

THE MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM PRESENTS
ICONIC PORTRAITS OF ARTISTS AND WRITERS BY
LEGENDARY PHOTOGRAPHER IRVING PENN

First Modern Photography Exhibition at the Morgan
Celebrates Six Decades of Penn's Career
Capturing Artistic Luminaries of the Twentieth Century

Close Encounters: Irving Penn Portraits of Artists and Writers
January 18 through April 13, 2008

****Press Preview: Thursday, January 17, 10 a.m. until NOON****

New York, NY, December 5, 2007— For the first time in its history, The Morgan Library & Museum will present an exhibition devoted solely to modern photography, showcasing the institution's first major set of acquisitions in this field. Opening January 18, 2008, and on view only at the Morgan through April 13, *Close Encounters: Irving Penn Portraits of Artists and Writers* features sixty-seven portraits of some of the twentieth-century's most influential artists, authors, and performers by legendary photographer Irving Penn (b. 1917).



Pablo Picasso, Cannes, France, 1957
Gelatin silver print, selenium toned (2000)
26 3/4 x 26 9/16 inches
The Morgan Library & Museum: Purchased as the gift of
Richard L. Menschel and with the support of The Horace W.
Goldsmith Fund for Americana and The Margaret T. Morris
Fund: 2007.69. Copyright 1960 by Irving Penn

This rare collection of gelatin silver prints was acquired by the Morgan in 2007 and constitutes an extraordinary visual record of some of the greatest creative minds of the period, including Pablo Picasso, Georgia O'Keeffe, Salvador Dalí, T. S. Eliot, Truman Capote, Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, Aaron Copland, Richard Rodgers, and Oscar Hammerstein II. Featuring portraits from every decade of Penn's sixty-year career to date—beginning with a 1944 photograph of Giorgio de Chirico and ending with a 2006 portrait of Jasper Johns—*Close Encounters* celebrates Penn as one of the great portrait photographers of our time and captures the feel of New York as a cultural capital during the postwar years.

Based in New York City for more than fifty years, Irving Penn has documented numerous international artists and writers including Max Ernst, Frederick Kiesler, Jorge Luis Borges and Simone de Beauvoir as well as New Yorkers, both native and adopted, who shaped metropolitan life, such as Langston Hughes, George Balanchine, Igor Stravinsky, Saul Steinberg, Woody Allen, Louise Bourgeois, and Rudolf Nureyev. Many of the portraits on

view at the Morgan bear witness to a time when incredible talent from Europe was migrating to New York, transforming the American art scene.

“Irving Penn’s incisive portraits illustrate a rich and defining period in this city’s cultural history,” said Charles E. Pierce, Jr., director of The Morgan Library & Museum. “Many of Penn’s subjects are artistic and literary icons whose own drawings, musical scores, manuscripts, and books are represented in the Morgan’s growing twentieth-century collections. For all these reasons, we could not imagine a more fitting home for these magnificent portraits than the Morgan.”

“Each of these works is a vivid record of the encounter between Penn and his subject,” said guest curator Peter Barberie. “If a fundamental task of portraiture is to capture subjects differently than they present themselves to the world, then Penn has succeeded admirably. He enters into hard negotiation with every personality that stops in front of his camera and, very often, he wins.”

Irving Penn began his career as a photographer in the 1940s working for *Vogue* in New York. His compositions helped define the look of the magazine and established a groundbreaking aesthetic for modernist photography. Penn’s signature style is pared down, reducing portraiture to its essential elements by capturing subjects in the light of the studio and using only simple props to facilitate the composition. His method involves an intense engagement between subject and photographer that permeates every one of his images.

More than one third of the Morgan’s exhibition focuses on Penn’s work from the 1940s, documenting the evolution and maturation of his style. In 1947 he began photographing subjects seated on or in front of a draped rug, including Salvador Dalí, who usually dominated photographers and the portraits they made of him. On Penn’s rug, however, Dalí looks caught, though stylish and defiant. In 1948 Penn constructed a temporary corner out of movable walls within his studio and directed sitters to inhabit the restricted space. Among the 1948 corner photographs on view at the Morgan, Truman Capote is shown armed with an overcoat and a chair, playing to his childlike persona; Marcel Duchamp is elegantly posed and dressed, a svelte, tall line echoing that of the corner itself; and Georgia O’Keeffe, who as Alfred Stieglitz’s wife and model was frequently photographed, stands warily without pose.

