

Consuelo Kanaga

CATCH THE SPIRIT

30.05 – 25.08.2024



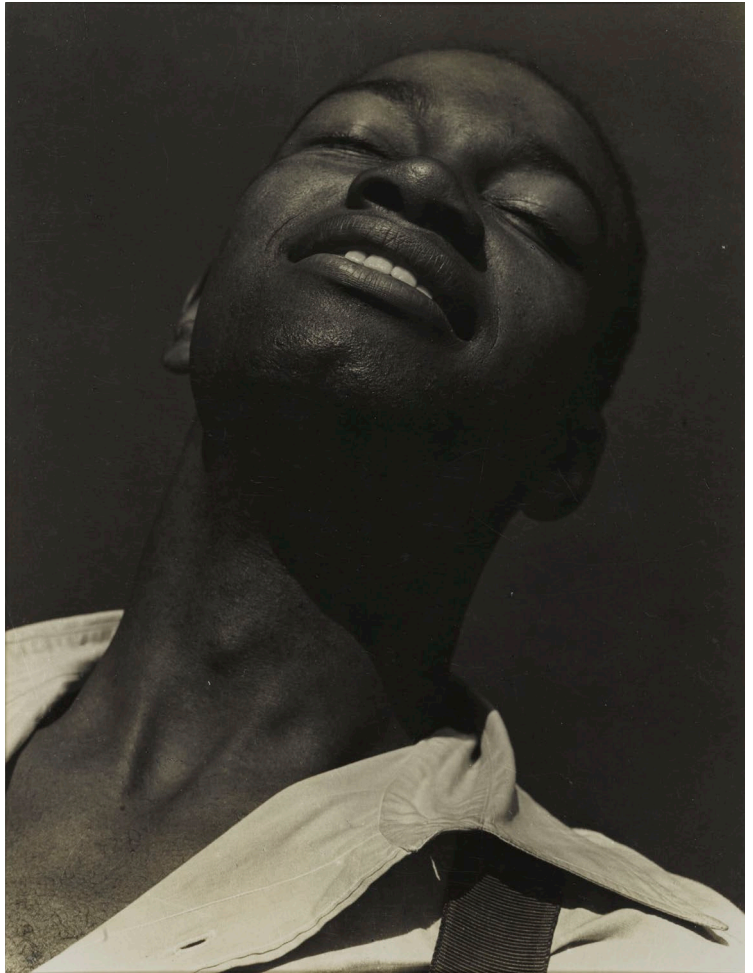
For the first time in Spain and Europe, *Consuelo Kanaga. Catch the Spirit* features the work of this North American photographer spanning her entire career. Kanaga is considered today a key figure in the history of contemporary photography, both for her contribution toward the recognition of women in this field and for the intensity with which her images confront the spectator with the great social issues of our time, particularly the conditions of African Americans in the United States.

The daughter of a lawyer who was interested in agriculture and of the writer Mathilda Carolina Hartwing, Consuelo Kanaga (Astoria, Oregon, 1894 – Yorktown Heights, New York, 1978) helped her parents with tasks related to editing from a very young age, which resulted in her interest in journalism. In 1915 she began to write for the San Francisco Chronicle. Three years later, after a period teaching herself photography in the newspaper dark room, she became staff reporter; undoubtedly, one of the first women to occupy such a position in the United States at that time.



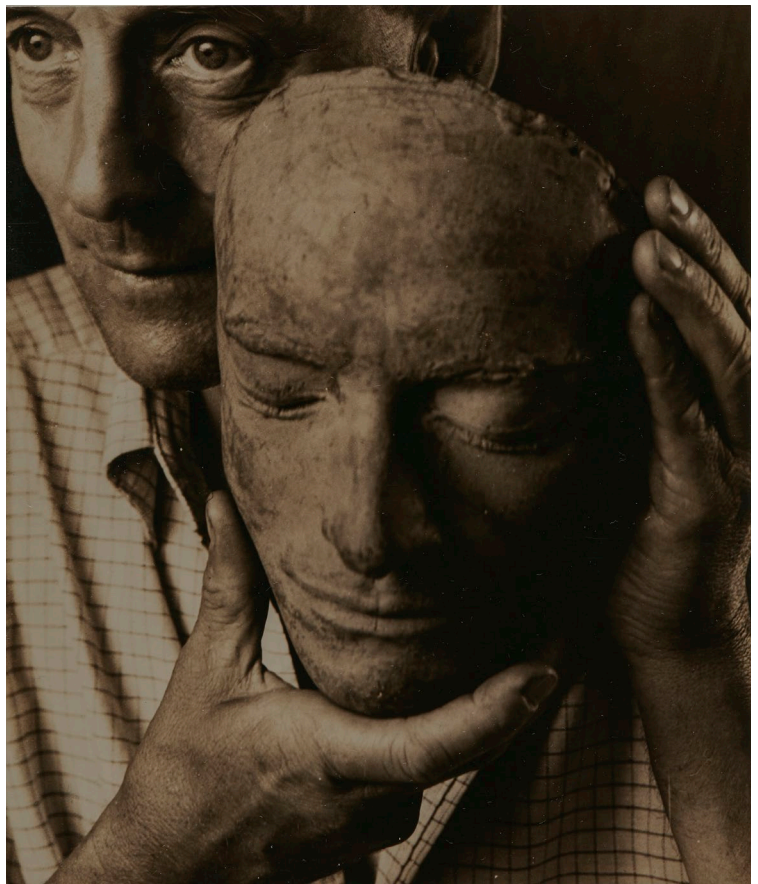
The Widow Watson,
1922-24

Kenneth Spencer, 1933



An unconventional figure, Kanaga was also one of the few women involved in the avant-garde circles both in San Francisco with the f.64 Group and in New York with the Photo League. Her friendship and professional support paved the way for other important photographers, such as Imogen Cunningham, Louise Dahl-Wolfe, Dorothea Lange, Alma Lavenson, Tina Modotti, and Eiko Yamazawa, among others. Despite the fact her accomplishments were as relevant as those of her colleagues, her oeuvre received much less attention. Kanaga spent little time self-promoting since she was always more interested in cultivating the affective bonds with the people closest to her. Gender inequalities and social conventions clearly limited her ability to dedicate herself completely to her artistic work. Kanaga worked full time jobs during many years and was only able to practice her art on weekends. She repeatedly put her career on hold for her partners.

