

# Photographic portraits of artists and culturally-(not)present Michel Sima

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<sup>1</sup> G. Everling, *Francis Picabia et Michel Sima*, Cannes 1942 [catalogue of the exposition of Francis Picabia and Michel Sima from the private archive of the Smajewski family; trans. A. Chwiałkowska].

<sup>2</sup> Robert Desnos – French poet, playwright and filmmaker. He was associated with the avant-garde movements: dadaism and surrealism, in the mid-1920s he left Breton's circle and became fascinated with Baudelaire.

<sup>3</sup> Jean Cocteau – French poet, film director, screenwriter, painter, choreographer. He was the first to realize the idea of surrealism in the film. In his poetry and novels we can find influences of many trends: surrealism, dadaism and metaphysical poetry.

<sup>4</sup> Francis Picabia – French painter and poet, co-founder of the Section d'Or, associated with the group of dadaists in Zurich and Paris. From 1925 he co-created a group of surrealists.

<sup>5</sup> Pablo Picasso – Spanish painter, sculptor, graphic and ceramics designer. Considered one of the most important artists in history, co-creator of cubism. His most important works include *The Young Ladies of Avignon*, *Guernica*, *Girl Before a Mirror*, *Man with a Lamb*, and plates and ceramic objects like *The Owl*.

<sup>6</sup> The basic biographical information about the artists is provided by French literature presenting only a biographical feature of the creator and publications accompanying collective or photographic

Here is the voice of a young man who reveals astonishing maturity [...] an extraordinary work when so many complain of forced resigning from what pleases their eyes, and these works allow us to know the happiness born of art, so necessary for our equilibrium<sup>1</sup>

– in that way, in 1942, Germaine Everling wrote about Michel Sima, a Polish sculptor and a photographer included today into the circle of the artists of the École de Paris, friends of Robert Desnos<sup>2</sup>, Jean Cocteau<sup>3</sup>, Francis Picabia<sup>4</sup> or Pablo Picasso<sup>5</sup>. To the French audience he is known as a photojournalist showing the events of Paris in the 1930s and 40s, an author of intimate portraits of the Montparnasse artists, a ceramic designer and a creator of large-format sculptures. Despite the rich bibliography about various artists based in France and the publication of the artist's photographs by such magazines as “Vogue” or “Life”, Sima is one of those unlucky creators who are only fragmentarily present in research on the history of art<sup>6</sup>. The basic biographical information is provided by French studies such as *Picasso in Antibes*<sup>7</sup> by Dor de la Souchère, *Francis Picabia. Ecritures et dessins. Rencontres avec Pierre-André Benoit, Henri Goetz, Christine Boumeester, Michel Sima* accompanying the exposition *Francis Picabia entre 1940 et 1953*<sup>8</sup>, *La Ruche: cite d'artistes au regard tendre, 1902–2002*<sup>9</sup> his exhibition in Musée du Montparnasse, or the article *The artist as subject. The photographs of Michel Sima*<sup>10</sup> published in Apollo (magazine) in 1997. The study *Ateliers d'artiste*<sup>11</sup> by Erika Biletere, a German art historian is also extremely valuable. It is the most reliable publication on Sima.

This article concerns Sima's photographic activity focused on portraits of famous characters at that time. The author, seeking in



— Michel Sima, Pablo Picasso in Atelier Madoura, Vallaris, 1950, Smajewski Family Collection, ©Picasso succession



exhibitions in the context of Pablo Picasso such as *Memyselfandl. Photo portraits of Picasso*, ed. P. Daix et al. Cologne 2012. A rich collection of archival material is kept in the archive of the Smajewski family and is subject to research conducted by the author.

<sup>7</sup> D. de la Souchère, *Picasso in Antibes*, London 1960.

<sup>8</sup> Francis Picabia. *Ecritures et dessins. Rencontres avec Pierre-André Benoit, Henri Goetz, Christine Boumeester, Michel Sima*, éd. P. Belfond, Carcassonne 2003.

<sup>9</sup> *La Ruche : cité d'artistes au regard tendre*, Paris 1902–2002 [catalogue of exhibition from Bibliothèque Nationale de France].

<sup>10</sup> M. Haworth-Booth, *The artist as subject. The photographs of Michel Sima*, "Apollo (magazine)", 1997, No. 428.

<sup>11</sup> E. Billeter, *Michel Sima. Atelier d'artiste*, Lucerne 2008.

<sup>12</sup> The knowledge about the creator is the result of research conducted by the author during her queries abroad in, among others, Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris, Bibliothèque Kandinsky in Paris, Archive Musée Picasso in Paris, Musée Picasso in Antibes, Musée Zadkine in Paris, and in the private archive of the Smajewski family.

<sup>13</sup> Paul Eluard – a French poet known particularly for his love lyric. Associated with the circle of dadaists and surrealists. In 1924, he participated in publishing of the Surrealist Manifesto.

<sup>14</sup> Interview of A. Chwiałkowska with P. Smajewski, France 2015.

<sup>15</sup> A. Wierzbicka, *École de Paris*, Warszawa 2004, pp. 69, 83.

