

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

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PRESS RELEASE

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AVEDON: *Beyond Beauty*

Through Saturday, 18 April 2015

Whenever I become absorbed in the beauty of a face, in the excellence of a single feature, I feel I've lost what's really there...been seduced by someone else's standard of beauty or by the sitter's own idea of the best in him. That's not usually the best. So each sitting becomes a contest.

—Richard Avedon

Gagosian Rome is pleased to present “Avedon: Beyond Beauty,” a career-spanning exhibition that includes nearly every editioned fashion photograph from Richard Avedon’s highly distinctive and influential oeuvre, as well as a number of his iconic portraits of female subjects.

As a young photographer's assistant in the U.S. Merchant Marine during WWII, Avedon was given the job to make identity photographs. He commented “I must have taken pictures of one hundred thousand faces before it occurred to me I was becoming a photographer.” Subsequently, from the outset of his professional career as a photographer, his command of composition, situation, and circumstance, and his erasure of the distinction between “art” and “commercial” photography resulted in a highly impactful body of work, whether celebrity portraiture, brand-defining commercial work, or gritty cultural and political documentary concerning race relations, poverty, and war.

From the beginning of his career as a fashion photographer in the 1940s, Avedon was renowned for his distinctive and transformative imagery, which challenged the boundaries of conventional beauty. Throughout sixty years, he captured with inventiveness, wit and insight both well-known and anonymous female subjects, from celebrities and models to friends and family. Fascinated by photography’s capacity for suggesting the personality and evoking the life of his subject, he also registered pose, attitude, clothing, and accessories as vital, revelatory elements of an image.

This exhibition emphasizes the breadth of Avedon’s creative and sometimes shocking representations of women, from intimate portraits to celebrated fashion photographs for *Harper’s Bazaar*, *Vogue*, *The New Yorker* and other publications. He set models in action, provoking them to appear questioning, unruly, vivacious, and confidently alive. The exhibition begins with the Early Paris Fashion Portfolio, eleven images commissioned by *Harper’s Bazaar* between 1947 and 1957, all of which were taken outside of the studio and capture the street life of Paris. Umbrella in hand, a skipping model appears suspended above a cobblestone street; Marlene Dietrich, wearing a turban by Dior, suavely lights a cigarette at the Ritz; a svelte Dorian Leigh gazes at her mirrored reflection while standing in Helena Rubenstein’s dressing room.

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The trust and rapport between Avedon and his subjects that enabled bold experimentation is perhaps most apparent in the continuous work produced in the stark white environment of his studio, from the poised, swan-like Gloria Vanderbilt (1953); to the angel-faced Cheryl Crane, the daughter of actress Lana Turner, who Avedon photographed in 1963 after she was exonerated from a murder charge; and the highly animated, leonine Tina Turner (1971). In an image from 1967, Veruschka appears to drift effortlessly upwards *en pointe*, a winter dress by Bill Blass billowing around her. Jean Shrimpton lunges across the picture plane in an ethereal evening gown by Pierre Cardin (1970); thirty years later, Malgosia Bela and Gisele Bundchen brace themselves against invisible harm in edgy Dior couture. In contrast is the macabre and darkly humorous 24-image *New Yorker* color fashion portfolio titled *In Memory of the Late Mr. and Mrs. Comfort* (1995), in which perverse beauty and eccentric luxury clash with reminders of mortality. Combining design, choreography, acute compositional awareness, and sheer verve, Avedon's images established new historical benchmarks. Unforgettable portraits, street work, and fashion photography attest to his career as a prescient social documentarian and stylistic innovator of unparalleled relevance and influence.

Richard Avedon (1923–2004) is widely acknowledged as one of the most influential artists of the twentieth century. Born in New York City, he began his professional career as a photographer for *Harper's Bazaar* in 1945, eventually joining rival *Vogue* magazine, where he remained on staff until 1988. In 1992 he was named the first staff photographer for *The New Yorker*. His work is included in the collections of MoMA, the Smithsonian, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, along with countless other museums and institutions worldwide. Avedon's first museum retrospective was held at the Smithsonian Institution in 1962. Many major museum shows have followed, including Whitney Museum of American Art (1994) and two at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (1978 and 2002). A 2007 retrospective exhibition organized by the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Denmark traveled to Milan, Paris, Berlin, Amsterdam, and San Francisco. "Richard Avedon: People" was presented at National Portrait Gallery, Canberra in 2013, traveled to Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth in 2014, and is on view at Ian Potter Museum of Art, Melbourne through March 15, 2015.

Richard Avedon established The Richard Avedon Foundation during his lifetime. Based in New York, the Foundation is the repository for Avedon's photographs, negatives, publications, papers, and archival materials.

For further inquiries please contact the gallery at +39.06.4208.6498 or at roma@gagosian.com. All images are subject to copyright. Gallery approval must be granted prior to reproduction.

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Image: *Audrey Hepburn and Art Buchwald, with Simone D'Aillencourt, Frederick Eberstadt, Barbara Mullen, and Dr. Reginald Kerman, evening dresses by Balmain, Dior, and Patou, Maxim's, Paris, August 1959, 1959, gelatin silver print, 20 x 24 inches (50.8 x 61 cm), ed. of 25 © The Richard Avedon Foundation*

Gagosian Gallery was established in 1980 by Larry Gagosian.