

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **The Museum of Modern Art**

**PROVOCATIVE EXHIBITION AT MOMA TRACES THE COMPLEX CONNECTIONS BETWEEN PHOTOGRAPHY AND FAME**

**Some 600 Objects--Daguerreotypes, Photographs, Advertisements, Newspapers, Magazines, Newsreels, Film and Television Clips, and Web Sites--Show the Power of Photographic Images in Our Celebrity-Conscious Culture**

***Fame After Photography*  
July 8 through October 5, 1999**

From July 8 to October 5, The Museum of Modern Art presents the first exhibition to trace the changing relationship between photography and fame over the years since the medium's invention in 1839. *Fame After Photography* tracks the history of photographic images in popular culture, and demonstrates how the subjects, style, usage, meaning, and influence of photographic images of the famous have evolved during the past 160 years.

The exhibition's dramatic presentation of a range of materials exemplifies how these images have permeated our daily lives and collective memories, and illustrates how fame, and our understanding of it, has been transformed by its photographic representation.

Some 600 original photographic artifacts are displayed in an unconventional multimedia installation. Newsreels and movie trailers are video-projected onto eight-foot screens, television programs are shown on monitors in three locations throughout the exhibition, and an installation of three computer workstations demonstrates how the representation of fame is evolving on the Internet. These moving pictures are juxtaposed with still images in many forms: nineteenth-century daguerreotypes, cartes-de-visite, and stereo and cabinet cards, along with twentieth-century tabloid newspapers, illustrated magazines, advertisements, and consumer products, such as an Elvis Presley umbrella, Marilyn "Merlot" wine, and collections of baseball cards, 45 rpm record covers, postcards, and stamps.

The exhibition was conceived, in part, as a response to recent events involving photography. The explosion of gossip columns, magazines, and tabloid television programs covering the famous and the notorious has created new venues for celebrity stories and slick photographs. After the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, the backlash against the paparazzi implicated celebrity photography itself, without a critical analysis of the connections between photography and fame, not to mention subjects and audiences. *Fame After Photography* examines these issues, and shows how the audience for images of the famous in Western culture has mushroomed from single viewers to global communities, and how these photographic images have multiplied and become unavoidable.

The Museum of Modern Art asked Marvin Heiferman and Carole Kismaric, founders of the New York cultural programming and publishing firm Lookout, to organize the exhibition. Peter Galassi, Chief Curator,

Department of Photography, comments, "The exhibition probes one of the key ways that photography has ceaselessly transformed our lives, and I am delighted by the imagination, wit, and scholarly range that Kismaric and Heiferman have brought to the project." Carole Kismaric and Marvin Heiferman say, "Today, fame can't exist without photography. In a culture that invests so much of its energy creating, consuming and obsessing about photographic images, it seemed important to step back and look at the power of fame and photography to better understand our fascination with both."

The exhibition follows a chronological narrative, divided into four sections: The First Photographs of the Famous, Fame in the Mass Media, A New Celebrity Culture, and Fame for All.

### **The First Photographs of the Famous**

Before photography, images of important people were minted on coins, memorialized in public sculpture, or captured in unique works of art made for elite audiences. After 1839, the photographic medium quickly established itself as the best way to record the accomplishments and to spread images of important men and women. The first segment of the exhibition, treating the period from the 1860s to 1900, surveys the earliest photographic records of the famous.

The first stiffly posed daguerreotypes were unique and fragile objects, meant to be handled carefully and treasured. Examples on display depict the author Edgar Allen Poe, the statesman Daniel Webster, and the performer and courtesan Lola Montez.

When cartes-de-visite, inexpensive paper prints glued to 2 x 3-inch cards, triggered a worldwide collecting trend in the 1860s, photographic portraits of the famous could, for the first time, be owned by those outside the celebrity's inner circle. The cartes appealed to a growing urban middle class interested in collecting images and fantasizing about social mobility. With the mass distribution of cartes-de-visite, the process of photography became more public, and seemingly more democratic. More than 100 of these visual calling cards, displayed in a cabinet specially built for the exhibition, show the era's most renowned scientists, musicians, authors, explorers, and royals, notably a portrait of the attractive young mother Alexandra, Princess of Wales--the Princess Diana of her day--whose carte sold 300,000 copies.

