



International Center of Photography

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media release



Unknown Photographer
Ruth Gruber, Alaska, 1941-43

Ruth Gruber, Photojournalist

On view from
May 20
through
August 28, 2011

Media Preview
May 19, 2011
11:30 am–1:00 pm

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Ruth Gruber, Photojournalist celebrates the remarkable life, vision, and heroic tenacity of a twentieth-century pioneer and trailblazer. Once the world's youngest PhD, Ruth Gruber is now in her hundredth year. The photographs in this exhibition span more than fifty years, from her groundbreaking reportage of the Soviet Arctic in the 1930s and iconic images of Jewish refugees from the ship *Exodus 1947*, to her later photographs of Ethiopian Jews in the midst of civil war in the 1980s. A selection of Gruber's vintage prints, never before exhibited, will be presented alongside contemporary prints made from her original negatives.

As the first correspondent granted permission to travel throughout the Soviet Arctic and Siberian gulag, 1934–35, Gruber documented frontier life in the Arctic and the unique role of women in the establishment of northern towns and ports. Vintage photographs represent her earliest use of the camera as a component of her reportage, and trace the exploration and settlement of the northernmost frontier and the development of the Soviet Arctic.

Gruber was thirty years old and already a celebrated author, lecturer, and intrepid reporter when, in 1941, U.S. Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes appointed her Field Representative to the Alaska Territory. Gruber traveled throughout the Alaskan frontier, an enormous and largely unknown expanse, and established herself as a serious photographer. She sent reports to the Department of the Interior on Alaska's vast natural resources, railway and air routes, opportunities for homesteading, lives and customs of the native Eskimo people, conditions and experiences

of American soldiers stationed there, and suggested ways to open up the territory. *Ruth Gruber, Photojournalist* will include color prints made from her original Alaska slides, 1941–43, printed for the first time, as well as never-before-seen motion picture footage.

In 1944, Gruber was assigned a secret mission to bring nearly 1,000 Jewish refugees from Europe to the U.S. Born in Brooklyn to Jewish immigrants, Gruber accepted the assignment despite the obvious danger it presented, and stewarded the ship *Henry Gibbins* and its 1,000 refugees to American shores. From that moment on, Gruber's life and work have been inextricably bound to the lives of refugees and dedicated to rescue, sanctuary, and liberation. Her tools have been her boundless tenacity, empathy, razor-sharp intellect, a Hermes typewriter, and a camera.

Gruber covered the activities of the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry on Palestine, and photographed the displaced persons' camps of Europe and the desolate internment camps of Cyprus, witnessing the desperate plight of Jewish refugees. In 1947, she documented the harrowing voyage of *Exodus 1947*, a ship carrying Jewish refugees attempting to break the blockade on Jewish immigration to Palestine. It was intercepted by the British near Haifa port, and its 4,500 Jewish passengers, most of them Holocaust survivors, were forced onto three prison ships and sent back to Europe. Gruber alone smuggled a camera aboard one of the three prison ships, *Runnymede Park*, and documented the horrible conditions she witnessed. Her photographs, taken surreptitiously in only a few short hours, were sent out to wire services throughout the world and radically transformed international attitudes toward the plight of Jewish refugees after the war. Gruber's iconic images, printed for this exhibition from her original negatives, will be displayed alongside vintage prints.

In the following decades, Gruber documented successive waves of migrants from Yemen, Iraq, Romania, Morocco, Tunisia, and Ethiopia, photographing often perilous journeys of emigration, small Jewish villages in North Africa, and the establishment of new lives in Israel.

Gruber is the author of twenty books and is the recipient of the 2011 Infinity Awards Cornell Capa Award. Her reportage and photojournalism have acted as advocate and witness for her subjects throughout her long career. *Ruth Gruber, Photojournalist* will introduce the broader photography community to one of the twentieth century's great humanitarians and photojournalists.

This exhibition is organized by ICP Adjunct Curator Maya Benton. It was made possible by friends of Ruth Gruber and with public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council.



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