Out of Hours Photography

IN THE SHADOW OF TYRANNY

EDITH TUDOR-HART

Scottish National Portrait Gallery,
Edinburgh, 2 March–26 May 2013

In the Shadow of Tyranny, an exhibition of Edith Tudor-Hart's photography, celebrates the life as well as the work of an intrepid voyeur and rumoured Soviet agent, and a marvellous photographer. Born Edith Suschitzky in 1908 and raised as a radical socialist, her early pictures reflected the interwar paradoxes of her hometown 'Red' Vienna, lamenting mass unemployment while extolling working-class solidarity. An evident concern for widespread poverty contrasts with a celebration of successful social endeavours like municipal leisure facilities and housing projects. Images of May Day celebrations exemplify the working-class vigour of 1920s Vienna, and a rendering of the 'Karl-Marx-Hof', an imposing housing estate built by the Social Democratic Party, testifies to the generous welfare effort that made Vienna a socialist

beacon. Yet surreptitiously undermining this political idealism is the sinister *Swastikas in Shadow* that heralded the glaring Nazi threat which culminated in the Anschluss of 1938. From a caption, we learn that the Karl-Marx-Hof was shelled and surrendered in 1934.

Suschitzky's work continued in Britain upon her marriage to Alex Tudor-Hart, a trauma surgeon whose son Julian is the British GP who famously devised the Inverse Care Law.¹ She described London's districts as the 'bleakest' in Europe, the most inequitable. Her photographs there are at once artful social commentary and jarring socialist propaganda. One widely reproduced piece, *Child Staring into Bakery Window* synthesised a popular anger at social inequality, by juxtaposing the ragged, besmeared child with the decadent bakery shelf bulging tarts and buns, so close to hand yet still out of reach. Elsewhere, a pet bulldog pampered in a beauty parlour opposes a grimy family crammed into a slum, while a lady at the Chelsea Flower Show, complete with feather boa, accompanies

Edith Tudor-Hart, Untitled (Ultraviolet Light Treatment, South London Hospital for Women and Children), about 1935, Modern silver gelatine print from archival negative, 30.30 x 30.00 cm, Scottish National Portrait Gallery: Archive presented by Wolfgang Suschitzky 2004.

Edith Tudor-Hart, Untitled (Child Staring into Bakery Window), about 1935, Modern silver gelatine print from archival negative, 35.30 x 30.00 cm, Scottish National Portrait Gallery: Archive presented by Wolfgang Suschitzky 2004.

sweaty miners' portraits from South Wales and Tyneside. Notably, in a photograph of a hunger march from the Rhondda Valley, the marchers smile at their diminutive and exotic Central European photographer (who must have been perched on a high wall). They knew that Edith was on their side.

In a final series called *A School Where Love is a Cure*, Tudor-Hart leaves behind the political appositions in favour of a more intimate and sympathetic study of Camphill School in Aberdeen where she undoubtedly rediscovered the patience and compassion of her Montessori youth. These contemplative images of children's lessons and play are more social optimism than criticism and suitably concluded a photographic career that remained dedicated to her socialist principles. From Vienna to Aberdeen, Tudor-Hart's lens articulated working-class identity, promoted political revolution, and boosted social welfare; a thematic rainbow archived in black and white.

Now that spring has sprung, and about time too, *In the Shadow of Tyranny* is a very good reason for jumping on a train to Edinburgh.

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REFERENCE

1. Tudor-Hart J. The Inverse Care Law. *Lancet* 1971; **297**(7696): 405–412.