As the novelty of the tiny cartes-de-visite began to wear off in the 1870s, cabinet cards, larger format prints glued to decorative boards, were introduced. In an unusual work devoted to P. T. Barnum, a dramatic engraving which shows the burning of The American Museum, a tourist attraction Barnum founded, is surrounded by cabinet cards featuring the eccentric and flamboyant performers the museum was noted for presenting.

Stereo cards, pairs of photographs that produced a three-dimensional effect when looked at through a viewer, were widely distributed and collected from the 1860s through the early twentieth century. The cards, when inserted in a stereo viewer, offered the nineteenth-century public its first three-dimensional views of Buffalo Bill, Theodore Roosevelt, Thomas Edison, John D. Rockefeller, and Mark Twain, among others.

### **Fame in the Mass Media**

The invention of moving images in 1895 and progress in the halftone printing process after the 1880s, followed by the rise of advertising and public relations agencies in the 1920s and 1930s, radically transformed the distribution and content of photographic images in the early part of

the twentieth century. The penchant for *collecting* photographic images of the famous--to be displayed on a shelf or pasted into an album--quickly evolved into the *consumption* of these images, in ever greater quantities and frequency, that were meant to be discarded after they were viewed. Early motion pictures, tabloid newspapers, and magazines--reliant on photographic images to attract buyers--became powerful vehicles for photography. The new media brought images of fame to a mass audience at an accelerated pace and created intimacy between subjects and audiences.

The introduction of the newsreel at the turn of the century added the expressive power of motion to the photographic image. The famous were now seen in action--flexing, strutting, dancing, and shooting, as in the exhibition's presentation of Annie Oakley firing at targets, photographed by Thomas Edison at his studio in West Orange, New Jersey, in 1894. Footage of Charles Lindbergh receiving a hero's welcome in France after crossing the Atlantic (1927) and film showing mourners at Rudolph Valentino's funeral (1926) are among the nonfiction films and newsreels on view.

Following World War I, advances in halftone printing encouraged the spread of tabloid journalism worldwide. Urban newspapers featured frequently sensational photographs of a new and electric mix of folk heroes: sports and Broadway stars, criminals, politicians, debutantes, and ordinary people elevated to stardom by life's lucky breaks or tragedies. Samples from New York's fabled tabloids of the 1920s and 1930s--*New York Daily News* and the *Daily Mirror*--are displayed.

Not long after, the Golden Age of the Hollywood movie studios saw the rise of the first industry based on the manufacturing and selling of the glamorous dream of fame as a way of life. In movie palaces across the nation, striking cinematography and larger-than-life close-ups elevated screen performers into gods and goddesses. Outside the theater, the movies and their stars were marketed via a vast and effective promotional apparatus. Material on view includes glamour shots by photographers such as Bernard of Hollywood and traces how these images were used in fan magazines and merchandise, for example, reproduced on the lids of Dixie Cup ice cream containers. The care the studios took in creating these publicity images is evident in their meticulous styling, lighting, and retouching, represented in the exhibition by side-by-side displays of retouched vs. unretouched photographs of stars. A selection of trailers are screened, featuring Greta Garbo as Camille and a parade of film stars in *Babes on Broadway* (1942), as are lobby cards advertising films about historic figures, such as Elisabeth of Essex, Alfred Dreyfus, and Enrico Caruso.

By the late 1920s, magazines were deploying photographic images to stimulate reader loyalty and desire, creating a craving for more sophisticated and higher-quality images of the famous. Magazine layouts from *Vanity Fair* in the 1920s and 1930s illustrate how the photographer Edward Steichen developed a streamlined photographic style while shooting a heady mix of socialites and celebrities. The bold covers and picture story spreads about the famous used by *Life* magazine in the 1940s and 1950s were central to that magazine's success. The subjects of layouts presented include Adolf Hitler's mistress Eva Braun, the opera singer Marian Anderson, the author Thomas Mann, and the women's rights pioneer Margaret Sanger.

#### **A New Celebrity Culture**

After World War II, American culture shifted to the suburbs, and television--available to anyone who could afford a set, and accessible at

the push of a button--provided a constant flow of celebrity images into America's living rooms. The first issue of *TV Guide* (1953) is presented, as are highlights of television programs from 1948 to 1960, including the influential celebrity interview program Edward R. Murrow's *Person to Person*, and excerpts from *This is Your Life*, *Queen for a Day*, *I Love Lucy*, and the Kennedy/Nixon Presidential debates.

