



611. A. J. LIEBLING, NEW YORK, 1960

(French, 1908-2004)

Gelatin silver print.

13 3/4 x 9 1/4" (35 x 23.5 cm).

Gift of the photographer

Audio courtesy of Acoustiguide

PETER GALASSI:

Cartier-Bresson was one of the great portraitists of the 20th century. He liked above all to photograph people in their own environments.

This is a portrait of A.J. Liebling, [a] marvelous American journalist who was most closely associated with The New Yorker magazine from the mid-'30s through the '60s.

The pictures are very simple, you might say even that his strategy for making a good portrait was to avoid the pitfalls of making a bad portrait. (Laughs) [And] to capture a distinctive gesture. As in this case of Liebling sticking his thumb into his armpit.

There's no way to really know, and you don't need to know, whether this is something that Liebling did all the time or not because it makes him in the picture an individual. It stresses the fact that it's this guy, and nobody else.

Now in some cases, the gesture could be representative of a particular person or directly symbolic. Elsewhere in the portrait section there's a picture of George Balanchine, the great ballet master, and the way that he's gesturing is absolutely about his mastery of ballet.