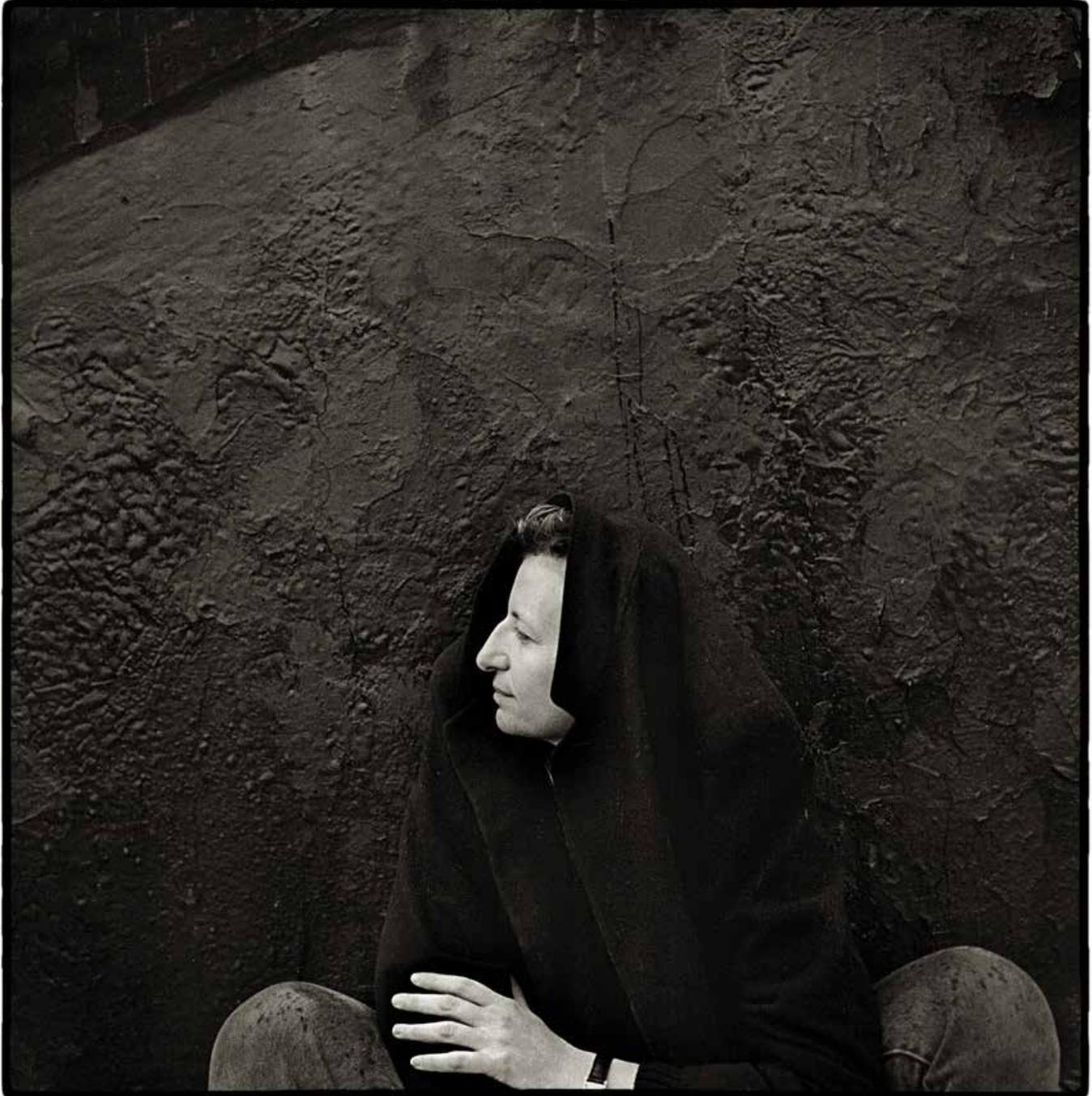


PETER ADAMS WHO SHOT THAT?

*A great camera can't make a great photograph, any more
than a great typewriter can write a great novel*
(Peter Adams, 1986)



Annie Leibovitz, photographed on the roof of her New York studio in the rain, in 1991. Annie hated her nose and asked why I wanted to photograph her in profile. I told her that is exactly why I wanted to photograph her that way.



Eddie Adams photographed in the snow, February 1991 on his upstate farm near Woodstock, New York. Eddie's most memorable photograph is probably the one of the Viet Cong soldier being shot in the head.