<sup>16</sup> Ossipe Zadkine – a Vitebskite sculptor active in Paris. One of the members of école de Paris. He created multidimensional sculptures mainly of metal and wood. He exhibited at Salon d'Automne and Salon des Indépendants. His work includes more than 400 sculptures and several thousands of drawings, watercolors and graphics.

<sup>17</sup> Constantin Brâncuși – a Romanian sculptor working in France. The inventor of organic abstraction in sculpture. The author of such works as: *Bird in Space*, *Sleeping Muse*, *The Kiss* or *Endless Column*.

<sup>18</sup> P. E. Smajewski, *Michel SIMA, sculpteur et photographe. Rencontres avec*

the history of photography a place which is due for the artist, refers only to works the most close to him, from compositional and chronological reasons, from both the French trend and the Anglo-Saxon one. Because of almost universal ignorance about Sima, the basic data about the artist's life were included in the content of the article<sup>12</sup>.

Michał Smajewski – the artistic pseudonym: Sima, given to him by Paul Eluard<sup>13</sup> as an anagram of the word: *amis*. The artist was born in 1912 in Słomin – a village situated between Minsk and Brest, on the lands now belonged to Belarus. In 1929, Smajewski, from a Jewish family, left Słomin for Paris, where he started to live with his uncle Chapiro who had been running a carpentry workshop in Montreuil for some time<sup>14</sup>. None of the sources describe how his adaptation in the city of lights looked like, but it certainly was not easy, also due to the declining of the French's sympathy towards foreigners, what was reflected in the press. In the interwar years, the number of foreigners – artists and art dealers – was so great that the Jeu de Paume Museum was given an additional annex to their works and exhibitions. In 1925, a discussion flared about the status and position of Jewish creators, which after the First World War constituted 30–40 percent of newcomers<sup>15</sup>. In such an atmosphere, at age 17, Smajewski began his studies at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière, where he studied until 1932. From 1933 he continued his work at the sculptor's atelier of Fetu, in the years 1934–1935 he was an assistant in the workshop of Ossip Zadkine<sup>16</sup>, and since 1937 he was a student in Constantin Brâncuși's studio<sup>17</sup>. From 1935 he lived in Impasse Ronsin, sharing a studio with his friend René Besset, a painter and a photographer. In the 1930s, he made photoreports for Parisian press agencies documenting events such as the speech of French politician Leon Blum on the occasion of the 14th of July, or the famous 1938 surrealist exhibition<sup>18</sup>. At that time, he made the first portraits of well-known artists such as Antonin Artaud the inventor of the Theater of Cruelty, and photos documenting the artist's atelier in Impasse Ronsin<sup>19</sup>. The years 1935–1940 were the time when Sima met Cocteau, Eluard or Picabia, attended their Sunday poetry meetings, and in 1936, thanks to Desnos, he became friends with Picasso.

In 1940, Sima left Paris and was incorporated into the Camp de Coëtquidan, a French military camp in Brittany, and at the end of October he settled in Vallauris, beginning a period of constant travel between Paris and the south. At that time, he was meeting with Jean Cocteau, Max Ernst<sup>20</sup> and Francis Picabia, whom he visited in his atelier in Golf Juan. On 2 August 1942 Smajewski, as a Jew, was arrested and imprisoned by the French in Nice. He was put into German hands and transported to the Drancy camp, which was intended for Jews living in France and in other Western European countries. The prisoners were waiting there for transport to an extermination camp.

The name of Smajewski is on the transport list of the deported to KL Auschwitz on 29 November 1942. The first transport selection took place in Kędzierzyn-Koźle (Blechhammer), where Sima was probably employed<sup>21</sup>. On 9 May 1945, the heavily ill artist left the camp, going again to the Côte d’Azur<sup>22</sup>. Unfortunately, no information has been left to say whether the choice of place was Sima’s decision, nor is it known whether he has taken the trip on his own or whether he was in a group of former prisoners transported south of France. His staying in the camp remains unknown, the sculptor himself did not mention this period, however – as Pierre’s son emphasizes – it was probably thanks to his artistic skills that he survived. In August 1946, after being recaptured in Grass and traveling to Cannes, where he found a former friend Romuald Dora de la Souchère, the curator of the Château d’Antibes, there was a reunion of Sima and Picasso<sup>23</sup>. If biographical notes about a Polish artist are to be believed, it was Picasso who persuaded him to start again with photography, which resulted in the cycle documenting the work of the Spaniard during his staying in Antibes and Vallauris.

Sima’s photographic activity is interesting in the context of traditional portrait paintings cycles dating back to the sixteenth century, as well as later workshop photography experiments that were considered to be the medium of modernity. Sima consciously used the classic patterns of posing the model, enriching the photographic images with a penetrating insight into the inner world of a portrayed person as in the old painting. Photos are a testimony of the times, they tell about stories, encountered artists and their shadows, which in spite of their transient nature are retained in human memory.

