

WHITNEY

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PRESS RELEASE



Toyo Miyatake (1895-1979). *Michio Ito*, (1929). Gelatin silver print, Sheet: 14 × 10 7/8in. (35.6 × 27.6 cm) Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; purchase, with funds from the Photography Committee 2014.241 © Toyo Miyatake Studio

The Whitney to Present Two-Floor Exhibition in Celebration of the Portrait

A complete reinstallation of the Whitney's collection in its new building

NEW YORK, March 8, 2016— The mysterious power and fascination of the portrait – and the ingenious ways in which artists have been expanding the definition of portraiture over the past 100 years – are celebrated in *Human Interest: Portraits from the Whitney's Collection*, to be presented at the Whitney Museum of American Art this spring. Drawn entirely from the Museum's collection, the exhibition features more than 300 works made from 1900 to 2016 by an extraordinary range of more than 200 artists, roughly half of whom are living. The show will be organized in twelve thematic sections on two floors of the Museum, with works in all media installed side by side. Floor Six, predominantly focused on art since 1960, opens first, on April 6; Floor Seven, which includes works from the first half of the twentieth century alongside more contemporary offerings, will open on April 27. The exhibition will remain on view through February 12, 2017.

Portraits are one of the richest veins of the Whitney's collection, thanks to the Museum's longstanding commitment to the figurative tradition, championed by its founder Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney. The works included in this exhibition propose diverse and often unconventional ways of representing an individual. Many artists reconsider the pursuit of external likeness—portraiture's usual objective—within formal or conceptual explorations or reject it altogether. Some revel in the genre's glamour and allure, while others critique its elitist associations and instead call attention to the banal or even the grotesque.

Many iconic works from the collection will be included by such artists as Alexander Calder, Marsden Hartley, Edward Hopper, Jasper Johns, Alice Neel, Georgia O’Keeffe, Cindy Sherman, and Andy Warhol. In addition, a number of major new acquisitions will be exhibited at the Whitney for the first time, including Barkley L. Hendricks’s full-length 1976 portrait, *Steve*; Urs Fischer’s 2015 towering candle sculpture of Julian Schnabel (making its debut); Joan Semmel’s painting of two nude lovers, *Touch* (1977); Henry Taylor’s depiction of Black Panther leader Huey Newton (2007); Deana Lawson’s striking color photograph *The Garden* (2015); and Rosalyn Drexler’s Pop masterwork *Marilyn Pursued by Death* (1963). The exhibition will extend to the Museum’s outdoor galleries on Floors Seven and Six, the latter of which will feature Paul McCarthy’s monumental bronze sculpture *White Snow #3* (2012), also a new acquisition.

Human Interest is curated by Scott Rothkopf, Deputy Director for Programs and Nancy and Steve Crown Family Chief Curator, and Dana Miller, Richard DeMartini Family Curator and Director of the Permanent Collection, with Mia Curran, curatorial assistant; Jennie Goldstein, assistant curator; and Sasha Nicholas, consulting curator.

“For the first reinstallation of the collection in our new building, we wanted to do something bold and distinctly Whitney. Our collection includes literally thousands of portraits, dating from the founding of the Museum to just this year,” said Scott Rothkopf. “The challenging and exciting part was to present these works with a new twist, according to inventive frameworks, and to show how artists have continually redefined one of art’s oldest genres.”

Dana Miller noted, “In selecting a single theme, we wanted to mix well known works with those that are less familiar. We’ve included a significant number of works that are new to the collection and others that have rarely, if ever, been exhibited. Across the one hundred years of art represented, we find artists grappling with notions of gender, sexuality, race, age, and beauty—and each one of these works provokes us to reconsider the ways in which we see ourselves.”