Penn’s portraits from the 1950s, ten of which are featured in the exhibition, begin to capture many of his subjects up close, sometimes cropping their forms to accentuate the two-dimensional design of a composition or filling the large picture frame with a bust or just a head. Penn’s iconic 1957 image of Picasso cloaks the artist’s face in the shadows of a wide-brimmed hat and the folds of a dark overcoat, leaving only the piercing stare of a single illuminated eye to radiate from the center of the photograph.

Throughout his career, Penn has also produced celebrated group portraits. Examples include the 1967 photograph *Rock Groups*, which captures Janis Joplin and her band, Big Brother and the Holding Company, alongside the Grateful Dead in San Francisco at a moment when both groups were in the earliest stages of fame. A 1960 photograph of the architect and designer Frederick Kiesler with his younger counterpart, the painter Willem de Kooning, depicts two European artists who were principals of the New York art world of the 1950s.

Since the 1960s, Penn has often reduced his portraits to the busts or even just the heads of his sitters. The theater of the studio recedes altogether, leaving just the photographer and the subject in a tug-of-war over the final image. Sometimes subjects close their eyes—for instance, the portraits of Ingmar Bergman (1964), Arthur Miller (1983), and Louise Bourgeois (1992). Only rarely does a subject gaze back at Penn with apparent total acquiescence, as in the powerful 2006 portrait of Jasper Johns.

Thirty-five of the works in the show are the gift of Mr. Penn. The acquisition of the remaining thirty-two was made possible through the efforts of Morgan director Charles E. Pierce, Jr.; Morgan trustee and vice president Richard L. Menschel; and Peter MacGill, president of Pace/MacGill Gallery, who has represented Mr. Penn for many years.

This exhibition is made possible by a generous gift from Richard and Ronay Menschel.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Irving Penn was born in Plainfield, New Jersey, in 1917 and studied design at the Philadelphia Museum School of Industrial Art. After moving to New York, where he resides today, Penn worked under *Vogue* magazine art director Alexander Liberman, who encouraged him to take his first color photograph—a still life—which ultimately became the October 1, 1943, cover of the magazine.

Penn's close collaboration with *Vogue* continues to the present day, and he is a contributor to other magazines and commercial clients in America and abroad. He has published eleven books and has had exhibitions at a number of major museums, including The Museum of Modern Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Art Institute of Chicago, and the National Gallery of Art. His photographs are also included in the permanent collections of these institutions.

PUBLIC PROGRAMS

The Morgan will offer a number of special programs held in conjunction with *Close Encounters*. Please check www.themorgan.org/public for a schedule of events.

ALSO ON VIEW

SELECTED WORKS FROM THE MORGAN'S COLLECTIONS BY IRVING PENN'S SUBJECTS

Some of Irving Penn's subjects featured in the exhibition are renowned figures whose letters, manuscripts, drawings and musical scores are included in the Morgan's permanent collections. Beginning in January 2008, a selection of these original works is on view as part of *Highlights from the Morgan's Collections*, featuring examples such as Tennessee Williams's manuscript diary, John Cage's *Three dances for two prepared pianos* music manuscript, Igor Stravinsky's *Ragtime* music manuscript, T.S. Eliot's autographed draft of the poem *Defence of the Islands*, an illustration by Joan Miró for a poem by Éluard, and an advertising poster for the Shený Silks Company by Georgia O'Keeffe.

THE MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM

A complex of buildings in the heart of New York City, The Morgan Library & Museum began as the private library of financier Pierpont Morgan, one of the preeminent collectors and cultural benefactors in the United States. Today it is a museum, independent research library, musical venue, architectural landmark, and historic site. Nearly a century after its founding, the Morgan maintains a unique position in the cultural life of New York City and is considered one of its greatest treasures. With the 2006 reopening of its newly renovated campus, designed by renowned architect Renzo Piano, the Morgan reaffirmed its role as an important repository for the history, art, and literature of Western civilization from 4000 B.C. to the twenty-first century.

GENERAL INFORMATION

The Morgan Library & Museum

225 Madison Avenue, at 36th Street, New York, NY 10016-3405

212-685-0008

www.themorgan.org

HOURS

Tuesday–Thursday, 10:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.; extended Friday hours, 10:30 a.m. to 9 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.; Sunday, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.; closed Monday, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day, and New Year's Day. The Morgan closes at 4 p.m. on Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve.

ADMISSION

\$12 for adults; \$8 for students, seniors (65 and over), and children (under 16); free to Members and children 12 and under accompanied by an adult. Admission is free on Fridays from 7 to 9 p.m. Admission to the McKim rooms is without charge during the following times: Tuesday, 3 to 5 p.m.; Friday, 7 to 9 p.m.; Sunday, 4 to 6 p.m. Admission is not required to visit the Morgan Shop.

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