The background of Sima’s typical portrait cycles was the ordinary photographic production growing on a large scale since the second half of the 19th century. In 1854, Andre Disdéri contributed to the popularisation of portraiture, creating *cartes de visite*, a small-size photographs that was glued to a slightly larger cardboard. Very often they imitated with no taste plein-air painting, setting a model against the background of curtains or surrounded by various props such as a columns or furniture. Eight or ten portrait shots were taken during a single session, resulting in a relatively low price for the image. In the 50s of the nineteenth century, the price of a daguerreotype portrait ranged from 50 to 100 francs, while a dozen *porte carte de visite* portraits costed only 20 francs<sup>24</sup>. Until the 1870s, the main recipient (especially of daguerreotypes) was the bourgeoisie, who gained the possibility to preserve their images, which was previously reserved only for rulers or aristocrats. The cabinet card invented by the London photographer Frederick Richard Window in 1866 was also important for popularizing portrait photography. In addition to commercial photography, whole series of portraits began to appear, differing in their way of adapting compositional patterns or resigning from them. What become interesting for a creator were



Francis Picabia, [in:] Francis Picabia. *Ecritures et dessins. Rencontres avec Pierre-André Benoit, Henri Goetz, Christine Boumeester, Michel Sima*, éd. P. Belfond, Carcassonne 2003, no page numbering.

<sup>19</sup> Information is based on the author’s research conducted in the private archive of the Smajewski family.

<sup>20</sup> Max Ernst – at first, he was associated with the Dadaist circle in Cologne, but after the official manifesto of surrealism, he joined that movement. His most important works include: *The Blessed Virgin Chastises the Infant Jesus Before Three Witnesses: A.B., P.E. and the Artist*, *The Temptation of Saint Anthony or Celebes*.

<sup>21</sup> Information obtained by the author’s correspondence with the Auschwitz Archive.

<sup>22</sup> The dates of Michel Sima’s deportation and departure of the camp are confirmed by the *Carte de déporté politique* and the card issued by the *Union Nationale des Internationales et des Familles de disparus* kept in the private archive of the Smajewski family, trans. A. Chwiałkowska.

<sup>23</sup> E. Billeter, *Michel Sima. Atelier d’artiste*, Lucerne 2008, pp. 18–19.

<sup>24</sup> A. Rouillé, *L’empire de la photographie. Photographie et pouvoir bourgeois 1839–1870*, Paris 1982, p. 60.



<sup>25</sup> S. Bann, "When I Was Photographer": Nadar and History, "History and Theory" 2009, No. 4, p. 101.

<sup>26</sup> X. Par, Nadar, *le premier grand photographe portraitiste*, <http://danslesyeux.com/nadar> (access date: 03.01.2017).

<sup>27</sup> J. P. Amar, Gaspard-Felix Tournachon, dit Nadar, <http://www.archives-defrance.culture.gouv.fr/action-culturelle/celebrations-nationales/brochure-2010/beaux-arts/nadar> (access date: 05.01.2017).

<sup>28</sup> Despite the accepted opinion that Nadar avoided retouching, as demonstrated by Leonard Sempoliński, the photograph of Adam Mickiewicz was appropriated and re-composed by him. The photograph, which was long regarded as the work of Nadar, is the work of another author, and was also the subject of retouching. According to Sempoliński, Michał Szweycer made two photographs in 1853: one which depicts Mickiewicz with a cane and which was later elaborated by Nadar, and the other in which the cane was replaced with a stick to move the coals resembling a pilgrim's staff in its form. Making retouching on a daguerreotype was an extremely difficult task, but changes such as sharpening the contour of the face were possible through the use of appropriate chemicals. For: L. Sempoliński, *Michał Szweycer (1809–1871). Photographer Adam Mickiewicz, "Photography" 1962, No. 10, pp. 235–238; D. Kudelska, Romantics and aorists of photography*, [in:] *Chopin's Epoch – Romantic Culture in France and Poland*, ed. A. Pienkos, A. R. Rodriguez, Warsaw 2013, pp. 92–93.

<sup>29</sup> Man Ray – American photographer and director, at first working with Marcel Duchamp in New York, but since 1921 stayed in Paris. He revolutionized the art of photography, created a technique called rayography and solarisation.

<sup>30</sup> J. Fuller, *Atget and Man Ray in the Context of Surrealism*, "Art Journal" 2017, No. 2, pp. 130–131.

<sup>31</sup> For each customer was a different price, according to the memoris of Berenice Abbott, Man Ray's assistant, in 1920 the artist's price for a portrait was 1000 francs. This amount was much higher than that which was set according to the price list of the French Chambre Syndicale Française de la Photographie – the price for a print of 24 × 30 cm was then 35 francs. Since 1920, the artist's studio at rue Campagne-Première, on the same street where a photographic studio was run by Eugène Atget, was a meeting place for many of Man Ray's friends – dadaists, surrealists, American communities

dependencies on the level of human relation and the role and function of the resulting images.

The first photographic studio was opened in 1854 at the rue Saint-Lazare in Paris by Gaspard Félix Tournachon (artistic pseudonym: Nadar), already known to Parisians for his caricatures published by "Le Charivari". The role that Tournachon played in the development of photography is significant from the perspective of the invention, its popularity and the experiment conducted on that medium, and, also importantly, in the context of Sima's portraits. For the photographic activity of the artist of Polish origin, composition patterns of portraits developed by Nadar and popularity of photography in the form of commercial albums with images of known characters have become essential. Today we can call Nadar a pioneer of portrait cycles showing famous celebrities, which in the 1980s coincided with the popularization of celebrities and events in the press.

