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Gagosian to Present *Iconic Avedon: A Centennial Celebration of Richard Avedon* in Paris

Exploring Avedon's Genius as a Maker of Icons, the Exhibition Opens January 22, 2024



Richard Avedon, *Brigitte Bardot, hair by Alexandre*, Paris, January 1959, gelatin silver print, 24 × 20 inches (61 × 50.8 cm)
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Photography for me has always been a sort of double-sided mirror. The one side reflecting my subject, the other reflecting myself.

—Richard Avedon

PARIS, January 15, 2024—Gagosian is pleased to announce *Iconic Avedon: A Centennial Celebration of Richard Avedon*, at the gallery on rue de Ponthieu, Paris, from January 22 to March 2, 2024. The exhibition marks the centenary of Avedon's birth in May 1923. Often attributed to his photographs, the word *iconic* applies equally to their maker, and is used here to illuminate his exceptional influence on culture today.

Soon after establishing his New York studio in the mid-1940s, Avedon developed an inventive, sophisticated, and instantly recognizable style. As a staff photographer for *Harper's Bazaar* (1944–65), and later *Vogue* (1966–88), he produced many of the publications' quintessential images. As Avedon's reputation grew, the defining figures of the twentieth century—performers, writers, artists, intellectuals, and other notables—were drawn to see themselves through his lens. Avedon produced images that became synonymous with the legends of his sitters. Featuring his photographs of subjects both renowned and obscure, the exhibition highlights the innovative role Avedon played as a creator of icons.

Avedon's most incisive portraits manifest his uncanny ability to elicit the singular vitality of his sitters, inscribing their charged essences—even those of the already famous—in decisive frames extracted from the larger arc of living history. His portrayals of Marian Anderson (1955), Marilyn Monroe (1957), Bob Dylan (1965), and the Beatles (1967) are as indelible as they are timeless. "It's not the way I *look*," Harold Brodkey remarked about his portrait by Avedon, "but the way I *am*." With an unerring eye, impeccable timing, and a prescient sensibility, Avedon vaulted the models Dovima (1955), China Machado (1958), and Penelope Tree (1967) to the pinnacle of their profession. He also recorded incomparable images of Charlie Chaplin (1952), Jacqueline Kennedy (1961), Andy Warhol (1969), and Tina Turner (1971) at pivotal moments in their storied lives.

Opening during the 2024 Haute Couture Week in Paris, *Iconic Avedon* is centered by Avedon's deep connection to the city that was an early proving ground. Beginning in 1947, the photographer returned regularly to Paris to photograph collections for *Harper's Bazaar* during couture week, working with editors Carmel Snow, Diana Vreeland, and Nancy White, and designers such as Christian Dior, not only to create a bold new vision of the modern woman but also to restore luster to the great city after World War II. Portraying models in motion and on the street, liberated from the confines of the studio, he made many of his best-known pictures in Paris, including *Dovima with elephants* (1955) and *Brigitte Bardot* (1959). In midcentury Paris he also captured, with élan, now-classic images of Dorian Leigh (1949), Suzy Parker (1957–58), Coco Chanel (1958), and Alberto Giacometti (1958) that appear in the exhibition.

Widely imitated, Avedon challenged and reinvented himself continually, especially in his personal and commissioned work. Later favoring stark white backgrounds, sharp tonal contrasts, and resolute frontality, he turned his camera to subjects far from the spotlight, transforming them into icons as well. Included in the Paris exhibition are his powerful 1963 depiction of William Casby, one of the last living people to be born into slavery; *The Family* (1976), a collective portrait of American power brokers chronicled during the bicentennial of the United States; selections from *In the American West* (1979–84), his searing exploration of the American heartland; and his guileless portrait of sculptor June Leaf (1975), a monumental image that Avedon regarded as one of his favorites.

Aware of his own image-making power, Avedon subjected himself to his own scrutiny. In a photomat self-portrait taken the year he published *Nothing Personal* (1964), conceived jointly with former classmate James Baldwin, he covered the left half of his face with a cropped portrait of his collaborator (Baldwin was unable to make the scheduled sitting), underscoring their bond shortly after the fraught passage of the Civil Rights Act. In a later self-portrait from 1993, the craggy contours of Avedon's sixty-nine-year-old face are shown with no guise at all.

Iconic Avedon, with exhibition design by Cécile Degos, follows the 2023 exhibition *Avedon 100* at the gallery in New York, which featured photographs selected by over 150 prominent artists, designers, musicians, writers, curators, and fashion world representatives, who elaborate in the accompanying catalogue on the impact of Avedon's work today.

Richard Avedon was born in New York in 1923 and died in San Antonio in 2004. Collections include the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Centre Pompidou, Paris; and numerous others worldwide. Avedon's first museum retrospective was held at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC, in 1962; many lifetime major institutional exhibitions followed, including at the Minneapolis Institute of Art (1970); Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (1978 and 2002); and Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (1994). Posthumous exhibitions include the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk, Denmark (2007, traveled to Fondazione FORMA per la Fotografia, Milan; Jeu de Paume, Paris; Gropius Bau, Berlin; FOAM Photography Museum, Amsterdam; and San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, through 2010). Avedon established the Richard Avedon Foundation in 2004 as the repository for his photographs, negatives, publications, papers, and other archival materials.

#RichardAvedon

ICONIC AVEDON: A CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION OF RICHARD AVEDON

Opening reception: Monday, January 22, 6–8pm

January 22–March 2, 2024

4 rue de Ponthieu, Paris

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