Left to right:
 Joe Rosenthal, Raising
 the Flag at Iwo Jima;
 Yousuf Karsh, Winston
 Churchill 1941;
 Eddie Adams, Street
 Execution of a Viet
 Cong Prisoner

For the past thirty years photographer Peter Adams has been recording and photographing master photographers all over the world. The result is a collection of some 500 portraits which he has named 'Who Shot That?'. Oz Arts caught up with Adams at his home in the Blue Mountains.

OzArts: What made you start this epic task?

PA: It all started in 1983 after a boozy lunch at a Surry Hills restaurant with a bunch of senior Australian photographers. Far too much of the amber liquid had been consumed, the plates of pasta and mussels had been cleared from the table and over coffee and mints we started playing photographic Trivial Pursuits. Questions like who made the photo of The Raising the Flag at Iwo Jima, The image of the Hindenberg bursting into flames, the well known gruff portrait of Winston Churchill and the street scene of the Viet Cong prisoner being shot in the head—and for some reason I seemed to know most of the answers. Someone who had emptied more than his fair share of wine glasses—and wasn't about to take his own advice anyway—suggested that I should do a book on it. I seem to remember my reply was far from flattering!

OzArts: So what changed your mind?

PA: Well, I started out by trying to find an existing book. I found books on individual photographers—which were primarily collections of their work—but I was amazed there were very few on what the photographers were like as people. And most of those were books of snapshots - not 'in depth' essays—for example Bill Jays book 'Photographers Observed'. I was horrified! Here was a group of people, many now in their dotage, who had witnessed and visually recorded the entire history of the world.

OzArts: Why do you say 'dotage'?

PA: Many of the photographers were in their 70s and 80s when I photographed them—and have since died. Alfred Eisenstaedt was 91 when I interviewed him in the Time-Life building in New York—till working 4 days a week! A great testimony to the magazine and to him. I mean, this is 30 years after many people have taken down their shingles and put their feet up in front of the fire! And in the adjoining office was Carl Mydans, who was 86—and still doing assignments!

OzArts: Tell me about Eisenstaedt and Mydans...

PA: Eisenstaedt is probably best known for his photograph of the sailor kissing the nurse in Times Square, on VJ day... Mydans photographed General Douglas MacArthur wading ashore in the Philippines—an image now known as the 'I Shall Return!' picture. The General waded ashore several times so the press could get a decent picture—here's nothing new about manipulating the press! Incidentally, 80% of these photographers have died since I met them—perhaps not a great recommendation for being photographed by Peter Adams!

OzArts: Did the photographers give you much time?

PA: Hell no! Most only gave me an hour. They were all very busy and some were very hard to gain access to. For instance, Annie Leibovitz had all sorts of PR people and managers who interviewed me before I was allowed to meet her. And, of course, photographers like Lord Snowdon and Lord Litchfield were naturally protected by layers of minders. Others were just difficult to access because of their current assignments—French photographer Marc Riboud was busy covering the 'Butcher of Lyon' trial (the Klaus Barbie trial). To work with him I had to sleep in a train corridor and travel with him to Lyon. I wasn't planning to, but the train left early and I got stuck on it!