Working as a caricaturist enabled him to establish a relationship with the artistic and literary milieu and the most important personalities of his times. Among his friends, who after became his models, were, among others, François Guizot, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Sarah Bernhardt, Victor Hugo, Charles Baudelaire, Camille Corot, Eugene Delacroix, Édouard Manet and Michelle Chevreul<sup>25</sup>. Most of the portrait photographs were made in Nadar's studio between 1850 and 1870. Each model has been captured in natural light in an isolated space, on a uniform background, so that the entire focus of attention was on a photographed person, which gave the opportunity to create an "intimate portrait" so important for Nadar<sup>26</sup>. The poses are classic, somewhat reminiscent of the Ingres paintings, each element, such as a position of a palm or a twist of a body, was aimed to capture a character of a portrayed person. None of the posing had any attributes indicating their occupations. Nadar sought to capture "a true expression and a moment of mutual understanding with models that helps to capture their personalities and characters"<sup>27</sup>. A matter of controversy is using the retouch by the French<sup>28</sup>.

The year 1909 marks the first portrait photographs created in Paris by Man Ray<sup>29</sup>. The artist performed commercial portraits, as well as cycles presenting popular persons<sup>30</sup>. The images of Jean Cocteau, Ernest Hemingway, Marcel Duchamp, Gertrude Stein, and the 1924 pictures of contemporary celebrities for Vogue contributed to his success. As recalled by Clément Chéroux, Ray's presence in elegant color magazines has made his clients and tourists to start to visit his atelier<sup>31</sup>.

The interest in human physiognomy has resulted in a rich collection of photographic portraits, because in the largest collections of artist negatives kept in Center Pompidou, the portrait accounts for nearly 64 percent of all the photos he has taken. Most of the portrait images were created in the artist's studio, only in some cases the photographs were taken elsewhere<sup>32</sup>. Ray photographed Georges

Braque, Henri Matisse<sup>33</sup> and Pablo Picasso in their ateliers and Marquise Luisa Casati in her apartment, surrounded by her favorite objects. In 1922, a cycle was created that documented the image of Casati, the most famous of which is the portrait, where by double exposure the model's eyes were shown twice. The photo appealed strongly to the taste of that eccentric, who said that the portrait fully captured her soul<sup>34</sup>. In the 1920s also Ray took also photographs showing Cocteau. The artist met the poet at the end of 1921, his portraits were some of the first ones he had created in Paris. A photo dated 1922 was made in the living room of the house in which Cocteau lived with her mother. The young poet was presented in a festive outfit in the central part of the photograph, at Ray's direction, he holded a blank frame in front of him, which made of his picture an image in an image. "The frame is [here] a symbol of the time interval separating the viewer from each viewed space of the photography"<sup>35</sup>. The attention of the viewer is also drawn by a statue depicting a head of a woman. Ray dialogued in that way with the first photographs showing the dead nature, where various figures were presented, including the antique-like busts and hermes. These objects or "African fetishes" aroused then great interest in, the mask inspired by African art returned, among others, in Kiki of Montparnasse's portrait made by Ray in 1926.

Almost 30 years later, Sima, from Poland, decided to use Leica's camera to re-show Cocteau. That time as an intellectual and a friend with whom he had a cordial relationship for many years. Sima created an entire portrait cycle of Cocteau, which presented his nature of a poet and a painter, almost always presenting him surrounded by many attributes. The most interesting is the photograph showing the poet at a desk with palms on the desktop<sup>36</sup>. Cocteau was placed in a cabinet space, which aroused great uncertainty due to the inability to identify the objects presented, which was a conscious artistic treatment. Sima created an atmosphere of anxiety and uncertainty, using a depth of field that, thanks to the use of a proper aperture, is small. Rectangular and vertical forms were fragmented in the foreground, completely building the area also behind Cocteau. All of them were devoid of sharpness as opposed to the poet's silhouette. The second plan of the photography evoked the type of space of Fernand Khnopff's paintings. An additional effect is the play with the viewer, which consists in showing the four hands of the poet, one of which one pair is artificial. There is also a model-photographer relationship that is characteristic of Sima's portraits.

The figures depicted in Ray's photographs are on the border of a traditional posed portrait in a studio and a dadaist-surrealistic experience. The portraits show the way of thinking of the artist who, constantly experimenting, claimed that his actions were based on calculations and some kind of mechanical work<sup>37</sup>. The composition is always well thought out, the light is adapted to the model. The power



centered on Montparnasse, people of fashion, cinema and entertainment. For: **C. Cheroux**, "Clairs visages hors du temps rassembles". *Les portraits de Man Ray*, [in:] *Man Ray Portraits*. Paris – Hollywood – Paris, éd. C. Cheroux, Paris 2010, p. 32.

<sup>32</sup> **Q. Bajac**, *De l'oeuvre a l'archive*, [in:] *Man Ray Portraits...*, p. 20.

<sup>33</sup> Henri Matisse – French painter, creator of colorful collages. Considered one of the leading representatives of fowism. The most famous works of the artist include: *Portrait of Madame Matisse (The Green Line)*, *The Joy of Life*, *The Dance or Large Red Interior*.

