

The Museum of Modern Art

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RECENT WORK BY IRVING PENN ON VIEW AT MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

"The capricious and frankly inconsequential nature of the nominal subject matter, in conjunction with its ambitious and enormously sophisticated handling, constitute a clear statement of intention: these photographs can be considered only as works of art."

This is how John Szarkowski, Director, Department of Photography at The Museum of Modern Art, describes an exhibition of 14 platinum print photographs of cigarette butts by Irving Penn, one of America's best-known photographers, which he has installed in the third-floor Steichen Galleries. The show will be on view from May 23 through August 3, 1975.

As the artist is best known for his fashion photography, elegant still lifes, and portraits of famous people, "It might therefore seem that the new pictures represent a break with Penn's work of the past, but it is more likely that they represent a further advance - in terms of a richer medium and more appropriate iconography - toward the goal that Penn has pursued throughout his career: a perfect, poised, and self-sufficient photograph," writes John Szarkowski.

All of the platinum prints are on an unusually large scale, approximately 25 x 22 inches. Each print is contact printed from two enlarged negatives, representing different interpretations of the original gray scale, and the paper is coated and exposed twice, to achieve maximum richness of tonality. The print is conceived not as a window to look through, but as an object with a satisfying physical presence. The platinum print, because of its

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exceptional richness and subtlety of scale and surface, was a favored medium for photographers around the turn of the century, but according to Szarkowski "perhaps no earlier master exploited these potentials with the breathtaking skill evident in these prints by Penn.

"Graphic and photographic beauty are not surprising qualities in the work of Irving Penn, but [these pictures] explicate these virtues with a richness, confidence, and virtuosity that are unmatched in his earlier work."

Irving Penn was born in Plainfield, New Jersey, in 1917. He has been working for Vogue magazine since 1943 and is the author of two books, Moments Preserved (Simon & Schuster, 1960), and Worlds in a Small Room (Grossman, 1974). The first consists largely of portraits of famous people and still lifes; his latest book consists of photographs taken as an "ambulant studio photographer": natives of various countries and cultures, such as the Estremadura Gypsies and the Indians of Cuzco, Peru, removed from their background and context and photographed in posed positions against a plain "studio" background. Many works by Penn are in the Museum's Collection; his work has been represented in several temporary exhibitions at the Museum, and a one-man show of his work was circulated by the Museum in 1962-65.

Photographs and additional material available from Michael Boodro, Assistant,
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