

Portraits & Early Work

Arnold Newman

Opening: May 8th from 6 until 9 pm

Show: May 9th until June 28th 2014

FIFTY ONE TOO is pleased to announce the first solo show by the renowned photographer Arnold Newman (USA, 1918-2006). He's legendary for his 'environmental portraiture': a new approach that he established by capturing his subjects in their surroundings in order to reveal the essence of the sitter's personality and/or profession. World's most eminent people took place before his lens: from post-war American and European artists to cultural figures and intellectuals to even American Presidents. Aside his narrative portraits, he is also known for his abstract and documentary photography, his 'early work'.

Although he began to study painting Arnold Newman switched quickly to photography. His photographic career started at chain portrait studios in Philadelphia in the late 1930s. There he learned the importance of interacting with the people in front of the lens. In his spare time he wandered around with his camera and mingled with art students who were trained at that time by Alexey Brodovitch (1898-1971), the influential art director of Harper's Bazaar. Through them Brodovitch's innovative perspective encouraged to develop Newman's gaze by photographing his surroundings in a graphical, abstract way. His early work shows views of city walls, porches, chairs, doorways, etc... which affirm a graphic simplicity. Also inspired by Walker Evans and Dorothea Lange's he captured social-documentary images of subordinated neighborhoods.

In 1941 he was discovered by Alfred Stieglitz (1864-1946) and had his first exhibition in Manhattan. In that same year he began to create his distinct environmental portraits, primarily of artists. Most of these pictures are made on assignments for magazines like Harper's Bazaar, Life, the New Yorker and Esquire. In the beginning the subjects were mostly artists located in New York: Willem de Kooning, Robert Rauschenberg, Alexander Calder, Igor Stravinsky. Later, after the war he was sent abroad to portray European artists like Picasso, Braque, Max Ernst, Piet Mondrian and Jean Arp to name a few.

His first solo show 'Artists Look Like This' was already in 1945 at the Philadelphia Museum. The first of so many that followed. By the end of the 1950s his images were so omnipresent that he was voted as one of world's ten best photographers.

His style became somehow outdated in the 1960s: the freshness was gone as his portraits of these successful people were too flattering and too well made. Nevertheless a decade later the art market for photographs started to flourish and a new generation got acquainted with this work.

In 1979 the National Portrait Gallery in London commissioned him to portray Britain's leading cultural and intellectual individuals, which resulted in the series 'The Great British'. Twenty years later he was asked by the National Portrait Gallery in Washington to do the same: portraits of individuals who have made a notable contribution to American culture and society, called 'Arnold Newman's Americans'.

Throughout his career he was also privileged to photograph several American presidents, such as John F. Kennedy, Harry S. Truman and Richard Nixon, all captured in a carefully composed setting.

He continued to work in the same way until late in his eighties. He died 2006.

Newman's portraits were mostly black & white, but there were a few in color as well such as the portrait of the American action painter Jackson Pollock. He used a large-format camera on a tripod to ensure every detail of the chosen setting was recorded. In contrast with his fellow-colleagues he turned away from the white backdrops of the studio. Instead he set up his camera in his subject's environment and composed with the corresponding visual elements to enhance the strength of the image of that person's identity.

He had countless exhibition shows and publications. One of his most famous books is *One Mind's Eye: The Portraits and Other Photographs of Arnold Newman* from 1974. But also the publication: *Arnold Newman: Five decades* from 1986, celebrating his 50 year career in photography. He won numerous awards, had nine honorary doctorates and his work is included in many museum collections such as Museum of Modern Art, NY, International Center of Photography, NY, Nihon University Collection of Art, Tokyo and the Moderna Museet in Stockholm.