<sup>34</sup> **M. Czyńska**, *Markiza Luisa Casati*, [http://www.wysokieobcasy.pl/wysokie-obcasy/1,96856,7818620,Markiza\\_Luisa\\_Casati.html?disableRedirects=true](http://www.wysokieobcasy.pl/wysokie-obcasy/1,96856,7818620,Markiza_Luisa_Casati.html?disableRedirects=true) (data dostępu: 5 I 2017). That is how Man Ray remembered that story: "Photo of the Marquise circled the whole Paris. People from the most exclusive circles began to come to me expecting miracles. I had to leave my room and find a real studio" (for: **M. Ray**, *Sur le portrait. Luisa Casati*, [in:] *Man Ray Portraits...*, p. 57).

<sup>35</sup> *Jean Cocteau*, <http://www.getty.edu/art/collection/objects/45092/man-ray-jean-cocteau-american-1922/> (access date: 10.01.2017).

<sup>36</sup> The photographs showing J. Cocteau can be found, among others, in the publication by **E. Billeter**, *Michel Sima. Atelier d'artiste*, Lucerne 2008.

<sup>37</sup> **J. Fuller**, *op. cit.*, p. 130.



<sup>38</sup> According to Desnosa, the photographer "stopped the face at the peak point just before returning to a normal position. It depicts faces in a fleeting moment between two states" (for: **C. Cheroux**, *Clairs visages...*, p. 36).

<sup>39</sup> **K. Slusher**, *The women who shot Picasso*, [in:] *Memyselfandl...*, p. 64.

<sup>40</sup> Dora Maar (Henriette Theodora Markovitch) – French photographer, painter and poetess associated with the surrealist circle. Pablo Picasso's companion and muse.

<sup>41</sup> **R. C. Morris**, *A palatia setting for surreal imagery in Venice*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/19/arts/international/a-palatial-setting-for-surreal-imagery-in-venice.html?ref=topics> (access date: 08.03 2017).

of expression of Ray's portraits is located in the spontaneity of the image, models are shown at the moment of motion stop, at the climax of a given situation<sup>38</sup>.

Picasso – an artist, whose image has completely dominated the contemporary albums and magazines, in Ray's portraits is presented in a slightly different way. A proudly erect man, captured three-quarters to the left, poses in his atelier against the background of his paintings that are building another plan in the photography. His clearly-set silhouette has a slightly sculptural feature. The painting canvas as well as intriguing outfit inform us about the profession and social position of the man or his aspirations. His black eyes demanding the attention of the viewer indicate the type of character of the portrayed. The Spaniard, because of his dominant personality, always influenced the process of image formation, never wanted to remain just an object<sup>39</sup>. We perceive completely differently his image on the portraits by his life companion Dora Maar<sup>40</sup>. A photograph of 1935/1936 shows a very interesting portrait of Picasso created in her Parisian studio at 29 rue d'Astorg. The photo was taken at the initial stage of Maar's acquaintance with Picasso, whom she met thanks to Eluard at the turn of 1935/1936. The acquaintance of a Spanish painter with a surrealist photographer turned into a passionate relationship that lasted until 1943 and resulted in extensive photographic documentation presenting Picasso's work on *Guernica*<sup>41</sup>. The portrait photography of Picasso presents Picasso set in the central point and wearing the same white shirt and tie he put on in 1937 when he was working on *Guernica*. Maar made a strong ingerention on the glass negative, by mechanical damage by the hand or some emulsion tool, partially blotting Picasso's face. The movement made by Maar is automatic, reminiscent of children's drawing, the artist gave up unnecessary objects, and focused on rendering the psychological study of the painter. The photographic image uses very strong figurative contrasts and posing of the model that becomes interesting in the context of Venetian painting of the Renaissance period, while presenting the continuation of certain patterns in the genre of the portrait. The pose taken by Picasso and the way she painted over almost half his face reminds the *Portrait of Doge Leonardo Loredan* by Giovanni Bellini. In both portraits the face of the model was partially hidden, the main axis of the composition is marked by the nose, and the point of attention is the eye.

A surrealistic play with a viewer reveals itself in the photograph taken by Maar in 1940 at the Les Voliles villa in Royan. In the picture we see the artist's studio. The space of the atelier was divided into two mutually-dependent parts. In the lower fragment there are painting tools and a drawing, the upper part was adapted for subsequent works of the artist. Rhythmically placed Picasso's drawings add additional vertical divisions in the photo. At the central point of the upper part of the frame, where the recipient may expect another

drawing work, a mirror with the reflection of the painter himself is placed. The spectator is subjected to a surprise treatment because what is seen here it is not an expected traditional portrait of the painter, but only his reflection which awakens the feeling of uncertainty of truth and awareness of creation. As Clement Cheroux notes, the motif of the reflection, especially in shop windows, has become extremely popular in surrealists' art already in the 1920s. In April 1925, *La Revolution Surrealiste* posted on the cover a photo by Ray showing the shop window in Saint-Sulpice. Two images overlap in the photo: a window of a shop with devotional items and a facade of the opposite building<sup>42</sup>.

Picasso belongs to a group of artists, whose image was most often recorded in the 20th century. For many years he worked with various photographers, repeatedly expressing great interest in this medium, which is emphasized, among others, by the use of a photograph of the Horta de Ebro factory in his painting work<sup>43</sup>. Among many photographers true friendship has linked him with several, including: Brassai (Gyula Halász), Robert Doisneau or David Douglas Duncan. Picasso's photographic depictions, depending on a time when being created, vary in the way of presenting the model driven by various author's intentions. Also creators of those photographs were different. Some of them experienced the privilege of photographing the artist in his studio during work, such as Maar in 1937 or Sima in 1946, while others photographed him only during family walks and playing with children, as did Doisneau in 1952.

