

## **THE FAMILY OF MAN IN THE 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY**

### **Reassessing an Epochal Exhibition**

#### **International Conference**

**June 19 – June 20, 2015**

**Clervaux Castle, Clervaux, Luxembourg**

With more than ten million viewers across the globe and more than five million copies of its catalogue sold, "The Family of Man" is one of the most successful, influential, and written about photography exhibitions of all time. It introduced the art of photography to the general public, one critic noted, "like no other photographic event had ever done." At the same time, the meanings and impact of "The Family of Man" remain highly contested among historians and critics of photography to this day. First presented in 1955 to a record audience at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the travelling exhibition is now on permanent display as a UNESCO Memory of the World document at the CNA exhibition site in Clervaux Castle in Clervaux, Luxembourg - the native country of the show's inventor and curator, the Luxembourg-American photographer, painter, and exhibition designer Edward Steichen.

The conference wants to reassess and discuss the exhibition's appeal and message, launched against the backdrop of Cold War threat of atomic annihilation. It also wants to indicate new ways in which the exhibition, as an artistic response to a historical moment of crisis, can remain relevant in the context of 21<sup>st</sup>-century challenges. For the first time in Steichen criticism, the scholars at this interdisciplinary conference will discuss a 1958 essay on "The Family of Man" by the Frankfurt philosopher Max Horkheimer. Horkheimer's appreciative assessment of the cultural value of the exhibition in the post-war world runs forcefully against the grain of the critical dismissals that have come to dominate accounts of Steichen's project ever since the publication of Roland Barthes's well-known review from 1957. The conference will offer reconsiderations of the achievement of "The Family of Man" and it will try to reassess the potentially radical role of the exhibition in intercultural communication in the historical contexts of both the mid twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

**More information :** [www.steichencollections.lu](http://www.steichencollections.lu)

Organized by:  
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