

6 VISUAL ARTS



Video Activity 15: The Falling Soldier

<http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/audioslideshow/2013/oct/29/robert-capa-spanish-civil-war>

1 Answer the questions before watching the video.

- What do you know about Robert Capa?
- What's the title of his book?
- Who was he in love with while in Spain?

2 What you are going to hear is the only known recording of Robert Capa's voice and until its very recent discovery by Brian Wallis (the chief curator of the International Center of Photography), there was no way to know what Robert Capa sounded like. He says that the "Falling Soldier" photo – taken in Andalusia – came while he was in the trenches with twenty green Republican soldiers with old rifles "who were dying every minute" as they faced a Fascist machine gun.

SCRIPT

Capa: You see, this is a cagey question, because you never know if you have a press picture or not. Because when you shoot, nearly every picture is the same to you, and a press picture is born in the imagination of editors and public who see them. I had, once, one picture which was appreciated much more than the other ones, and I certainly did not know when I shot it that it was an especially good picture. It happened in Spain. It was very much at the beginning of my career as a photographer, and very much at the beginning of the Spanish Civil War, and war was kind of romantic, if you can see anything like that.

Interviewer 1: No, I can't!



Capa: It was there, because it was in Andalusia and those people were very green, they were not soldiers, and they were dying every minute with great gestures and they figured that was really for liberty and the right kind of fight and they were enthused, and I was there in the trench with about 20 *milicianos*, and those 20 *milicianos* had 20 old rifles, and on the other hill facing us was a Franco machine-gun. So my *milicianos* were shooting in the direction of that machine-gun for five minutes and then stood up and said “*Vámonos!*” and got out of that trench and began to go after that machine gun. Sure enough, that machine-gun opened up

and mowed them down. So what was left of them came back and again took potshots in the direction of the machine-gun, which certainly was clever enough not to answer, and after five minutes again they said “*Vámonos!*” and they got mowed down again.

This thing repeated itself about three or four times, so the fourth time I just kind of put my camera above my head and even didn’t look and clicked a picture when they moved over the trench. And that was all. I didn’t ever look at my pictures there and I sent my pictures back with a lot of other pictures that I took.

I stayed in Spain for three months, and when I came back I was a very famous photographer because that camera which I held above my head just caught a man at the moment when he was shot.

Interviewer 2: That was a great picture!

Capa: That was probably the best picture I ever took. I never saw the picture in the frame because the camera was far above my head.

Interviewer 2: Of course, there’s one condition that you’ve got to create yourself, Bob, in order to get a lucky picture like that, you’ve got to spend a lot of time in trenches.

Capa: Yeah, this habit I would like to lose.



3 Decide if the statements below are true (T) or false (F). Correct the false ones.

	TRUE	FALSE
a. Robert Capa chose the best photos to be published among which "The Falling Soldier".		
b. "The Falling Soldier" was shot in Andalusia.		
c. Robert Capa stayed in Spain three years.		
d. Republican soldiers had new machine guns.		
e. Robert Capa's voice was recorded in many occasions.		
f. Nobody knew what Capa's voice sounded like before this recent discovery.		

4 Fill in the gaps with a word taken from the video.

- Capa was in the with 20 green Republican soldiers.
- Brian Wallis is the chief of the International Center of Photography.
- "I sent my pictures with lots of other pictures."
- The "..... Soldier" photo was taken in Andalusia.
- "I was a very famous photographer because my head just a man at the moment when he was shot".

5 The Falling Soldier is controversial and some think it was staged. Until this recent recording nobody had ever heard Robert Capa's version. Here are some opinions about it. After reading them answer the questions.

"To insist upon knowing whether the photograph actually shows a man at the moment he has been hit by a bullet is both morbid and trivializing, for the picture's greatness ultimately lies in its symbolic implications, not in its literal accuracy as a report on the death of a particular man." *Richard Whelan, Capa's biographer*

"It is irresponsible and itself trivializing [to say that the true story behind the photo does not matter]. Would the photograph really have effectively, affectively, the same symbolic implications if Capa had hired an actor for his shot? We take the force of it because we take the photographer's word for it." *Christopher Ricks, cultural critic*

"The Falling Soldier, authentic or fake, is ultimately a record of Capa's political bias and idealism. Indeed, Capa would soon come to experience the brutalizing insanity and death of illusions that all witnesses who get close enough to the 'romance' of war inevitably confront." *Alex Kershaw, Capa biographer*

- Do scholars dealing with the issue share the same opinion?
- Why doesn't the true story behind the picture really matter according to Richard Whelan?
- Why does the true story behind the picture matter according to Christopher Ricks?