Once a rarified luxury good, portraits are now ubiquitous. Readily reproducible and ever-more accessible, photography has played a particularly vital role in the democratization of portraiture, and will be strongly represented in the exhibition. Most recently, the proliferation of smartphones and the rise of social media have unleashed an unprecedented stream of portraits in the form of selfies and other online posts. Many contemporary artists confront this situation, stressing the fluidity of identity in a world where technology and the mass-media are omnipresent. Through their varied takes on the portrait, the artists in *Human Interest: Portraits from the Whitney’s Collection* demonstrate the vitality of this enduring genre, which serves as a compelling lens through which to view some of the most important social and artistic developments of the past century.

Following is a selection of several of the sections in which the exhibition will be divided:

Portrait of the Artist

On the seventh floor, the section “Portrait of the Artist” brings together self-portraits with portraits of artists and other members of the creative community, a moving window into the way artists see themselves and their relationships with one another. On view will be Edward Hopper’s iconic self-portrait in oil in a brown hat, as well as a pair of drawings by Hopper and Guy Pène du Bois, each depicting the other and made during a single sitting. Other works depict artists with the tools of their trade—Ilse Bing is seen in a photograph holding the shutter release of her camera; Mabel Dwight uses a mirror as an aid in drawing herself; Andreas Feininger photographs himself regarding a strip of film through a magnifying glass. Other works in this section include Cy Twombly photographed by Robert Rauschenberg; Jasper Johns by Richard Avedon; Georgia O’Keeffe drawn by Peggy Bacon; Edgard Varèse sculpted in wire by Alexander Calder; Langston Hughes photographed by Roy DeCarava; Berenice Abbott by Walker Evans;

Yasuo Kuniyoshi by Arnold Newman; and a double portrait of Joseph Stella and Marcel Duchamp taken by Man Ray.

Early Twentieth Century Celebrity and Spectacle

In the early decades of the twentieth century, a spectrum of new, popular leisure pursuits—vaudeville, theater, cabaret, sporting events, and above all, motion pictures—thrust performers and entertainers into the public eye as never before. For the crowds that flocked to see them, the stars of these entertainments became larger-than-life figures, and an array of media outlets, from tabloid newspapers to glossy magazines to radio, sprang up to broadcast their exploits to captivated audiences across the nation. Artists eagerly delved into these new phenomena, creating portraits that stoked the public's growing fascination with celebrities. At the turn of the century, painters such as Howard Cushing and Everett Shinn investigated the changing terms of fame and glamour as flashy public spectacles eclipsed Gilded Age refinement. Following World War I many artists joined in the commercial opportunities offered by the booming entertainment industry—particularly photographers, whose easily reproducible images carried a special air of authenticity. Foremost among them, Edward Steichen pioneered the aesthetic of the “close-up” in his stylish magazine portraits of movie stars and other luminaries, such as Marlene Dietrich, Dolores Del Rio, and Paul Robeson. Other photographers such as James Van Der Zee, Toyo Miyatake, and Carl Van Vechten called attention to vanguard performers whose race or ethnicity placed them outside the mainstream, challenging the sanitized imperatives of popular culture.

Street Life

Under the rubric of “Street Life” the exhibition presents artists who took to the pavement with their cameras, photographing subjects as they encountered them, sometimes surreptitiously. These images, which often capture fleeting, serendipitous moments, present a counterpoint to the premeditated, sedentary sitter of historical portraits. At the turn of the last century it became clear that the camera could become an apparatus for the indictment of a society's ills and a group of socially aware photographers became activists in addition to observers of the urban environment. An early work in the exhibition, Lewis Hine's *Newsies at Skeeters Branch, St. Louis, Missouri* (c. 1910), exemplifies this type of politically motivated street photography. Other works documenting the spectacle of urban life include Walker Evans's subway photographs; Helen Levitt's images taken on the streets of Yorktown and Spanish Harlem; and examples from Garry Winogrand's *Women Are Beautiful* portfolio. Artists featured in this section also include Diane Arbus, Robert Frank, Lee Friedlander, and Nan Goldin. The tradition of street photography is carried through to more recent works by Dawoud Bey and Philip-Lorca di Corcia.

