

# Fraenkel Gallery

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For immediate release:

IRVING PENN **RADICAL BEAUTY** 1946–2007  
June 30–August 20, 2011



IRVING PENN *Mouth (for L'Oreal)*, New York, 1986

Fraenkel Gallery is pleased to present **RADICAL BEAUTY** 1946–2007, an exhibition of photographs by Irving Penn. On view from June 30–August 20, the works span six decades of the artist's influential career.

The nearly thirty photographs on view explore Penn's radical and long-standing investigation into what constitutes beauty, an aspect of his career that has received only passing attention. These works reflect the artist's deep appreciation for the diversity of human physiognomy, and challenge a media-driven and image-saturated society that has narrowed the very idea of beauty.

Known for depicting his subjects with a rare combination of precision and compositional elegance, Penn's work contrasts elements of the grotesque and the sublime. Throughout his early career, as a photographer at *Vogue*, and then later in his personal work, he consistently questioned and reinvented the parameters of physical beauty. His early nudes, from the late 1940s, were not exhibited until over three decades later. *Alexandra Beller (D)*, *Nude 132*, and *Nude 18* are studies of an exuberance of flesh.

His subjects—from the highlands of Papua New Guinea to the high-society of the fashion world—are presented as distinct and particular. His portraiture is known for revealing the essentials of his sitter, devoid of superfluousness. In *Five Okapa Warriors, New Guinea*, the men face the camera frontally, their pierced nasal septums and bush arrows as rigid as their gaze. Several images in the exhibition obscure faces—*Canvas Head With Hardware (Design by Jun Takahashi)* and *Football Face*, among others—alluding to the masks of fashion and persona.

Irving Penn, (1917–2009), was one of the most influential photographers of the twentieth century. Having studied art under Alexey Brodovitch, Penn began a decades-long career with *Vogue* where he became known for his groundbreaking fashion and celebrity portraiture. His sitters included many of the luminaries of the day, from Martha Graham and Marcel Duchamp, to Picasso, O'Keeffe and Tennessee Williams. He was equally renowned for his still life work. Flowers, food and all manner of detritus—cigarette butts, discarded paper cups, and chewing gum—found their way into his studio. Later in his career he traveled the globe photographing indigenous people in a simulated, portable studio, producing memorable images from Africa, South America, and Papua New Guinea. Numerous books on his work have appeared, such as *A Notebook at Random*, *Worlds in a Small Room*, *Irving Penn Portraits*, and *The Small Trades*. His work is included in most major museum collections.

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