

## JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY

### GORDON PARKS

*I Am You | Part 1*

January 11 – February 10, 2018

Opening reception for the exhibition: **Thursday**, January 11<sup>th</sup> from 6 – 8 PM at 524 West 24<sup>th</sup> Street.

*What I want. What I am. What you force me to be is what you are. For I am you staring back from a mirror of poverty and despair, of revolt and freedom. Look at me and know that to destroy me is to destroy yourself.*

Gordon Parks wrote these words in 1967. Whether through photographs, words or music, Gordon gave a voice to the sometimes voiceless and demonstrated the transformative power of self-expression. His photographs transcend art, history, race and culture and have endured to stand the test of time.

Peter W. Kunhardt, Jr., Executive Director of the Gordon Parks Foundation

**Jack Shainman Gallery** is pleased to announce **Gordon Parks: I Am You | Part 1**. As a photographer, film director, composer, and writer, Gordon Parks (1912-2006) was a visionary artist whose work continues to influence American culture to this day. In collaboration with the Gordon Parks Foundation, this first half of a two-part exhibition will focus on Parks' lesser known bodies of work, such as his elegant compositions of artists in their studios, as well as his timeless fashion photography.

Though Parks is best known for his photographs documenting much of the civil rights era, he spent many years as a freelance photographer for a variety of publications, working across many subjects. Among his lesser known works featured in the exhibition is a series of portraits of artists in their studios, including Helen Frankenthaler, Alexander Calder and Alberto Giacometti. A 1951 group of images taken in Giacometti's studio transforms the artist into one of his creations – skeletal and draped in shadow, yet still dominating the composition, even from the background.

*I Am You* also includes examples from Parks' fashion works taken during the 1950s and 60s in New York. He showcased a signature aesthetic, which photo historian and Gordon Parks Foundation board member Deborah Willis calls street style. "He situated models in haute couture dresses and stylized suits within the lively city. Readers could imagine themselves in the clothing, either waiting for a bus on Fifth Avenue or experiencing a flat tire on the way to a ball." She adds, "Gordon understood the importance of beauty in everyday life. He recognized desire and found a way to express it in many forms."<sup>1</sup>

As a photographer for *Life* Magazine during the publication's most influential years, Parks had a wide audience for his celebrity portraits and photo essays. His work documented everyday life across the country, when photographs were not only taken at face value, but could turn the tide of public opinion. Parks' images have been woven into the fabric of our nation's collective visual memories, and continue to be relevant today. American rap musician Kendrick Lamar recreated several classic Parks photographs in the 2017 music video for his song "ELEMENT," emulating not only the artist's signature aesthetic style, but his critique of injustice and call for activism.

Gordon Parks was born in Kansas in 1912. He was self-taught, and first worked for the Farm Security Administration, documenting the nation's social conditions. In the 1940s he was a freelance photographer for publications like *Ebony* and *Vogue* and in 1948 he became the first African American staff photographer and writer for *Life* magazine, the most prominent photojournalist publication in the world at that time. He spent twenty years with the publication, chronicling racism and poverty, and captured moments with leaders such as Muhammad Ali, Malcolm X, and Adam Clayton Powell Jr. that would go on to become iconic. He was also a noted composer and author, and in 1969, became the first African American to write and direct a Hollywood feature film based on his bestselling novel *The Learning Tree*. This was followed in 1971 by the classic motion picture *Shaft*. He was awarded the National Medal of Arts in 1988, and continued working until his death in 2006, leaving behind The Gordon Parks Foundation to carry on his enduring legacy.

Concurrently on view at 513 West 20<sup>th</sup> Street is **Third Sun**, an exhibition of works by Odili Donald Odita. **The Coffins of Paa Joe and the Pursuit of Happiness** is on view at The School in Kinderhook through February 24, 2018. Upcoming exhibitions at the gallery include **I Am You | Part 2** at our 24<sup>th</sup> Street location, and an exhibition of works on paper by **Barkley L. Hendricks** at 513 West 20<sup>th</sup> Street, both opening February 15, 2018.

Gallery hours are Tuesday through Saturday from 10am to 6pm. For additional information and photographic material please contact Victoria Kung, SUTTON, [victoria.kung@suttonpr.com](mailto:victoria.kung@suttonpr.com), +1 212 202 3402.

<sup>1</sup> Sala Elise Patterson, "Gordon Parks," *Kinfolk*, November 2017, 76.