



**Irving Penn**

*Picasso at La Californie, Cannes, France, 1957*

platinum/palladium print, 1974

National Gallery of Art, Washington, Gift of Irving Penn

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## IRVING PENN'S MASTERY OF THE PLATINUM PRINT EXPLORED IN NEW EXHIBITION AT THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

—Famous Photographer One of the

## **Great Master Printers in the Medium's History—**

Washington, DC— **Irving Penn: Platinum Prints**, on view June 19 through October 2, 2005, is the first major retrospective examination of renowned American photographer Irving Penn's platinum prints. The National Gallery of Art is the sole venue for the exhibition.

A meticulous craftsman, Penn (born 1917) has experimented extensively with platinum/palladium printing since the early 1960s, transforming his celebrated photographs into independent works of art with remarkably subtle, rich tonal ranges and luxurious textures. In 2002 and 2003 Penn gave the National Gallery of Art 17 unique collages known as the *Platinum Test Materials* and 85 platinum/palladium prints as well as archival material. Spanning most of Penn's innovative career from the 1940s to the late 1980s, this important collection represents all of Penn's genres: from fashion photographs and still lifes to portraits of some of the 20th century's most celebrated figures—Pablo Picasso, David Smith, and Colette, for example—and studies of anonymous individuals from around the world. Organized by the National Gallery of Art, the exhibition presents the collages and prints together for the first time.

“This collection eloquently and forcefully demonstrates Penn's important contributions to American photography, and reveals his ongoing pursuit of perfection in his art,” said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. “We are grateful to the artist for the scope and generosity of his gift, as well as to the funders who have made this important exhibition possible.”

### **Exhibition Support**

The exhibition is sponsored by Merrill Lynch.

“Merrill Lynch is proud of our association with the National Gallery of Art and we enthusiastically support their work in bringing important exhibitions to the public. We share a firm belief that the arts can expand horizons and enrich everyday life,” said Evan R. Chertkov, managing director, Merrill Lynch Global Private Client Group.

The exhibition is also supported by the Trellis Fund and The Ryna and Melvin Cohen

Family Foundation.

## The Exhibition

The exhibition presents works from all of Penn's genres organized chronologically, including portraits of famous celebrities and unknowns, fashion and ethnographic studies, and still lifes, along with the *Platinum Test Materials* collages.

**Portraits:** Widely celebrated for his portraits, Penn adeptly utilizes formal design elements to reveal the character and personality of his subjects. The exhibition includes many of Penn's iconic portraits, including *Colette, Paris* (1951; platinum/palladium print, 1976), and *Steinberg in Nose Mask, New York* (1966; platinum/palladium print, 1976). In the 1940s, Penn positioned his sitters in a small corner space made of two studio flats, a device of his own creation; one example on view is *Marcel Duchamp, New York* (1948; platinum/palladium print, 1979). Penn developed a more direct approach by the late 1950s, photographing subjects at close range, such as *Picasso at La Californie, Cannes, France* (1957; platinum/palladium print, 1974).

**Fashion Studies:** Examples of Penn's fashion studies, a steady part of his editorial assignments from *Vogue* for more than 50 years, are also on view as part of the collection. Penn came to fame immediately after World War II by presenting his models in simple settings, free from the theatricality that had characterized earlier fashion photographs. Many of the works are of his wife, his favorite model, seen in *Cocoa-Colored Balenciaga Dress (Lisa Fonssagrives-Penn), Paris* (1950; platinum/palladium print, 1979) and *Woman with Roses (Lisa Fonssagrives-Penn in Lafaurie Dress), Paris* (1950; platinum/palladium print, 1977).

**Ethnographic Subjects:** In 1948, after a fashion project in Lima, Peru, Penn flew to the town of Cuzco in the Andes. The Quechuan Indians he found there so captivated him that on impulse he rented the local photographer's studio. The exhibition includes *Cuzco Children* (1948; platinum/palladium print, 1978) among the works on view from that famous encounter. Fifteen years later, Penn would again take up ethnographic subjects, photographing such works as *Three Asaro Mud Men, New Guinea* (1970; platinum/palladium print, 1976) and *Two Guedras, Morocco* (1971; platinum/palladium

print, 1977), which are presented here with extraordinary detail, texture, and tone.

