

HEIDE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART PRESENTS *BRASSAÏ: SECRET PARIS*

The most comprehensive survey of the photographer's work seen in Australia



Left to right: *Autoportrait, Boulevard Blanqui, Paris, c. 1931*; *Couple d'amoureux dans un petit café parisien, Place d'Italie, Paris, c. 1932*; *Escalier de la Butte Montmartre, c. 1937*. All © Estate Brassai Succession — Philippe Ribeyrolles

Heide Museum of Modern Art has announced *Brassai: Secret Paris*, a major survey exhibition of work by the eminent Hungarian-born French photographer Brassai, presented from **25 July – 15 November 2026**.

The exhibition marks the most comprehensive presentation of Brassai's work ever seen in Australia, and his first solo exhibition in the country in over five decades. It is the third major modernist photography exhibition presented by Heide in five years, following the acclaimed *Man Ray and Max Dupain* in 2025 and *Surrealist Lee Miller* in 2023.

Brassai: Secret Paris brings together more than **150** original vintage prints depicting the City of Light in the 1930s. Co-curated by Heide Artistic Director **Lesley Harding**, **Philippe Ribeyrolles**, manager and curator of the Estate Brassai and nephew of the artist, and renowned French photography curator **Emmanuelle de l'Ecotais**, the exhibition encompasses Brassai's greatest achievements. These include his iconic atmospheric black-and-white images of Paris and its people by night, his relationships with leading figures of the Parisian avant-garde, his experiments with Surrealism, and hallmark photographs of graffiti captured at the dawn of contemporary street art.

Lesley Harding, Artistic Director Heide Museum of Modern Art, said: "*Brassai is one of the great photographers of the twentieth century, and we are delighted to bring this depth of work to Australian audiences for the first time in a generation. His images continue to resonate nearly a century on, and in presenting the full breadth of his practice, from*

night photographs and graffiti to surrealist experiments and portraits of his inner circle, this exhibition at Heide reveals an artist of remarkable range and vision."

Philippe Ribeyrolles of the Estate Brassai said: *"This exhibition was prepared in the heart of Paris, in the very place where Brassai lived and where his memory still endures. I personally wished to imbue this presentation with the familial spirit and soul that belonged to the Brassai I knew, and which I strive to preserve in my capacity as the artist's nephew. For this reason, the exhibition is conceived as an invitation to journey into the heart of an oeuvre focused primarily on the secret Paris of the 1930s, through a selection of photographs whose prints were all made by Brassai himself. For Henry Miller, Brassai was the 'Eye of Paris'. Even today, it is this eye that teaches us not only how to see, but above all how to look."*

Born in 1899 in Transylvania (present-day Romania), **Brassai** arrived in Paris in the 1920s, where he would spend the remainder of his working life. Working through the night in Montparnasse and its surroundings, Brassai documented an unseen Paris, its cafes, bars, street corners, sex workers and the demimonde, with a clarity and psychological depth that set him apart from his contemporaries. In 1933 he published the photo book, *Paris de nuit (Paris by Night)*, which established him as one of the defining photographers of the 20th century.

Central to the exhibition is Brassai's close friendship with Pablo Picasso, documented across decades of photographs made in Picasso's studio, alongside portraits of Salvador Dalí, writer Henry Miller, and cabaret singer Kiki de Montparnasse. Moving within the innermost circles of the Parisian avant-garde, Brassai captured these figures with the same intimacy he brought to the city's margins.

Other significant works in the exhibition trace Brassai's sustained interest in early graffiti: crude marks, faces and figures carved into the stone walls of Paris, which he photographed over many years. These photographs, presented in his landmark 1956 exhibition *Language of the Wall* at MoMA New York, position Brassai as an observer of vernacular mark-making at a moment before contemporary street art existed as a category.

The exhibition will also include his experimental portfolio, *Transmutations* (1934–35), containing photomontage and collage inspired by the Dadaists and Surrealists, exploring alternative realities below the surface of the photographic image.

Adding local context to the exhibition, Brassai had a relationship with Australian art dealer Georges Mora, and had two exhibitions at his Tolarno Galleries in Melbourne in 1979 and 1980. A work purchased by Heide founders John and Sunday Reed during that period will be included in the exhibition.

Accompanying *Brassai: Secret Paris* is a comprehensive catalogue featuring an essay by **Gael Newton AM** tracing Brassai's impact on Australian photography including W.L. Lucke-Meyer's photo book, *Melbourne by Night* (1933), a personal contribution on the man and artist by **Philippe Ribeyrolles**, a curatorial overview by **Emmanuelle de l'Ecotais**, and new research on Brassai's influence on the Heide artists by **Lesley Harding**.

MEDIA RELEASE

28 May 2026



The exhibition has been designed by **Mel Bright, Eliza Ng, Maryna Popova** and **Pei She Lee** of Melbourne architecture firm Studio Bright, who previously designed the celebrated *Barbara Hepworth: In Equilibrium* exhibition at Heide in 2022.

Ends

IMAGES available [HERE](#)

MEDIA CONTACTS: For further information or interview requests, contact Articulate Advisory: Siân Davies, sian@articulateadvisory.com, 0402 728 462.

ABOUT HEIDE

Heide is a public art museum and sculpture park located on a stretch of the Birrarung/Yarra River in Naarm/Melbourne that has long served as a meeting point and as a creative hub. Once a significant Wurundjeri gathering place, the site later attracted the artists of the Australian Impressionist School before becoming the home of art patrons John and Sunday Reed in 1934. The Reeds and their circle of artists and writers embraced the brave and the new in art and ideas and their spirited legacy inspires the museum's activities today, from collaborating with emerging and mid-career artists to celebrating those who have made major contributions to Australian and international art. Set on 6.5 hectares of parkland with five gallery spaces, award-winning architecture and a distinctive collection of more than 3,800 works of art, Heide holds a special place in the cultural landscape of Australia. heide.com.au