

# PACE/MACGILL GALLERY

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IRVING PENN: IN FLOWER

January 11 through February 17, 2007

Gallery hours: Tuesday-Friday, 9:30-5:30; Saturday, 10:00-6:00

Pace/MacGill is pleased to present an exhibition of flower studies made by Irving Penn between 1967 and 2006. Penn has been working in this genre for over four decades, utilizing a variety of printing processes that meet his consistently high standards for quality. The show will feature a series of color close-ups printed with digital and dye-transfer methods as well as a black and white platinum print.

Without artifice or sentimentality, Penn's flowers are statements of fact. Recording what is in front of his lens with as much fidelity as the camera allows, the photographs dissect each whorl and petal, each stem and stamen with the honesty of an X-Ray. Penn examines the topography and biological wonder of each specimen, many of which are in a state of decay. He makes note of the feathery skeleton of the *Dandelion/Taraxacum officinale* bearing the weight of droplets of water and the withering petals of *Peony/Paenonia: Silver Dawn*. Each browning, twisting flower is seen with cool objectivity.

Beyond the display of striking clarity, there are moments within each composition where Penn's objective study becomes poetic contemplation. The passage of time is implicit in these images: the pink pigment drips from the tips of *Tulip/Tulipa: China Pink* and *Iceland Poppy/Papaver nudicaule (C)* is caught cocooning into itself. With subjects found at the penultimate moment before their expiration, Penn documents each flower's vitality while speaking of its mortality.

Irving Penn (b. 1917, Plainfield, NJ) began his prolific career in photography in 1943 at the encouragement of Alexander Liberman, then art director at *Vogue* magazine. Liberman would later recall that after seeing some Penn's early camera work he realized "we were in the presence of a major new vision with infinite possibilities for growth and discovery." Penn has developed that vision for over sixty years at *Vogue*, executing celebrated portraits of leading cultural figures as well as groundbreaking fashion editorials noted for their natural

lighting and formal simplicity. During the same span, Penn has produced a large and varied body of artistic work that includes robust female nudes, still lifes, and photographs of street debris. Now 89, he is still expanding the creative limits of the medium by continually exploring new subjects and techniques.

Penn's work has been exhibited widely in career retrospectives at major museums. Just last year, the National Gallery of Art in Washington mounted "Irving Penn: Platinum Prints," featuring over 90 photographs given to the museum by the artist in 2002. In 1997, he donated an important group of prints and archival material to the Art Institute of Chicago. His work belongs to public collections in this country and abroad, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; and the Moderna Museet, Stockholm.

Penn has published eleven books of photographs: *Moments Preserved* (1960); *Worlds in a Small Room* (1974); *Inventive Paris Clothes* (1977); *Flowers* (1980); *Issey Miyake* (1988); *Passage* (1991); *Still Life* (2001); *Dancer* (2001); *Earthly Bodies: Irving Penn's Nudes, 1949-50* (2002); *Notebook at Random* (2004); and *Photographs of Dahomey* (2004).