



Portrait by John Banting, c.1934

HUMPHREY SPENDER

Born in London in 1910 to a German Jewish mother and English father Humphrey Spender studied Art History at Freiburg before training as an architect at the Architectural Association in London. He worked initially as a studio photographer and then as a freelance photo-journalist after being invited by a probation officer to provide evidence of the poor living conditions in London's East End (that were thought to contribute to crime in the area). He was subsequently commissioned by the Left Review to document the Jarrow Crusade (1936) and a British Union of Fascists rally at Earls Court and by Mass Observation to record the lives of working people in Bolton and Blackpool. His photographs for the latter, a part-anthropological, part-Surrealist study, were taken surreptitiously with a Leica concealed under his Mackintosh raincoat.

Between 1935 and 1937 he worked as a photographer for the Daily Mirror under the pseudonym Lensman before being employed to document cities across Britain for Picture Post. During this time he also travelled extensively in continental Europe. In the early 1940s he worked as an official war photographer before largely abandoning photography in the 1950s to concentrate on painting and producing murals, mosaics, and designs for wallpaper and textiles (for Sandersons and Edinburgh Weavers amongst others). He produced public artworks for the Television Pavilion at the Festival of Britain and for the P&O cruise ships Canberra and Oriana.

His brother was the poet Stephen Spender and he went to school with W.H. Auden and also Christopher Isherwood for whom he designed the dust-jacket for his novel *Goodbye to Berlin* (1939) His portrait of Isherwood standing at a window overlooking Nollendorf Platz in Berlin was also reproduced on the cover of *Christopher and His Kind* (1973).

In the late 1960s he commissioned Team 4 (Richard and Su Rogers and Norman Foster) to design a modest home and studio near Maldon in Essex. This steel-framed structure was realised in 1968 by the Rogers (Team 4 having dissolved) and is now Grade II listed.

He taught in the Royal College of Art textile department for 20 years and in 2004 was enrolled as an Honorary Fellow of the Royal Photographic Society. A major retrospective of his photographs was mounted at the Yale Center for British Art in Connecticut in 1997. His paintings and photographs are held in many public collections. He died in March 1995.