

PACE/MACGILL GALLERY

IRVING PENN: UNDERFOOT

October 6 through November 5, 2005

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

Pace/MacGill Gallery is pleased to present an exhibition of recent work by Irving Penn comprised of approximately twenty-five gelatin silver prints each averaging roughly 20-inches square. Called "Underfoot," the series marks a shift in focus for Penn in that he leaves the controlled environment of his studio to photograph small-scale debris in outdoor public spaces. Although somewhat similar in theme to his cigarette and street material series from the 1970s, "Underfoot" photographs subjects *in situ*, small pieces greatly enlarged: chewed gum, matches, dog hair, and discarded objects discovered on the sidewalks of New York City. Studying Penn's prints, its subjects abstracted by intense changes of scale, the viewer might make associations -- a pig's head, a Chinese Emperor, the Canals of Mars -- in an unexpected experience of discovery and revelation. Presented without embellishment and in sharp-focus, this otherwise forgotten and unremarkable refuse becomes a source of visual intrigue and alluring beauty.

The series was exhibited at the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 2004 and earlier this year at Fraenkel Gallery in San Francisco.

At the age of eighty-eight, Penn is experiencing one of the longest and most prolific careers in photography. Through exhibitions, monographs, and his pages appearing regularly in *Vogue*, his work continues to alter the shape of the visual world. Instead of relying upon the familiar, Penn ventures into the unknown by challenging the technical limits of the field as well as our expectations of what can, and does, comprise a memorable image. Penn's aesthetic is the result of his readiness to push his work to the edge of what people find acceptable; the potency of his pictures lays in their power to re-orient our sensibilities.

In the catalog accompanying Penn's 1984 exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, John Szarkowski wrote:

Until now it [Penn's work] has demonstrated for photography in our time what must be relearned by most arts in most times: that the apparently inconsequential can be redeemed by artistic seriousness; that a plain vocabulary is the most demanding; that high craft is the just desert not only of monuments and ceremonial vessels, but of the ordinary baggage of our lives.

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Irving Penn (b. 1917, Plainfield, NJ) studied design and began his career in New York City in 1938 as a graphic artist. In the early 1940s Penn began work at *Vogue* magazine where Alexander Liberman was art director. Liberman encouraged Penn to take his first color photograph -- a still life -- that ultimately became the October 1, 1943 cover of *Vogue*. 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 abroad.

Penn's photographs are in the collections of major museums in America and abroad, including the Moderna Museet, Stockholm; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; and the Museum of Modern Art, New York. Penn made a major donation of prints and archival material to the Art Institute of Chicago in 1997. In 2005 the National Gallery of Art presented "Irving Penn: The Platinum Prints," an exhibition of over 90 platinum prints given by Penn to the National Gallery of Art in 2002.

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); *A Notebook at Random* (2004); *Photographs of Dahomey* (2004); and two books of drawings.