



NEWS RELEASE

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THE FRICK PITTSBURGH PRESENTS

Irving Penn

BEYOND BEAUTY

***Retrospective exhibition of modern master photographer
opens June 17 at The Frick Art Museum***

PITTSBURGH, PA, June 8, 2017—The Frick Pittsburgh will celebrate the centenary of iconic American photographer Irving Penn (1917–2009) by presenting a major exhibition of his work this summer. Featuring 146 photographs representing all phases of this extraordinary artist’s long career, *Irving Penn: Beyond Beauty* is an enthralling, thought-provoking retrospective that goes far beyond Penn’s well-known and familiar persona as one of the world’s most famous fashion photographers. Beginning with social realist images taken in the late 1930s and concluding with photographs made in the 21st century, *Irving Penn: Beyond Beauty* provides both an introduction to Penn’s work and an overview of his seven-decade career and myriad accomplishments.

Irving Penn: Beyond Beauty opens to the public on Saturday, June 17, 2017, following a Frick members’ preview event on June 16, which would have been the artist’s 100th birthday. The exhibition will remain

on view through Sunday, September 10, 2017. Admission is free for Frick members. Non-members: \$10; \$8 students and seniors; \$6 youth (16 and under); free for children ages 5 and under and active duty military and their immediate families.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Born in Plainfield New Jersey, Irving Penn attended the Pennsylvania Museum School of the Industrial Arts from 1934–38 where he studied drawing, painting, and graphic and industrial design. One of his instructors was Alexey Brodovitch. Best-known as the art director for *Harper's Bazaar* magazine from 1934–1958, Brodovitch had been hired to help infuse the magazine with a more modern sensibility. An influential teacher, Brodovitch was particularly adept at helping gifted students broaden their vision. Penn ended up interning with Brodovitch at *Harper's Bazaar*, which published a number of his early drawings and photographs. Though he probably never took a formal course in photography, Penn used the money he earned at *Harper's* to buy a camera, and spent his free time on the streets of Philadelphia and New York, taking what he later described as “camera notes.” These pictures show Penn’s early interest in European surrealism as well as a documentary spirit today associated most with Penn’s contemporary, Walker Evans.

Penn claimed Eugène Atget, a photographer known for his images of Paris and its surroundings at the turn of the 20th century, as a major influence. Atget’s straightforward pictures were promoted by the surrealists during the 1930s and received widespread attention in both Europe and the Americas. Like Atget, Penn treated the storefronts and architecture of the urban environment as his subjects, finding art and poetry while documenting the world around him.

In 1941, declaring a “need to paint,” Penn left New York and traveled through the American South en route to Mexico City, a cosmopolitan haven for intellectuals and artists. He returned to New York after a year, not with paintings, but with photographs. In his travels he was often attracted to subjects in African-American neighborhoods, photographing people, in his words, “as chance composed them, lounging in front of barber shops and shoeshine parlors. The camera in my hands did not seem to intrude.”

When Penn returned to New York in 1943, he began work as assistant to *Vogue's* new art director, Alexander Liberman, beginning a creative collaboration that lasted throughout both men’s careers. Penn’s first assignments were to sketch cover designs that would be photographed by others. He soon

began to make the photographs himself, learning how to operate an 8 x 10 inch studio camera and compose still-life arrangements that brought a new look to mid-20th-century magazines.

Within ten years Penn's photography was well established and he had begun making work in the wide variety of genres that characterized his broad vision and questing perfectionism. Works from the 1940s include portraits of artists like Giorgio de Chirico (whom he recognized on the streets of Rome), Salvador Dalí, and Joan Miro. He also began shooting still lifes, and making ethnographic portraits, as well as capturing the chic post-war world of fashion. His long association with *Vogue* resulted in 150 magazine covers and Penn becoming indelibly associated with the world of fashion; a selection of *Vogue* covers are included in the exhibition as well as a rare travel film shot by his wife, supermodel Lisa Fonssagrives-Penn.

In December 1948 Penn traveled to Peru for a fashion feature called "Flying Down to Lima" which was published in *Vogue* the following year. When everyone else went home Penn stayed, traveling further inland to the remote Andean town of Cuzco. He rented the studio of a local photographer and made portraits of Quechua Indians and festival participants who had come to town for the Christmas holiday. His personal photographic adventure, which resulted in these photographs of an unfamiliar culture, was his first foray into what became a favored way of working, as he alternated one genre or type of project with another. With these works he established a pattern he continued all of his life.