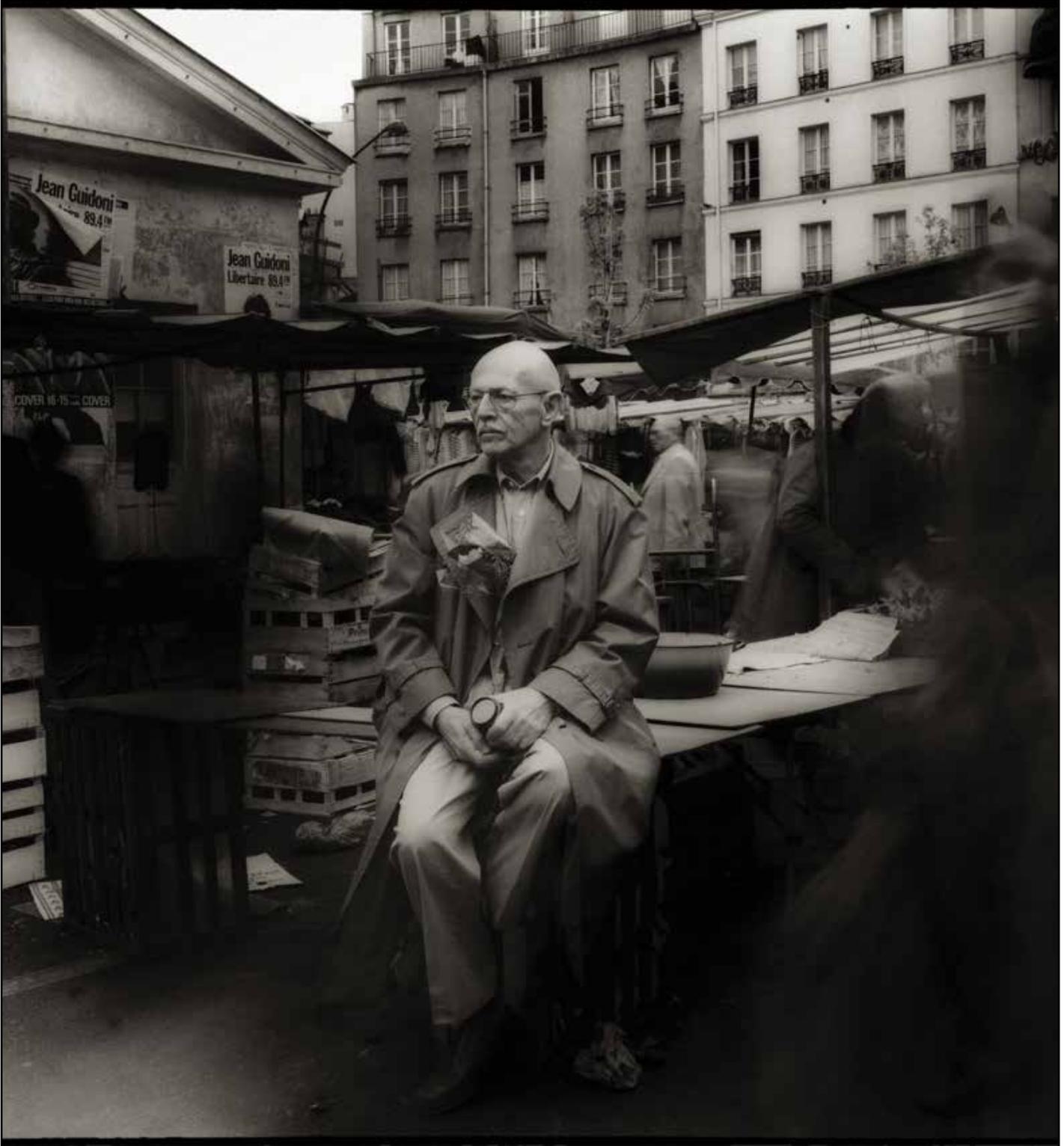
OzArts: With so little time, how did you approach the interviews?

PA: I wanted the photographers—with one or two exceptions – to face the camera and acknowledge that I was there. I wasn't trying to make casual snapshots; these were always intended to be quasi-formal portraits. I also wanted my pictures to work as 'complementary to' or 'in contrast to' the photographer's own work. Of course I wasn't always successful. They would usually say how much time they could give me—perhaps 1 to 2 hours. Whatever it was, I always spent three quarters of that time talking to them on a tape recorder. Digital wasn't around when I started and, sadly, many of these recordings are beginning to deteriorate.

OzArts: What's your best memory?

PA: The whole thing really... it was like attending 500 great lectures. I learnt a huge amount and feel privileged to have

Willie Ronis, Paris



spent time with them and even more amazed that they gave me that time.

OzArts: Are there many women and young photographers in the collection?

