

Bowdoin College Museum of Art Receives Gift of 16 Photographs by Irving Penn

Penn's Former Studio Assistant, Robert Freson, Donates Collection of Works Demonstrating Breadth of Photographer's Career

Brunswick, Maine – January 18, 2021 – The Bowdoin College Museum of Art (BCMA) today announced that it has received a gift of sixteen photographs by Irving Penn from his former studio assistant Robert Freson. Spanning more than fifty years of the photographer's prolific career and demonstrating the variety of his portrait work, the gift includes multiple examples of Penn's iconic portraits of fellow artists such as Jacob Lawrence and Georgia O'Keeffe, as well as his photographs of anonymous workers in New York. The gift also includes examples of Penn's fashion photography and still lifes. Freson, now a resident of Bailey Island, Maine, selected the images with special assistance from representatives at the Irving Penn Foundation in order to ensure they provided an overview of Penn's august career.

"We are immensely grateful to Robert Freson for enhancing our collection of twentieth century photography so substantially with this extraordinary gift. We are looking forward to sharing Penn's works with Bowdoin students, faculty, and the general public, and to studying them alongside the museum's collection," said Frank Goodyear, Co-Director of the BCMA. "Penn's works arrive at the BCMA as we prepare for two major photography exhibitions opening in February 2022: the first museum retrospective of the photographer Marcia Resnick, and an immersive installation by photographer Jona Frank and designer Alex Kalman," added Anne Collins Goodyear, Co-Director of the BCMA. "The timing of Robert's generous gift augments this celebration of photography at the BCMA, and we are very excited by the possibilities of future exhibitions and scholarship created by adding these works to our collection."

Irving Penn (1917-2009) was one of the great portraitists of the twentieth century. Penn had a special interest in artists, and the gift features likenesses of Marcel Duchamp, Georgia O'Keeffe, Pablo Picasso, and Jacob Lawrence, who is pictured alongside his wife Gwendolyn Knight. Other notable portraits include Louis Armstrong performing with Duke Ellington, and his iconic photograph of the hand of Miles Davis. The gift also includes examples of Penn's fashion photography, such a cover he shot for *Vogue* and a photograph of a model wearing a Balenciaga dress which looks almost like a modern sculpture through Penn's lens. Additionally, the collection contains some experimental photography as well as images taken during the artist's travels to France, Peru, and New Guinea.

Freson worked as Penn's studio assistant from 1949 to 1962, when he left to pursue his own independent photography career. In 2019, he partnered with the BCMA to develop "Photographic Lives: Robert Freson, Irving Penn, and the Portrait," an exhibition curated by BCMA student intern Ellery Harkness '21.

"Since moving to Maine, I regularly visit the Bowdoin College Museum of Art and follow its programming closely," said Freson. "The BCMA is not only the center of the arts at Bowdoin, but is

also a vital cultural hub for the region, both in terms of presenting exhibitions and generating new scholarship. Penn dedicated much of his life to research, study, and self-improvement, so I have no doubt he would be thrilled that this collection will now be easily accessible to students, professors, and others who want to study his work in an academic setting.”

Bowdoin College Museum of Art

The Bowdoin College Museum of Art is the cornerstone of the arts and culture at Bowdoin. One of the earliest collegiate art collections in the nation, it came into being through the 1811 bequest of James Bowdoin III of 79 European paintings and a portfolio of 140 master drawings. The collection has been expanded through the generosity of the Bowdoin family, alumni and friends, and now numbers more than 20,000 objects, including paintings, sculpture, works on paper, decorative arts and artifacts from prehistory to the present from civilizations around the world. www.bowdoin.edu

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For more information, please contact:

Suzanne Bergeron
Bowdoin College Museum of Art
207-725-3124
sbergero@bowdoin.edu

Aga Sablinska
PAVE Communications & Consulting
862-216-6485
aga@paveconsult.com