It is extremely interesting to compare the photographs made by Maar, which show Picasso during his work on *Guernica* with those created in the 1940s during the artist's work on the Côte d'Azur, where he was accompanied for a long time by Sima. Maar and Sima's photographs were created in completely different circumstances. Maar, who was then associated with Picasso, showed him during his work, which he began right after receiving information about the bombing of that small town in northern Spain. This was a huge blow for the painter who, in addition to feeling the tragedy of war and violence, always emphasized his nationality. The cycle created in his atelier on rue Grand-Augustine shows Picasso in various poses during work and the atelier itself with the finished work. The expressive shade of light gives the photograph a bit of a baroque charm. The artist was very careful about the way he was perceived by others – almost in every photo he was shown in a festive attire with a tie and elaborated theatrical poses. Throughout the series the most interesting is the photo on which Picasso stands on a ladder. The frog perspective is used here, so that the silhouette shown in the image gained even more monumental character, hiding at the same time the low growth of the model, which was visible in the usual portrait. The photographs of the artist's work on the Côte d'Azur were made by Sima during his holiday trips to Antibes with Françoise Gilot.



<sup>42</sup> C. Cheroux, *Wertykularne. Eseje z historii fotografii*, trans. T Swoboda, Warszawa 2014, p. 164.

<sup>43</sup> K. Slusher, *op. cit.*, p. 67.





<sup>44</sup> A. Wierzbicka, *op. cit.*, pp. 85–92.

<sup>45</sup> G. Halasz, *Brassaï rozmowy z Picassem*, trans. Z. Florczak, Warszawa 1979, p. 182.

<sup>46</sup> M. Haworth-Booth, *The artist as subject. The photographs of Michel Sima*, "Apollo (magazine)", 1997, No. 428, p.3–11. The role played by the photography in M. Sima's life is also mentioned in F. Gilot's movie: *Tran, Picasso et Sima, le modeleur d'amitie*, Lyon 2009.

<sup>47</sup> The photographs of his social meetings with de la Souchere, Eluard and his wife Nush can be seen, among others, in the catalog of the exhibition: *Picasso, la Joie de Vivre. 1945–1948*, Venice 2006. The information is based on the author's research conducted in the private archive of the Smajewski family.

The photographs are also posed, but we see more ease in both dress and poses. The painter is rarely captured directly at work, he is more likely to present himself with a finished work.

The dominant personality of the model is a very important element of all photographs taken at this time by the Polish artist. The pictures of Sima and Maar, discussed above, were created in two completely different periods of Picasso's life. Each time when a new love appeared at the side of the artist, it was customary for him to change everything – a house, a circle of friends and a photographer. Years of photographs document the work and life of the Spaniard. They are also extremely interesting from a sociological point of view, as they illustrate the social aspirations of Picasso, his transition from the position of the bohemian artist in Montmartre to a recognized artist who was admitted to Parisian salons.

Picasso's portrait photographs made in Paris by Brassai, Robert Capa and Dora Maar have a completely different character from those created in the south of France. The interest of artists in traveling to the Côte d'Azur developed during the interwar years, due to the reduced demand for paintings (because of the crash of New York Wall Street in 1929) and the possibility of working en plein air<sup>44</sup>. The south of France has become attractive not only for artistic but also for economic and tourist reasons. Picasso has found his "landscape" there since 1919, traveling regularly to Antibes<sup>45</sup>, Golf-Juan or Cap d'Antibes. During his many trips he was accompanied by such artists as Lee Miller (1937), Robert Capa (1948), David Duncan (1956–1962), André Villers (1961) and Michel Sima (1946, 1948, 1950).

The reunion with Picasso on the Côte d'Azur had a special impact on Sima's creative journey. Photography became for a Polish artist, mentally devastated in a concentration camp (1942–1945), some kind of psychotherapy<sup>46</sup>. His cycles were not only reportage photographs like those he had created in Paris in 1937. The artist's main interest was a human in a specific space, surrounded by various objects. During Picasso's stay in Antibes in 1946, he was accompanied exclusively by Sima documenting his work at the Chateau d'Antibes, in Maudora's studio in Vallauris, and during his social meetings with de la Souchere, Eluard and his wife Nush. Sima preferred to set models, so all photographs are posed, but at the same time capturing certain situations and faces. In some photographic images, Picasso is portrayed at work, while in others – following Sima's guidelines or his own likes – he adopts various poses around completed paintings and ceramics<sup>47</sup>.

In a large part of the photograph, a frame was divided into two coexistence spaces: the first intended for the artist and the second due to his work. In others an image itself has become central, always presented in the surroundings of painting objects. Each composition is carefully thought out and built by the artist. As in a photograph taken in 1950 in Vallauris, where the photographic frame was

divided into three parts by vertical-horizontal arrangements made up by shelves, and ceramic vases and plates. Sima, taking care of every detail, built a space whose elements were the attributes of the portrayed. The Picasso's figure is shown in the lower right corner and his head reaches the middle part of the image emphasizing the rhythm of ceramic vessels shown centrally and in the left part. The whole space is made up of geometric figures that are related to each other – rectangles, squares, ellipses and triangles. Sima inscribes his model in a triangle running centrally throughout the photograph and marked by darker vessels and clothing of the painter.