Penn's portraits of tradesmen in their work clothes, begun in Paris in 1950 at the suggestion of Alexander Liberman, and later continued in London and New York, seem to reject fashion and embrace anthropology. Shot in the same studio used for couture-wearing fashion models, Penn focused his lens on individuals engaged in the "small trades"—vocations that, by the end of World War II, were fast disappearing. These workers were photographed with the same respect and care that he approached all subjects, revealing great dignity and beauty.

Photographs of street trash were among the most controversial Penn ever made. Smashed paper cups and other detritus were photographed and meticulously printed using the expensive techniques of platinum and palladium printing. It seemed an ironic, perhaps even rude, comment on the world of luxury for which Penn was known. But by the 1970s, photographers interested in challenging the limits of picture making were exploring earlier, more elaborate forms of printing. This renewed interest in the surface and materiality of the photographic print helped forge a new audience for Penn, who was

dependent on the reproducibility of his images in the mostly black-and-white pages of magazines.

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

The exhibition is presented in sections beginning with Penn's early work in Philadelphia and New York, and moving into his work in the American South, Mexico and in Europe during WWII. After the war, Penn's developing interest in portrait photography and travel is explored, as are some of his most memorable commercial images, which quintessentially embody mid-century chic. Later portraits, still-lives, and an increased interest in travel and ethnic portraiture, feature in photographs taken from the 1960s on, and the exhibition concludes with Penn showing a renewed interest in photographing nudes, continuing to innovate an unorthodox approach to fashion photographs, and embarking on a gritty series of images of found street objects like cigarette butts, cups, and discarded gloves.

As a whole, the exhibition provides a thought-provoking immersion in one of the greatest artists of the 20th-century's career, which gives an expansive view of the second half of the 20th century itself. His work is remarkable for its consistent vision across genres, and though beauty unifies all of his varied photographic projects—Penn's achievements go beyond conventional beauty and completely transform how we understand fashion, photography, and art.

EXHIBITION ORGANIZATION AND SUPPORT

Irving Penn: Beyond Beauty is organized by the Smithsonian American Art Museum with generous support from ART MENTOR FOUNDATION LUCERNE, Sakurako and William Fisher, The William R. Kenan Jr. Endowment Fund, The Lauder Foundation—Leonard and Judy Lauder Fund, Edward Lenkin and Roselin Atzwanger, The Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation, Margery and Edgar Masinter, The Margery and Edgar Masinter Exhibitions Fund, the James F. Petersen Charitable Fund in honor of Tania and Tom Evans, The Bernie Stadiem Endowment Fund, and the Trellis Fund. The C. F. Foundation in Atlanta supports the museum's traveling exhibition program, *Treasures to Go*.

PUBLICATION

The exhibition is accompanied by a 240-page catalogue, co-published by The Irving Penn Foundation and the Smithsonian American Art Museum and distributed by Yale University Press. In addition to 20 color and 147 black-and-white illustrations, the softcover catalogue features an essay by exhibition curator,

Merry Foresta, who was Smithsonian American Art Museum’s curator of photography from 1983 to 1999. Foresta’s essay introduces Penn to a younger generation and delves into his use of photography to respond to social and cultural change. The catalogue will be available for purchase in the Frick Museum Store and online (\$45 non-members/\$40.50 members).

ABOUT THE FRICK PITTSBURGH

Located on the Pittsburgh estate of late-19th-century industrialist Henry Clay Frick, The Frick Pittsburgh is the steward of collections left as a legacy to the people of Pittsburgh by Frick’s daughter, Helen Clay Frick. The permanent collections include fine and decorative arts, cars, carriages, historic objects, and buildings. The Frick experience includes The Frick Art Museum, the Car and Carriage Museum, Clayton, the Frick family Gilded Age mansion, and six acres of beautifully landscaped lawns and gardens. Also included are an Education Center, the Frick children’s playhouse (designed by renowned architects Alden & Harlow), a large working greenhouse (also designed by Alden & Harlow), The Café at the Frick, and the Grable Visitor Center, which houses the Frick Museum Store.

GENERAL INFORMATION

The Frick Pittsburgh is located at 7227 Reynolds Street in Pittsburgh’s Point Breeze neighborhood. Free parking is available in the Frick’s off-street lot or along adjacent streets.

The Frick is open 10:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Tuesday–Sunday; 10:00 a.m.–9:00 p.m. Friday; and is closed Mondays and major holidays. To make reservations, or for information, the public should call 412-371-0600, or visit the Frick online at TheFrickPittsburgh.org.

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