of anti-fascism. Yet she was soon forgotten, since the photo agencies increasingly attributed her photographs to the more well-known Robert Capa. It was only at the beginning of the 2000s that Gerda Taro's pioneering work in war photography was rediscovered. To this day, researchers are working on distinguishing Taro's photographic work in the Spanish Civil War from that of Capa.

Lee Miller (1907–1977)

Lee Miller was one of only four female American photojournalists during the Second World War. She was accredited by the US army at the end of 1942 to document events in Europe. Her mission began in July 1944, a month after the Allies had landed in Normandy. Initially commissioned to take photographs in a military hospital, internal miscommunication enabled Miller to move to the front line in St. Malo. There, she worked exclusively for Vogue magazine, covering the advance against Nazi Germany in both image and text. The political topicality of her photographs did not stop the editors from publishing Miller's extensive reports: as a former model and photographer from the circle of the Parisian surrealist movement, Miller fit well into the unusual role of a war reporter in the service of a fashion magazine. Her assignment had her following the Allied forces through France, Belgium and Luxembourg, and she accompanied them as they crossed the German border in March 1945. Her first photographs of Germany show the cities in ruins and document the everyday life of the German population. In later photographs from the liberated concentration camps of Dachau and Buchenwald, she reveals the horrific scale of the genocide against European Jews. They were published in an issue of the American Vogue in June 1945, in a report with the headline 'Believe It'. After the war, Miller refused to speak about her experiences. Only after her death in 1977 her son began to work through the extensive photographic material from the war years.

Catherine Leroy (1944–2006)

Without experience or a journalistic network, Catherine Leroy, aged 21, set off to Saigon in 1966 to document the Vietnam War. Once there, the French photographer swiftly obtained accreditation from the Saigon branch of the Associated Press agency, upon which she soon received regular commissions from various magazines. She accompanied US troops during their missions against the forces of Communist North Vietnam in the interior of the country. The choice of perspective of her photographs show how freely she was able to move at the front line: she documented the combat from both the air and on land, often creating short sequences of successive events. Magazines such as Paris Match and Life made use of this narrative potential and printed her picture series filling whole pages. At the outbreak of the Lebanese Civil War, Leroy travelled to Beirut and photographed the impact it had on the civilian population. In 1976, she was awarded the Robert Capa Gold Medal for these pictures, a prestigious prize for the best published photo reportage from abroad. She was the first woman to receive it. Following the traumatic events in Lebanon she eventually stopped working as a photojournalist. Catherine Leroy died of cancer in 2006 in Santa Monica, California.

Françoise Demulder (1947–2008)

Françoise Demulder's career as a photojournalist began during the Vietnam War, from which she reported in the early 1970s. Initially she had travelled to Vietnam as a tourist and then decided to stay and work for the French photo agency Gamma. Like Catherine Leroy and Christine Spengler, she had no photographic training and learned how to work the camera on site. In 1975, when most foreign journalists had already left the country, she exclusively photographed the invasion of the North Vietnamese troops in Saigon. She also travelled to neighbouring Cambodia where she covered the civil war. Parallel to working in South-East Asia, Demulder reported from crisis zones in Africa. In 1975 she went to Angola to photograph the departure of the former colonial power Portugal and the struggle for control after the country gained independence. Demulder's photographs are carefully structured compositions which pointedly highlight the subjects portrayed. During the civil war in Lebanon, Demulder documented the massacre in which Christian militias killed hundreds of Palestinian refugees in East Beirut. One of those was selected as the World Press Photo of the Year in 1977. She was the first woman to receive this award. Françoise Demulder died in Paris in 2008.