Portraits Without People

Is likeness essential to portraiture? The works in this section, spanning the past one hundred years, ask this question as they pursue alternate means for capturing an individual's personality, values, and experiences. Often, the presence of the individual or his or her character is implied through objects and symbols that resonate with hidden meaning. Gerald Murphy's *Cocktail* (1927), a bold, Jazz Age still life suggests a uniquely autobiographical approach: the accoutrements of a typical 1920s bar tray were based on Murphy's memory of his father's bar accessories and the cigar box cover shows a robed woman surrounded by items that allude to Murphy himself, including a boat (he was an avid sailor) and an artist's palette. Marsden Hartley's *Painting, Number 5* (1914–15), a portrait of Karl von Freyburg, uses German imperial military regalia to stand in for the presence of the officer with whom the artist had fallen in love. In *Summer Days* (1936), Georgia O'Keeffe adopted the animal skull and vibrant desert wildflowers as surrogates for herself, symbols of the cycles of life and death that shape the desert world she made her home. Jasper Johns's portrait of a Savarin coffee can full of brushes stands for Johns himself; and James Welling's portrait of Philip Johnson's Glass House in New Canaan, CT, may be viewed as a sort of portrait of the famous architect. In a number of works in this section, body parts or personal possessions may allude to the subject, such as Jay DeFeo's teeth; Alfred Stieglitz's hat; and Ed Ruscha's shoes. Forgoing likeness in favor of allusion and enigma, these artists expand the possibilities of the portrait, while also acknowledging that the quest to depict others—and even ourselves—is elusive.

Body Bared

The nude is one of the most time-honored subjects in Western art, but for centuries it was used to depict unnamed generic figures or mythological subjects rather than specific individuals. Since the turn of the twentieth century, however, artists have increasingly challenged this convention by producing frank, highly particular nudes, often with the sitters identified in the title of the work. From Joan Semmel's monumental self-portrait in bed with a lover, to Lucas Samaras's playful theatrics, to John Coplans's unflinching documents of his aging body, most of these works subvert expectations about how a nude should look, pose, and engage the viewer. Photographs by Robert Mapplethorpe, Peter Hujar, and Deana Lawson, among others, unabashedly question cultural assumptions about gender, race, beauty, and power, giving voice to groups and individuals often marginalized by both the traditions of portraiture and mainstream American culture. By transforming nudity from a classical ideal into something decidedly personal, contemporary, and idiosyncratic, these artists compel us to confront the complex and often contradictory feelings elicited by the human body: fascination and repulsion, shame and pleasure, inhibition and freedom. Other artists in this section include David Armstrong, Alvin Baltrop, LaToya Ruby Frazier, Sally Mann, Mark Morrisroe, Catherine Opie, Irving Penn, and Francesca Woodman.

Self Conscious

Since the 1980s, artists have increasingly used self-portraiture to explore multiple invented personas as well as darker psychological states. Searching for their own place in a society that prizes youth, fame, and self-exposure, many have adopted strategies from popular culture but often with a twist. Cindy Sherman masquerades as a world-weary, aging socialite in a photograph tinged with both satire and pathos, while Jean-Michel Basquiat places himself and his friends along the troubled continuum of African-American performers in Hollywood. Other artists confound the air of heroism traditionally associated with the artist's image, casting themselves as anti-heroes shrouded in anxiety and self-doubt. Charles Ray turns himself into the diminutive prisoner of his own art, and Rudolf Stingel depicts himself on grand scale, overcome by melancholy and inertia. In a culture in which the imitation and idolization of celebrity have become the norm, and both cosmetic surgery and digital editing have made physical appearance increasingly unreliable, these artists testify to a widespread sense of uncertainty in the self and how it might be portrayed. Also included in this section are works by ASCO, Charles Atlas, Alex Bag, Nicole Eisenman, and Kalup Linzy.