In all of Picasso's portraits, which have been made by the Polish artist, the level of relationship becomes of great importance. It can be considered at the level of model photographer, model-viewer, and creator-work. As in Ray's portrait photographs (from 1921 or 1930) or in Picasso's famous picture in a Duncan hat, so as in Smajewski's the power of portraits of the Spaniard is his penetrating look that always stays in contact with the photographer and with the viewer, which intensifies impression of proximity or urgent observation by the artist. Picasso had to appreciate the author's skills, because, as Brassai recalled, he showed him Sima's photographs the same year, just after returning to Paris<sup>48</sup>. One of the photos of the artist with Picasso's dedication was donated to Cuban painter Wifredo Lam. The photograph showing the author against *Nature morte a la bouteille, a la sole et a l'aiguier* at Chateau d'Antibes is today a part of the Archives SDO Wifredo Lam<sup>49</sup> and was presented during the retrospective exhibition of the artist in the Centre Pompidou in 2016<sup>50</sup>. In 1948, René Draoulin published the first selection of Sima's photographs documenting the work and presence of Picasso in the studio at Grimaldi Castle. The album was commented on by Jaime Sabartes and Eluard<sup>51</sup>. Details about this publication were discussed by the artists by correspondence as evidenced by the letters kept at the Picasso Museum in Paris. Among these archival materials are also letters about the private relationship that has arisen between artists. In one of them, Sima shares the events of his life, such as the birth of his son Pierre<sup>52</sup>.

In the next 10 years, marked by trips between Paris and the Côte d'Azur, Sima made a series of portraits of the artists of the école de Paris<sup>53</sup>. Prompted by the Spaniard, with a help of Leica and Rolleiflex cameras, he marked again his presence in artistic millieus portraying Jean Cocteau, Francis Picabia, Ossip Zadkine, Alberto Giacometti, Max Ernst, Man Ray, Marcel Duchamp and Pierre Tal-Coat. Some of the photographs were published in the book *21 visages d'artistes* published in 1959<sup>54</sup>. It is unknown whether Smajewski was paid for the photographs or whether he himself chose models. It is also unclear to what extent his acquaintance with Picasso was significant for him in the Parisian millieu<sup>55</sup>. Thanks to the correspondence stored in the Smajewski family archive, we know that Sima



<sup>48</sup> G. Halasz, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

<sup>49</sup> Wifredo Lam (Wifredo Oscar de la Concepción Lam y Castilla) – painter, ceramic designer, sculptor. Inventor of an individual style that was a combination of Latin American culture, African culture and influences of European art. Since 1938 he has been associated with the circle of Pablo Picasso and André Breton. Author of such works as *The Jungle*, *The Dream*, *The Shadow of Days*.

<sup>50</sup> On the reverse side of the photo there is Picasso's dedication.

<sup>51</sup> *Picasso a Antibes* – photo album by Michel Sima, with comments by Jaime Sabartes and Paul Eluard. The book, published in 1948 by René Draoulin, is an extremely important publication of Sima. The album not only documents Picasso's stay in Antibes, but is also proof of his physical and spiritual convalescence of the Polish artist.

<sup>52</sup> M. Sima's letter P. Picasso, Picasso Museum Archive, Paris.

<sup>53</sup> E. Billeter, *Sima photographie Picasso*, [in:] *idem, Michel Sima. Atelier...*, p. 62.

<sup>54</sup> M. Sima, *Vingt et un visages d'artistes*, ed F. Nathan, Paris 1959.

<sup>55</sup> Similar questions arise much more: did Sima run an atelier available to every potential client? Did photography allow him to raise funds for life?



<sup>56</sup> The meetings in the artists's atelier in La Ruche are documented by photographs kept in the private archive of the Smajewski family.

<sup>57</sup> P. Paret, *Sculpture and its negative the photographs of Constantin Brancusi*, [in]: *Sculpture and photography, envisioning the third dimension*, ed. G. A. Johnson, Cambridge 1998, p. 101.

<sup>58</sup> Information provided on the basis of research conducted by the author in the archive of the Smajewski family.

<sup>59</sup> A. Wierzbicka, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

<sup>60</sup> *Hommage à Antonin Artaud*, Paris 1944 [catalogue of exhibition in the private archive of the Smajewski family; trans. A. Chwiałkowska].

<sup>61</sup> *Au Château de Cagnes. Peintures, Sculptures, Arts Graphiques, Ceramiques*, France 1948 [catalogue of exhibition in the private archive of the Smajewski family].

<sup>62</sup> *Michel Sima. Sculptures, Ceramiques*, Cannes 1949 [catalogue of exhibition in the private archive of the Smajewski family; trans. A. Chwiałkowska].

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<sup>67</sup> *Michel Sima. Sculpteur, photographe*, Paris 1996, [catalogue of exhibition in the private archive of the Smajewski family; trans. A. Chwiałkowska].