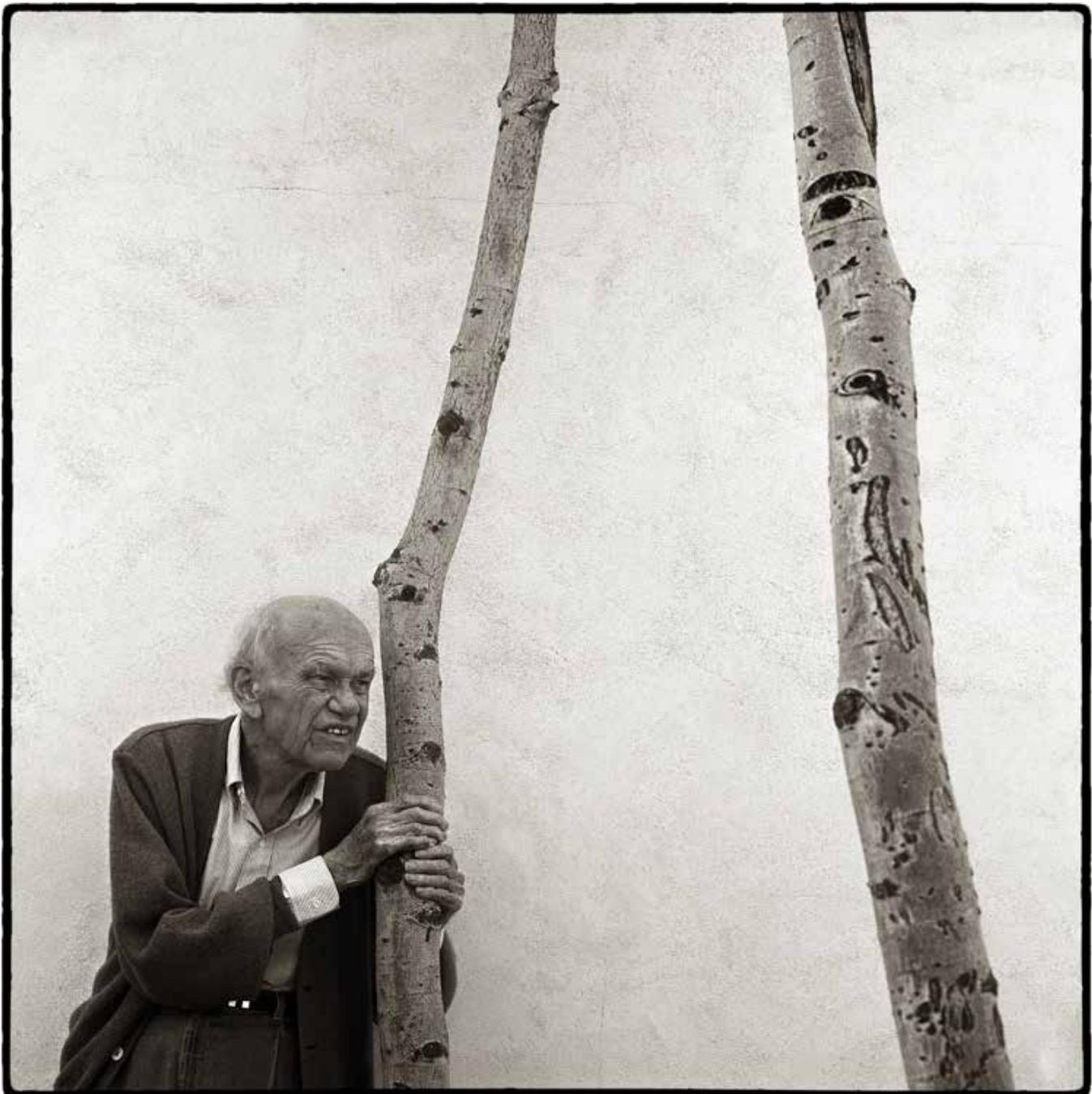
PA: About 20% of the photographers in the collection are women—which is roughly the proportion of women who were working as photographers when I started the