Susan Meiselas (*1948)

The American photographer Susan Meiselas started working on documentary photographic projects as a student in the 1970s. In 1976, she was invited to join the renowned photo agency Magnum. This enabled her to cover wars and humanitarian crises as well as other relevant cultural and historical events in Central and South America independently over many years. Meiselas's photographs of the Nicaraguan revolution of 1978/79, which were driven by the young photographer's interest in the growing opposition against the military dictatorship, were first published by the New York Times and reproduced in numerous other contexts thereafter. They brought worldwide attention to the conflict and had a decisive influence on the photographer's career: she was awarded the Robert Capa Gold Medal in 1979. Meiselas's black and white photographs documenting the civil war in El Salvador are very different to her images of Nicaragua which were in colour – an uncommon feature in war photography during the time. While her US-citizenship allowed her access to the military and the dictator Somoza in Nicaragua, she had to team up with other photographers in El Salvador for her own protection. Meiselas's social documentary projects are based on a long-term and sustainable approach, whereby she often returns to the places and people she has photographed. Through this recontextualization of her own projects, which she sometimes expands into films and installations, she reflects on medial embeddings and the general impact of photography. Susan Meiselas lives in New York.

Carolyn Cole (*1961)

The American Carolyn Cole has worked as a photographer for the Los Angeles Times since 1994. At the end of the 1990s, she began to travel to war zones all over the world. When Palestinian militants, police and civilians barricaded themselves in the Church of Nativity and held Christian clergy hostage during the Israeli army's invasion of Bethlehem in 2002, Cole was the only journalist who spent the last nine days in the church during the 39-day siege by Israeli troops. For her coverage of this event she was awarded the Robert Capa Gold Medal in 2003. At the beginning of the Iraq War, Cole reported from Baghdad where she witnessed the bombings by US forces. She photographed the civilians affected by the war as well as the presence of American troops and their acts of war. From Baghdad she travelled directly to West Africa, having been assigned to cover the civil war in Liberia. Based in the capital Monrovia, she documented street battles, people in refugee camps and casualties, often in close-up. In 2004 she received the Robert Capa Gold Medal for the second time, as well as a Pulitzer Prize. Carolyn Cole still takes photographs for the Los Angeles Times. Her photographic focus has meanwhile shifted to nature and ocean conservation.

Anja Niedringhaus (1965–2014)

In 1990, at the age of only 24, Anja Niedringhaus became the first female photographer to be employed by the European Pressphoto Agency. Two years later, she started her mission as war photographer during the Yugoslav Wars (1991–2001) which she covered in depth until 1997. In 2002, the German photographer changed to Associated Press, the world's largest press agency. From then on she photographed events in the war zones of Iraq, Afghanistan, Gaza and Libya. In 2005, she and her colleagues won a Pulitzer Prize for their coverage from Iraq. Niedringhaus felt a deep affinity with the civilian population whose lives she documented under the influence of war and conflict. Despite the immediacy inherent to her photographs, she always kept a respectful distance. From 2003 Niedringhaus mostly worked as an 'embedded journalist', as a photographer assigned to a particular military unit and compelled to accept restrictions and army regulations for her photographs. In most situations she was the only woman; she had to adapt to the rhythm of the mainly male soldiers. In addition to being a war photographer, Niedringhaus also worked as a photojournalist covering major sports events. On 4 April 2014, Anja Niedringhaus was killed while covering the presidential elections in Afghanistan by a police officer at a security base in Khost province.

Christine Spengler (*1945)

In 1970, during a three-month trip with her younger brother to Chad, French-born Christine Spengler got caught up in a regional armed conflict. Bearing witness to the situation and without prior experience, she took her first photographs with her brother's camera, for which she was imprisoned for several weeks, suspected of being a spy. From then on, the self-taught photographer decided to make war photography her profession. Spengler documented major international conflicts all over the world, which marked world events during the last three decades of the twentieth century. Her first independent trip took her to Northern Ireland, followed by Bangladesh, Vietnam, Cambodia, Western Sahara, Iran, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Lebanon, Afghanistan, Kosovo and Iraq, among others. Her photographs were widely published in renowned international magazines and newspapers. Spengler mainly focused on the consequences of war for the civilian population rather than on actual combat. She was especially concerned with the fates of local women and children and their struggles to carry on their lives behind the front lines. In contrast to other photographers who take pictures of immediate acts of war, Spengler deliberately waited for the right moment to capture her photos. In 2003, Christine Spengler, now based in Paris, abandoned war photography and has since been working on artistic photographic collages.