The exhibition also examines the phenomenon of celebrity endorsements, popular with companies eager to attract attention and increase sales of their products. On view are magazine advertisements from the 1920s to 1960s, a group of Wheaties boxes featuring photographs of athletes, a sumptuous color photograph featuring Claudette Colbert, Fredric March, and Cecil B. DeMille on the set of *Cleopatra* (1935) enjoying Coca-Cola, and fifteen mid-century celebrities drinking Rheingold Beer.

By the late 1960s and early 1970s, the rise of rock and roll, the peace and women's liberation movements, and strong anti-establishment sentiments encouraged new criteria for fame and new models for images of the famous. Different types of celebrities--political activists such as Jerry Rubin, feminists Gloria Steinem and Betty Friedan, and counterculture figures such as Allen Ginsberg--entered the public consciousness. The narcissism that characterized the "me decade" of the 1970s, buoyed by the public's fascination with the growth of a new celebrity culture, was responsible for the immediate success of *People* magazine, a spin-off from *Time*'s most-read section. Launched in 1974, *People*'s mission was to publish features on the lives of well-known and "ordinary" people, side by side. The distinction that had once separated fame from celebrity, leaders from followers, and stars from their audiences further eroded.

This transition was turned into art in the work and person of Andy Warhol. Warhol's obsessions with fame and celebrity are represented by a selection of rarely seen screen tests of the rocker Lou Reed, the writer Susan Sontag, the model Naomi Sims, and the cult figure Edie Sedgwick, and in the twenty-eight studio Polaroid portraits made in the 1970s portraying politicians, musicians, and actors. *Interview* magazine--the influential celebrity magazine Warhol founded--is exhibited, along with his screenprint depicting Jacqueline Kennedy before and after the assassination of the President, *Jackie III* from the portfolio *11 Pop Artists* (1966).

#### **Fame for All**

In the past two decades, photographic images of recognizable faces have become icons and commodities. Images of fame are business tools used by anyone with a product, service, or political agenda to promote--from chefs and florists, to artists and authors, and to diplomats and presidents.

The exhibition explores self-created fame, now possible for the first time on the Internet. Jennicam.org, a Web site created by a college student who transmits video images from her home, is shown, along with sites by celebrities such as supermodel Cindy Crawford and actor Kelsey Grammer. A video depicts Tinseltown, a theme restaurant in Anaheim, California, where customers pay to be treated like movie stars, surrounded by actors impersonating fans, reporters, and paparazzi. A selection from Donald Trump's personal collection of photographs shows the tycoon with famous people, including the actor Sylvester Stallone, the television hostess Kathie Lee Gifford, and the saxophonist Kenny G.

There is also a display of work by contemporary artists who are

responding to the prevalence and power of images of fame in our culture, including work by Cindy Sherman, Richard Prince, Larry Johnson, David Robbins, Karen Kilimnick, and Yasumasa Morimura.

The exhibition has been made possible by a generous grant from CameraWorks, Inc. Additional support has been provided by The Contemporary Arts Council and The Junior Associates of The Museum of Modern Art, and Mr. and Mrs. Peter William Schweitzer. The following corporations contributed exhibition materials, resources, and technical support: ABC News, Apple Computer Inc., CBS Broadcasting Inc., CBS News, Chevrolet, TBWA/Chiat/Day, CMG Worldwide, Corbis, Ralph Edwards Productions, Island Records, Lois/EJL, MTV: Music Television, NBC, Pepsi-Cola Company, Rysher Entertainment, Dinah Shore Trust, Sofa Entertainment, Tinseltown, Universal Media, and Video Verité. The installation of Web sites in the exhibition was conceived and produced by Howard Pyle.

**WEB SITE**

A subsite devoted to the exhibition will be available via the Museum Web site at [www.moma.org](http://www.moma.org). It will include introductory text, a selection of eight works represented by images and commentary, quotes from celebrities, and links to Web sites that are featured in the exhibition.

**EDUCATIONAL BROCHURE**

A brochure in the form of a tabloid newspaper will be available to visitors at the entrance of the exhibition. Written by guest curators Carole Kismaric and Marvin Heiferman, the illustrated brochure discusses the broad themes and photographic artifacts on view.

No. 54



©1998 The Museum of Modern Art, New York