Institutional Complex

Whether in the form of passport photographs, ID badges, or mug shots, portraits play a central role in society's efforts to classify individuals and regulate their behavior. Against the backdrop of the social upheavals of the early 1990s—including the economic downturn, heightened racial tensions, and the Culture Wars—artists seized on such images to ask pointed questions about how academic, legal, civic, and other institutional structures shape our perceptions of others and ourselves. By drawing on the formulas of the police lineup and the mug shot, for example, Gary Simmons and Glenn Ligon both underscore and bristle against the representational conventions and stereotypes that associate black men with violence. Other artists inject oblique personal statements into indifferent systems of order. Byron Kim's *Synecdoche* (1999–2001), transforms the modernist touchstones of the grid and the monochrome from abstractions into veiled portraits, while Andrea Zittel conjures a generic self by distilling the necessities of life into a few basic functions.

Postwar Celebrity

In the decades following World War II, artists began to crack the glossy veneer of celebrity culture. Andy Warhol played a pivotal role in this transition with portraits of famous figures like Jackie Kennedy, whose glamour was intertwined with pathos and fragility. Warhol evoked mass media's transformation of the individual into a consumable icon, a path followed more recently by Rachel Harrison in her portrait of Amy Winehouse, as well as in Karen Kilimnik's portrait of Kate Moss, Richard Prince's of Kurt Cobain, and Elizabeth Peyton's of Eminem. These artists examine the fantasy of stardom and expose its darker side—the flashbulb's glare, the menacing intrusions of paparazzi, and the voracious appetites of audiences

raised on a diet of pop culture. Still other artists have explored how the glut of media imagery has led ordinary people to internalize the rituals of glamour and fandom. Some of the sitters depicted in this section are not in fact pop stars but individuals who place themselves onstage by appropriating everything from costumes and makeup to the artificial poses of film stills and headshots. This self-conscious role-playing may be seen as confirming the inescapable, often insidious influence of the mass-media machine or may point to the liberating possibilities of a world in which identity is malleable and self-determined.

Support

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About the Whitney

The Whitney Museum of American Art, founded in 1930 by the artist and philanthropist Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney (1875–1942), houses the foremost collection of American art from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Mrs. Whitney, an early and ardent supporter of modern American art, nurtured groundbreaking artists at a time when audiences were still largely preoccupied with the Old Masters. From her vision arose the Whitney Museum of American Art, which has been championing the most innovative art of the United States for more than eighty years. The core of the Whitney's mission is to collect, preserve, interpret, and exhibit American art of our time and serve a wide variety of audiences in celebration of the complexity and diversity of art and culture in the United States. Through this mission and a steadfast commitment to artists themselves, the Whitney has long been a powerful force in support of modern and contemporary art and continues to help define what is innovative and influential in American art today.

Current and Upcoming Exhibitions at the Whitney Museum of American Art

<i>Collected by Thea Westreich Wagner and Ethan Wagner</i>	Through Mar 6, 2016
<i>The Whitney's Collection</i>	Through April 4, 2016
<i>Flatlands</i>	Through April 17, 2016
<i>Laura Poitras: Astro Noise</i>	Through May 1, 2016
<i>Open Plan</i>	Through May 14, 2016
<i>June Leaf</i>	April 27 –July 17 2016

<i>Human Interest: Portraits from the Whitney's Collection</i>	April 27, 2016- February 12, 2017
<i>Mirror Cells</i>	May 13–Aug 21, 2016
<i>Stuart Davis: In Full Swing</i>	June 10–Sept 25, 2016
<i>Danny Lyon: Message to the Future</i>	June 17- Sept 25, 2016
<i>Sophia Al-Maria</i>	Summer 2016
<i>Carmen Herrera</i>	Fall 2016
<i>Whitney Biennial</i>	Spring 2017
<i>David Wojnarowicz: History Keeps Me Awake at Night</i>	Spring 2018

The Whitney Museum is located at 99 Gansevoort Street between Washington and West Streets, New York City. Museum hours are: Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Sunday from 10:30 am to 6 pm, Friday and Saturday from 10:30 am to 10 pm, closed Tuesday. General admission: \$22. Full-time students and 65 & over: \$18. Visitors 18 and under and Whitney members: FREE. Admission is pay-what-you-wish on Fridays, 7–10 p.m. For general information, please call (212) 570-3600 or visit whitney.org.

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