

Exhibition
Irving Penn. Artists Portraits
Photographs from
the Pinault Collection

Villa Les Roches Brunes, in Dinard,
from 11 June to 1 October 2023

The Pinault Collection and the City of Dinard are teaming up once more to present the exhibition “Irving Penn. Artists Portraits. Photographs from the Pinault Collection”.

After an initial exhibition in 2009 at the Palais des Arts titled “Who’s Afraid of Artists?”, featuring a selection of works from the Pinault Collection, it was with great enthusiasm that François Pinault accepted a new proposal from the City of Dinard to exhibit a selection of photographs at Villa Les Roches Brunes, a sprawling Belle Époque residence located in the heart of the city. This exhibition forms part of the Pinault Collection’s *extra muros* programme, which is simultaneously also presenting a major exhibition at the Couvents des Jacobins in Rennes, “Forever Sixties: the Spirit of the 1960s in the Pinault Collection”.

An artist’s artist, Irving Penn first studied painting, an approach he would then apply to construct his still lives and plumb the psychological depths of his subjects. Devoid of any flourish or decoration, his studio consisted of an old theatre curtain, a stool, or at most an armchair draped with a ragged, heavy fabric – this is all Irving Penn would provide people when photographing them. Away from their studios and off-stage, the artists appear without tools, instruments, entourages, or fanfare of any kind. It was through this process of stripping things down to an almost minimalist core that he would portray his subjects, ultimately yielding portraits of an unprecedented existential depth. The bareness of the setting and Irving Penn’s graphic conciseness uncovered the psyche of each of his subjects with the utmost delicacy. His influence on the art of photography was widely felt. Simplicity, light, construction, and distance were the magic formula that the artist concocted to reveal people and objects on glossy paper.

Traversing Irving Penn's sixty-year career, this exhibition features a gallery of faces of the men and women who embodied a major part of the past century's creative spirit: painters, choreographers, musicians, architects, film directors, and writers show themselves in consonance with the walls of this legendary seaside villa to provide a timeline of the twentieth century.

Curated by:

Matthieu Humery, curator in charge of photographs at the Pinault Collection, with Lola Regard, research assistant.

Irving Penn: a biography

Irving Penn (1917-2009) is recognised as one of the twentieth century's masters of photography. He is widely admired for his iconic fashion images as well as his remarkable portraits of artists, writers, and celebrities who left their mark on the cultural landscape of his time. Irving Penn is a studio photographer, first and foremost. With their simple backdrop of paper, canvas, or even a bare wall, his photographs create a highly formal, insular environment. The intensity generated by removing the subject from his or her context instantly draws the viewer's attention into the image.

After initially studying painting and then applied arts, Penn was hired in 1943 as assistant to Alexander Liberman, the artistic director of Vogue in New York, who would become his mentor and friend. That same year, he began working as a photographer for the magazine, quickly proving himself to be one of the most innovative artists in this medium. Penn's commercial success did not hinder his artistic explorations, though. In 1949-1950, he began photographing a series of remarkably abstract nudes. He took full charge of all stages of the process of printing his personal photographs. His extensive involvement in the production of his works also involved exploring various lesser-known printing processes, especially platinum printing, an early twentieth-century technique that yielded images with a seemingly unlimited range of tonalities. The wealth of the process' aesthetic possibilities led Penn to reprint earlier works that he had originally printed on silver gelatin papers. This constant revisiting of his older images constitutes a fundamental aspect of his artistic oeuvre.

Photography in the Pinault Collection

Photography has occupied a significant place within the Pinault Collection since 2006. From Gustave Le Gray to Cindy Sherman and from Irving Penn to LaToya Ruby Frazier by way of Raymond Depardon and Lee Miller, the Pinault Collection's various shows of photographs testify to the formation of a major corpus of works in this domain. From the historical to the contemporary, the collection reflects the wealth and diversity of the medium of photography.

In focusing on large sets of works, the Pinault Collection in 2014 acquired one of six editions of Henri Cartier-Bresson's "Master Collection", a portfolio of 385 photographs. More recently, the Pinault Collection acquired an exceptional set of images from Condé Nast's photographic archive, a selection of which is currently on view at Palazzo Grassi in Venice, as part of the exhibit "Chronorama: Photographic Treasures of the Twentieth Century".

Practical information

Exhibition “Irving Penn. Artists Portraits. Photographs from the Pinault Collection Pinault”

Villa Les Roches Brunes — 1, allée des Douaniers 35800 Dinard
From 11 June to October 1 2023

The exhibition is open every day, except Monday
From 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.
Full rate: €6 / Reduced rate: €4

The Pinault Collection is on show all summer long in Paris, Rennes and Dinard: buy a ticket to one exhibition and get a discount on two other exhibitions!

- “Avant l’orage” at the Bourse de Commerce — Pinault Collection (Paris) until 11 September 2023
- “Irving Penn. Artists Portraits. Photographs from the Pinault Collection Pinault” at the Villa Les Roches Brunes (Dinard), from 11 June to 1 October 2023
- “Forever Sixties, the spirit of the sixties in the Pinault Collection” at the Couvent des Jacobins (Rennes), from 10 June to 10 September 2023

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