

# THE GORDON PARKS FOUNDATION

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## *Invisible Man: Gordon Parks and Ralph Ellison in Harlem*

New exhibition opens at The Gordon Parks Foundation's 48 Wheeler exhibition space

Pleasantville, New York – The Gordon Parks Foundation announces the opening of a new exhibition. *Invisible Man: Gordon Parks and Ralph Ellison in Harlem* is an exploration of Gordon Parks' photographic interpretation of Ralph Ellison's National Book Award winning novel *Invisible Man*. Published in 1952, the novel has been hailed as one of the first to treat the black experience in twentieth-century America as a full human experience. Soon after its publication, Gordon Parks set out to evoke passages from the novel for *Life* magazine. He staged an actor around Harlem, where both he and Ellison had lived, and recreated poignant scenes from the story; his photoessay titled "A Man Becomes Invisible," published in the August 25, 1952 issue of *Life*, introduced Ellison's novel – and the societal issues it raised - to the magazine's wide readership.

These images testify not only to the book's deep impression on Parks, but also illustrate the photographer's expanding vision and technical expertise in his first few years on staff at the magazine. A prime example is the photograph *Invisible Man Retreat*, which closes the *Life* article. The protagonist's subterranean retreat – the "hole in the ground" – serves as his home after he is forced into hiding on the evening that riots break out in Harlem. The scene remains at the center of the novel—it is where the protagonist recounts his story, and the place where that story starts and ends. Parks leads a long line of artists inspired by *Invisible Man*. *Untitled, 2017*, an installation by mixed-media artist Radcliffe Bailey (American, b. 1968), brings the "hole in the ground" to life; it is included in the exhibition on loan from the permanent collection of The Studio Museum in Harlem.

This exhibition features both published and unpublished photographs from this series. It also includes archival material illustrating the production of the photographic recreations, as well as the final *Life* article. Parks' and Ellison's collaboration was the subject of the major 2016 exhibition titled *Invisible Man: Gordon Parks and Ralph Ellison in Harlem* at the Art Institute of Chicago as well as a publication of the same name, which will be on sale at the exhibition space. The exhibition will run from June 12 through August 26 and is free to the public.

### **About Gordon Parks**

Gordon Parks was one of the seminal figures of twentieth century photography. A humanitarian with a deep commitment to social justice, he left behind a body of work that documents many of the most important aspects of American culture from the early 1940s up until his death in 2006, with a focus on race relations, poverty, civil rights, and urban life. In addition, Parks was also a celebrated composer, author, and filmmaker who interacted with many of the most prominent people of his era - from politicians and artists to celebrities and athletes.

### **About The Gordon Parks Foundation exhibition space**

The Gordon Parks Foundation's mission is to permanently preserve the work of Gordon Parks, make it available to the public through exhibitions, books, and electronic media, and support artistic and educational activities that advance what Parks described as "the common search for a better life and a better world." The primary purpose of The Gordon Parks Foundation's exhibition space is to present focused exhibits of Parks' photography, as part of the Foundation's commitment to educating the public and preserving his work.

For more information and press images please contact Amanda Smith: [amanda@mkfound.org](mailto:amanda@mkfound.org) or 914-238-2619.

### **Hours & Admission**

Free and open to the public.  
M-Th: 10am - 4pm  
F: 10am - 1pm  
Sat-Sun: Closed

### **General Information**

48 Wheeler Avenue, Floor 1  
Pleasantville, NY 10570  
Tel: (914) 238-2619  
Website: [www.gordonparksfoundation.org](http://www.gordonparksfoundation.org)

### **Social Media**

Facebook: The Gordon Parks Foundation  
Twitter: @GparksFound  
Instagram: gordonparksfoundation

# RADCLIFFE BAILEY/GORDON PARKS FOUNDATION COLLABORATIVE ART PROJECT



At the heart of Ralph Ellison's seminal novel, *Invisible Man* (1952) is the protagonist's subterranean retreat, the "hole in the ground" that serves as his home after he is forced into hiding on the evening that riots break out in Harlem. Gordon Parks famously recreated the scene in an elaborately staged 1952 photograph, showing the man surrounded by "exactly 1,369 lights," drinking sloe gin and listening to Louis Armstrong records, his only means of escape from the dark world above. The scene remains at the center of the novel—it is where the protagonist recounts his story, and the place where that story starts and ends.

For this year's Gordon Parks Foundation Awards Dinner, celebrated Atlanta-based artist Radcliffe Bailey has created a unique work that brings to life Ralph Ellison's and Gordon Parks' imagining of that space, with one important exception: Here the Invisible Man's retreat is vacant. Ellison's novel concludes with the protagonist announcing his intention to end his underground hibernation—the reemergence must take place after the story has finished. Readers are left to reflect on the protagonist's place within society and their own, echoing *Invisible Man*'s famous closing words: "Who knows but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you?"

Radcliffe Bailey's mixed-media paintings and installations are steeped in African American history and yet convey a universal story. As he has said, "even though my work may seem to have this layer of history, it is also a cover for what I'm dealing with on a day to day." Bailey's work is included in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Smithsonian Museum of American Art, Washington, D.C.; the Art Institute of Chicago, Illinois; the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas; the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri; and the High Museum of Art, Atlanta, Georgia among many others.