Kanaga was truly passionate about social justice. She was most interested in people and issues such as marginalization, poverty, racial harassment, and inequality; particularly in relation to African Americans and worker's rights, regardless of gender. Her first portraits of African Americans were aligned with the New Negro Movement that developed in Harlem during the 1920s and 30s. Kanaga began to produce portraits for additional income as a complement to her journalistic work, initially in San Francisco and later in New York. She opened her first studio in the early 1920s and was able to support herself and her partners financially by taking photographs of wealthy clients and friends who were part of the avant-garde movements in San Francisco and New York. Thus, the portrait became the main focus of Kanaga's creative production. It is also important to note that while most of her work as a photojournalist was lost, her portraits remain well represented among the negatives and prints that have been preserved.



Wharton Esherick, 1940



Untitled, 1936

Beyond portraiture, the images Kanaga produced during numerous trips abroad were also an important part of her work. Between 1927 and 1928, she spent close to a year travelling and taking photographs in France, Germany, Italy, Hungary, and Tunisia. Likewise, in the late 1940s and 60s, she journeyed through the United States portraying black families and farmhands. In 1950 Kanaga and her husband moved to the countryside, which reduced her artistic output. Nevertheless, she continued to take photographs of the rural environment surrounding her house in Yorktown Heights, sixty kilometers north of Manhattan.

The exhibition presented by Fundación MAPFRE contextualizes Consuelo Kanaga's work while focusing on some of her most iconic images and her portrayal of African American communities during the 1930s.

Exhibition organized by the Brooklyn Museum in New York in collaboration with Fundación MAPFRE and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

Curator : Drew Sawyer

Keys

New Negro Movement

From the late 19th century, magazines and novels published by black men and women began to emerge as a response to the prevailing racism in cities such as San Francisco, Washington, and New York. This literary explosion was the precedent of what became known as the New Negro Movement, which developed in Harlem, New York, between 1920 and 1930; a movement that also lent its name to the most comprehensive anthology dedicated to said cultural renaissance, written by Alain Locke and considered at the time as “the fundamentals of the black canon”. Not only did black artists flourish during this time, white artists were also encouraged to join this movement in defense of the freedom, rights, and equality of African Americans through culture.



Hands, 1930

Kanaga Photojournalist

In 1915, when she was only 21 years old, Consuelo Kanaga began to write for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, where she learned photography in order to illustrate her assignments: “For my articles requiring photographs, I went with the photographer to help make the pictures more interesting”, she later recalled. “The editor liked the results and encouraged me to learn photography, ‘from scratch’”. In 1918 she began to work as a photographer for the newspaper and was also hired by the *Daily News* the following year. Kanaga was undoubtedly one of the first women photojournalists on staff at a newspaper; as her friend Dorothea Lange remarked: “she was the first newspaper photographer I’d ever met. She was a person way ahead of her time”.



The Bowery, 1935

Kanaga and Women Photographers

Kanaga's career was interwoven with a solid and broad circle of women photographers who she cultivated special relationships with over the course of five decades. She was a great supporter and a confidant for Imogen Cunningham, Louise Dahl-Wolfe, Dorothea Lange, Alma Lavenson, Tina Modotti, and Eiko Yamazawa, among many others, who she advised and shared her company and connections in the art world with. These women inspired her and likewise she was an inspiration for them. Despite the fact her accomplishments were as relevant as those of her colleagues, her oeuvre received much less attention. Kanaga spent little time self-promoting since she was always more interested in cultivating the affective bonds with the people closest to her.



Louise Dahl-Wolfe, circa 1928

Consuelo Kanaga

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CURATOR

Drew Sawyer

DATES

From May 30 to August 25, 2024

OPENING TIMES

Mondays (except public holidays): 2 pm to 8 pm
Tuesdays to Saturdays: 11 am to 8 pm
Sundays and public holidays: 11 am to 7 pm
(Last access: 30 minutes before closing time.
Visitors must leave the galleries 10 minutes before closing time)

TICKET PRICES

Standard: 5 €
Reduced: 3 €
Free entry: Mondays (except public holidays)

COMMENTED TOUR

Brief explanation of the main artistic aspects of the exhibition and its most outstanding works.

Hours:

Wednesdays and Thursdays: 5 pm to 8 pm

Fridays and Saturdays: 12 am to 2 pm and

5 pm to 8 pm

Sundays and holidays: 12 am to 2 pm

No additional cost upon entry.

Information at reception desk

(is not offered during the month of August)

AUDIO GUIDE

4 €. Spanish and English

BOOKSHOP

LAIE

Tel. 911 703 851

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Share your thoughts on the exhibition:

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<https://www.exposiciones.fundacionmapfre.org/KanagaFM>

Cover:

Young Girl in Profile, 1948

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