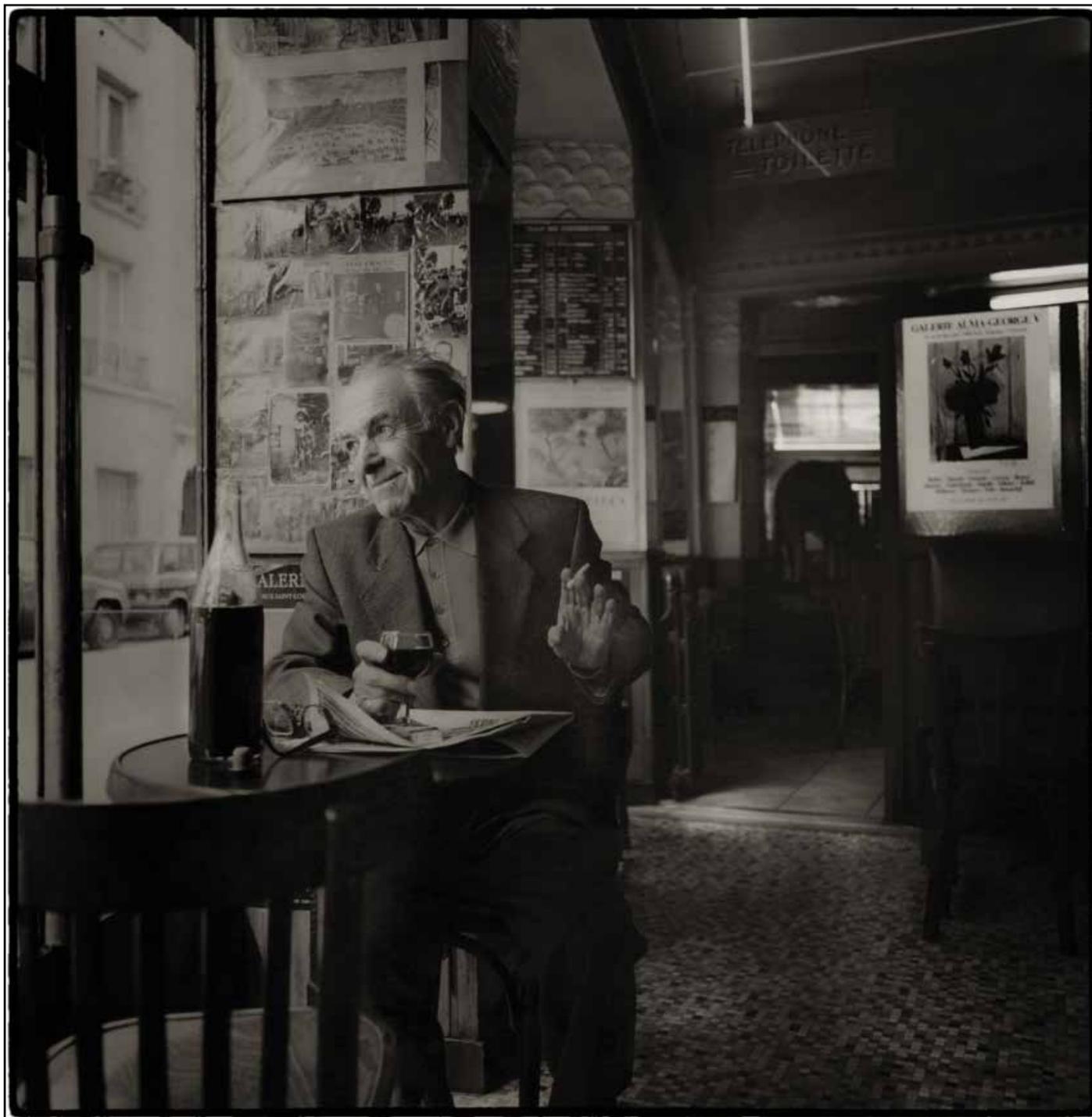
project. Perhaps the number was low because in its early days, cameras and equipment were heavy and not very appealing to women. Of course it's different now with miniaturised cameras and digital capture. But young photographers have always been difficult to pick—they have one great image that attracts you, but how can you determine if they are going to do the hard yards and still be a great image maker twenty years down the track? I did try. In America alone I interviewed 20 young photographers –



Left to right: Alfred Eisenstaedt, VJ Day Times Square, 1945; Marc Riboud, Jane Rose Kasmir, Vietnam Protest March 1967; Willie Ronis, Le Nu Provencal, 1949

Below: Beaumont Newhall, Arizona





but I was only proven correct twice, with my inclusion of Michael Kenna and David Burton.

OzArts: Will you publish the collection?

PA: Not the full collection. I was never able to find a publisher prepared to take the risk! If the entire collection was published with each photographer assigned perhaps four pages and a 1200 word text—there would need to be six volumes! No, I can't say I blame the publishers.

OzArts: Has it been exhibited?

PA: A couple of times, yes. It makes a great exhibition with

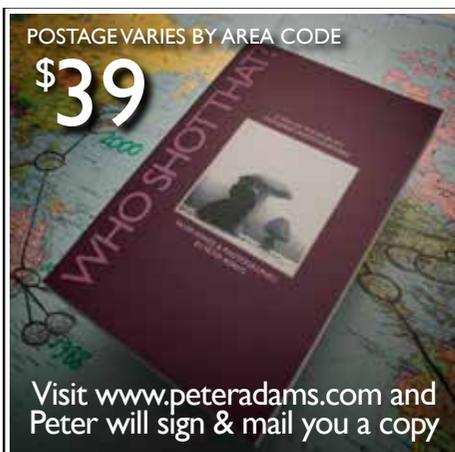
Above,
Robert Doisneau,
Paris

Right,
Robert Doisneau,
l'Enfer, 1952





Yousuf Karsh, Ottawa



my portrait, the photographer's best known image and their best quote. A small book entitled 'Who Shot That?' was published for the Monash Art Gallery exhibition in 2005. Towards the end of this year I plan to publish a large volume under the original title 'A Few of the Legends'.

OzArts: You will be 71 this year—is the project finished?

PA: No, not really! It never can be—hence the title 'A Few of the Legends'. I am travelling through Europe this summer to photograph a couple of young digital image-makers to complete the project—but there can never be an end....



Left: Marc Riboud, Lyon,
Below: Joe Rosenthal, San Francisco





Patrick Litchfield, Shugborough Hall

Peter Adams is currently living and working in the Blue Mountains as a writer, photographer, sculptor and furniture maker.