**Still Lives:** Over the years Penn has created many striking still lifes in both his commercial and personal work. In the first photographs he conceived as platinum prints, he produced a series of still-lives using urban detritus, such as cigarette butts and crushed paper; among them is *Archipelago, New York* (1975; platinum/palladium print, 1975). Pushing his technique still further, he made another series of still lifes in the late 1970s and early 1980s that tackled the challenges of revealing both the texture and changing tones of such disparate objects as steel blocks, human skulls, and leather shoes. Several striking examples are in the exhibition, including *Composition with Skull and Pear, New York* (1979; platinum/palladium print, 1981).

**Platinum Test Materials Collages:** The exhibition concludes with 12 *Platinum Test Materials* collages, which draw upon all of Penn's genres, and make provocative associations between the works. When Penn made his platinum prints, he often used test strips, positioned to capture a photograph's most relevant details and tonal range, instead of exposing full sheets of paper. In the late 1980s when he re-examined some of these strips, he was struck by their aesthetic qualities and attached several of them to large sheets of paper. By mixing together images from throughout his career, these collages reveal the diversity of his work and the unexpected juxtapositions between fashion and art, Western and non-Western ideals of beauty and adornment, and Penn's personal and commercial work.

## **Artist's Biography**

Irving Penn was born in 1917 in Plainfield, New Jersey. In 1934 he enrolled at the Philadelphia Museum School of Industrial Art, where he studied design with Alexey Brodovitch.

In 1938 he began a career in New York as a graphic artist. Then, after a year painting in Mexico, he returned to New York City and began work at *Vogue* magazine, where Alexander Liberman was art director.

Liberman encouraged Penn to take his first color photograph, a still life that became the October 1, 1943, cover of *Vogue*, beginning a fruitful collaboration with the magazine

that continues to this day. In addition to his editorial and fashion work for *Vogue*, Penn has photographed for other magazines and for a number of commercial clients in America and around the world.

He has published nine books of photographs: *Moments Preserved* (1960); *Worlds in a Small Room* (1974); *Inventive Paris Clothes* (1977); *Flowers* (1980); *Passage* (1991); *Irving Penn Regards The Work of Issey Miyake* (1999); *Still Life* (2001); *Earthly Bodies* (2002); *A Notebook at Random* (2004); and two books of drawings.

Penn's photographs are in the collections of major museums in America and throughout the world, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Moderna Museet in Stockholm, and the Museum of Modern Art in New York, which honored him with a retrospective exhibition in 1984. That exhibition was circulated to museums in twelve countries. In 1997, Penn made a major donation of prints and archival material to the Art Institute of Chicago. He made his gift of the *Platinum Test Materials* collages and 85 corresponding prints as well as archival material to the National Gallery of Art in 2002 and 2003.

Irving Penn lives and works in New York City.

### **Curator and Catalogue**

Sarah Greenough, curator and head of the department of photographs, National Gallery of Art, is the exhibition curator. The exhibition catalogue **Irving Penn: Platinum Prints** is written by Greenough. Published by the National Gallery of Art, Washington, in association with Yale University Press, New Haven and London, the book is available in the Gallery Shops, from the Gallery's Web site at [www.nga.gov/shop](http://www.nga.gov/shop) (<http://www.nga.gov/shop>), or by phone at 1-(800)-697-9350 or (202) 842-6002 for \$50 in hardcover (200 pages, 87 tritones, 5 duotones, and 20 color plates).

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## General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets along Constitution Avenue NW and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. With the exception of the atrium and library, the galleries in the East Building will be closing gradually beginning in July 2013 and will remain closed for approximately three years for Master Facilities Plan and renovations. For specific updates on gallery closings, visit [www.nga.gov/renovation](http://www.nga.gov/renovation) (<http://www.nga.gov/renovation>) .

For information call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176, or visit the Gallery's website at [www.nga.gov](http://www.nga.gov). Follow the Gallery on [Facebook](http://www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt) at [www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt](http://www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt) and on [Twitter](http://twitter.com/ngadc) at [twitter.com/ngadc](http://twitter.com/ngadc).

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

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