

A Delicate Balance

If there is one contemporary artist who deserves the title "European," it is French painter and photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson. During a career that spans more than seven decades, he has been present at—and photographed—some of the most decisive events of 20th century European history, including the Spanish Civil War, World War II and the French student riots of 1968. His images of these momentous historical episodes are unflinchingly intimate and personal: the spotlight is on ordinary people taking part in extraordinary events. Cartier-Bresson once described his approach to photography as weaving around "the subject like a referee in a boxing match." Indeed, even at 90, he is still sharp and agile, wending his way through the busy streets of Paris. For Cartier-Bresson, the story of Europe is the story of its people, people who are more often the raw material rather than the shapers of history. As the next century approaches, Europeans are embarking on another extraordinary event: the creation of, in the words of the Maastricht Treaty, "an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe" through the integration of countries in the East into the European Union. The E.U. is intended to unite the *peoples* of these many diverse nations, not merely their national currencies and interest rates. To achieve this, people's hearts and minds must ultimately converge around a shared sense of being European. "To photograph," Cartier-Bresson has said, "is to place in the same line of sight the head, the eye and the heart." A similar balance, and a similar clarity of vision, will be needed to realize this ideal of a unified Europe. ■



Sevan Lake, Armenia, 1972 © Henri Cartier-Bresson/Magnum Photos