<sup>68</sup> *La Ruche D'Aujourd'hui*, Paris 1966, [catalogue of exhibition from Bibliothèque Nationale de France].

<sup>69</sup> *Michel Sima. Photographies*, Paris 1995, [catalogue of exhibition in the private archive of the Smajewski family; trans. A. Chwiałkowska].

<sup>70</sup> *Picasso, la Joie de Vivre. 1945–1948*, Venise 2007 [catalogue of exhibition].

maintained a private relationship with some of the artists; this group includes Alberto Giacometti, Robert Couturier, Man Ray or Jean Cocteau.

Together with his family Sima lived in La Ruche, where he run his atelier, but probably it was because of not very good conditions he did not take pictures in his atelier, but in those belonging to portrayed models. In La Ruche, only occasional photos of private meetings were made, such as when he was visited by Max Ernst or Horace Titus, Helena Rubinstein's son<sup>56</sup>.

It is also interesting to note that Picasso does not appear on any of the photographs made in the studio. At least in those known to the author. Sometimes, as in the case of the portrait photographs of Duchamp, Sima was documenting the artist's figure in another environment intimate for him, but these were individual cases. Sometimes the space of the atelier itself and locating an artist in its context was very interesting for Smajewski. Having spent his youth in Constantin Brancusi's atelier, he had to know the photographs of the studio he had made since 1905. Brancusi's first photographs were made for commercial purposes, their task was to facilitate the sale and to find merchants for sculptures. In the 1920s, the photographs, in addition to documenting functions, gained artistic value so that in the 1930s the studio could become a place of presentation of works<sup>57</sup>.

Continuing the iconographic motif of an artist in a studio, Sima, like in the case of Picasso's portraits, scrupulously built up the space of every frame. A model was shown in correlation with his work, which acts as an attribute, indicating the profession or social role of a portrayed. Particular attention should be paid to the type of relationship between a posing and the creator presented in the photographic images. Sima not only enters the private space of his models, but also faces them face to face, showing more than a portrait. The mentioned-before publication *21 visages d'artistes* includes portraits, created in 1949–1959, of such creators as Hans Arp, Georges Braque, Marc Chagall, Jean Cocteau, André Derain, Fernand Legler, Joan Miró, Francis Picabia, Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, Ossip Zadkine, Kees van Dongen, Georges Rouault, Maurice Utrillo, Matisse, Ossip Zadkine, Kees van Dongen, Georges Rouault, Maurice Utrillo, André Lothe, Alberto Magnelli and Tsuguharu Fujita. The images of some of the artists shown by Ray or Sima appear also in the portrait cycles by André Villers and Brassai.

Portraits and reportage photographs made by Sima represent only a small part of his rich and diverse creative work in other fields of art. Photography, although present in the artist's work since the 1930s, appeared as an intermediate branch, Sima always emphasized that he was a sculptor. They are still preserved numerous ceramics that show the influence of Paul Gauguin and Pablo Picasso, and multidimensional sculptures in wood, stone, metal or plaster. His sculptural work was strongly impressed by the teachers of the Académie

de la Grande Chaumière and the artists in whose ateliers he stayed before leaving for Côte d'Azur<sup>58</sup>. According to the documents collected in the archive of the Smajewski family, the years of 1942–1974 was a period of numerous exhibitions for the artist. Initially, these were mainly group exhibitions, later individual ones, which – as Anna Wierzbicka emphasizes – was a practice often practiced to help beginners to gain recognition<sup>59</sup>. Smajewski's photographs, sculptures and ceramics were presented, among others, in: Galerie Pierre Place du Châtelet, Théâtre Sarah-Bernhardt<sup>60</sup>, Château Musée de Cagnes<sup>61</sup>, Lambert Décorateur in Cannes<sup>62</sup>, Galerie Colette Allendy in Paris<sup>63</sup>, Galerie Henriette Niepce Paris<sup>64</sup> or in his studios in La Ruche<sup>65</sup> an Tauriers<sup>66</sup>. After Sima's death his photographs were presented in: Galerie Lucie Weill & Seligmann in Paris<sup>67</sup>, Galerie Jeanne Castel in Paris<sup>68</sup>, Galerie de L'Ours. Jean-Marie et Elisabeth Gaymard<sup>69</sup>, Palazzo Grassi in Venice<sup>70</sup>, Galerie Fischer in Switzerland<sup>71</sup>, Museum Ludwig in Cologne<sup>72</sup>, Sala Municipal San Benito in Valladolid<sup>73</sup>. After Sima, numerous sculptures, ceramics, photographs, and a collection of correspondence left that gives insight into his life and work. The materials require further elaboration, which would allow Sima to be deprived of the status of only Picasso's photographer, thus helping to admit him the right place in the history of art.

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#### Keywords

portrait photography, carte de visite, Michel Sima, Pablo Picasso, Man Ray

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### **Summary**

**AGNIESZKA CHWIALKOWSKA (The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin)  
/ Photographic portraits of artists and culturally–(not)present Michel Sima**

This article is dedicated to the photographic activity of a forgotten artist Michel Sima. It concentrates on series of portraits of the artist known at that time, refers to the motif initiated by Nadar and continued, among others, by Man Ray and Michel Sima. Because of the general lack of knowledge about the artist of Polish origin, a biography of Sima was included in the article.