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Beat Memories: The Photographs of Allan Ginsberg

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Release Date: April 14, 2010

RENOWNED AMERICAN POET ALLEN GINSBERG'S PHOTOGRAPHS OF HIMSELF AND BEAT PERSONALITIES ARE FEATURED IN FIRST SCHOLARLY EXHIBITION AND CATALOGUE, AT THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, MAY 2–SEPTEMBER 6, 2010



Allen Ginsberg, *Wandering Along East 7th Street*, 1953. Gelatin silver print, printed 1984-1997. Gift of Gary S. Davis. © Copyright 2010 The Allen Ginsberg LLC. All rights reserved.

Allen Ginsberg, *Jack Kerouac wandering along East 7th street ...*, 1953

gelatin silver print, printed 1984-1997

Gift of Gary S. Davis

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Washington, DC—Some of the most compelling photographs taken by renowned 20th-century American poet Allen Ginsberg (1926–1997) of himself and his fellow Beat poets and writers—including William S. Burroughs, Neal Cassady, Gregory Corso, and Jack Kerouac—are the subject of the first scholarly exhibition and catalogue of these works. ***Beat Memories: The Photographs of Allen Ginsberg*** will explore all facets of his photographs through 79 black-and-white portraits, on view at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, from May 2 through September 6, 2010.

The works are selected largely from a recent gift to the Gallery by Gary S. Davis as well as from private lenders. Davis acquired a master set of Ginsberg's photographs from the poet's estate,

including one print of every photograph in Ginsberg's possession at the time of his death. If more than one print existed, Ginsberg's estate selected the one with the most compelling inscription. In 2008 and 2009 Davis donated more than 75 of these photographs to the National Gallery.

"We owe an enormous debt of gratitude to Gary Davis for his dedication to Ginsberg's work and for his donations to the National Gallery," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "Joining other large and important holdings of photographs by such 20th-century artists as Harry Callahan, Walker Evans, Robert Frank, Lee Friedlander, André Kertész, Irving Penn, Alfred Stieglitz, and Paul Strand, this Ginsberg collection will allow future generations to study the evolution of the visual art of this important poet in all its rich complexity and to assess his contributions to 20th-century American photography."

Exhibition Support

The exhibition is organized by the National Gallery of Art.

The exhibition is made possible through the generous support of the Trellis Fund.

Additional support is provided by The Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation, Inc.

The Exhibition

The same ideas that informed Ginsberg's poetry—an intense observation of the world, a deep appreciation for the beauty of the vernacular, a faith in intuitive expression—also permeate his photographs.

When Ginsberg first began to take photographs in the 1950s, he—like countless other amateurs—had his film developed and printed at a local drugstore. The exhibition begins with a small selection of these "drugstore" prints.

The exhibition showcases examples of his now celebrated portraits of Beat writers such as Burroughs, Kerouac, and Ginsberg himself, starting just before they achieved fame with their publication, respectively, of *Naked Lunch* (1959), *On the Road* (1957), and *Howl* (1956), and continuing through the 1960s. In the photograph *Bob*

Donlon (Rob Donnelly, Kerouac's 'Desolation Angels), Neal Cassady, myself in black corduroy jacket... (1956), Ginsberg captures the tender, playful quality of his close-knit group of friends.

Photographs such as *The first shopping cart street prophet I'd directly noticed...* (1953) and *Ginsberg's apartment at 1010 Montgomery Street, San Francisco* (1953), reveal his self-taught talents and careful attention to the world around him.

The second section of the exhibition presents Ginsberg's later photographs, taken from the early 1980s until his death. These images were immediately embraced by the art world in the 1980s, and works such as *Publisher-hero Barney Rosset whose Grove Press legal battles liberated U.S. literature & film...*(1991) and *Lita Hornick in her dining room...*(1995) were exhibited in galleries and museums around the world. Prestigious institutions acquired Ginsberg's photographs for their permanent collections, and two books were published on his photographic accomplishments. Ginsberg was not simply a happy bystander, witnessing these events from afar; he was one of the most active promoters of his photography. With their handwritten captions by Ginsberg himself, often reflecting on the passage of time, his photographs are both records and recollections of an era.

Allen Ginsberg (1926–1997)

Allen Ginsberg began to take photographs in 1953 when he purchased a small, secondhand Kodak camera. From then until the early 1960s, he photographed himself and his friends in New York and San Francisco, or on his travels around the world. At the same time, he was formulating his poetic voice. Ginsberg first commanded public attention in 1955 when he read his provocative and now famous poem *Howl* to a wildly cheering audience at the Six Gallery in San Francisco. It was published the following year by City Lights Books with an introduction by William Carlos Williams.

Together with *On the Road* (1957), written by Kerouac, *Howl* was immediately hailed as a captivating, if challenging expression of both a new voice and a new vision for American literature. Celebrating personal freedom, sexual openness, and spontaneity, Ginsberg and Kerouac came to be seen as the embodiment of a younger generation—the Beats—who were unconcerned with middle-class American values and aspirations and decried its materialism and conformity. Ginsberg abandoned photography in 1963.

In 1983, with this rich, full life largely behind him, Ginsberg became increasingly interested in ensuring and perpetuating his legacy. Inspired by the discovery of his old negatives and encouraged by photographers Berenice Abbott and Robert Frank, he reprinted much of his early photographs and made new portraits of longtime friends and other acquaintances, such as the painter Francesco Clemente and musician Bob Dylan. With his poetic voice refined, Ginsberg, also added extensive inscriptions beneath each image, describing both his relationship with the subject and his memories of their times together.

Unlike many other members of the Beat Generation whose careers were cut short, Ginsberg wrote and published deeply moving and influential poetry for the rest of his life, including *Kaddish* (1961), his soulful lament for his mother, and *The Fall of America: Poems of These States, 1965 –1971* (1972), which was awarded a National Book Award in 1974. Using his fame to advance social causes, he also continued to capture public attention as an outspoken opponent to the Vietnam War and American militarism and as a champion of free speech, gay rights, and oppressed people around the world. In the midst of this popular acclaim, Ginsberg's photographs have not received much critical attention, especially in the years since his death in 1997.

Although Ginsberg's photographs form one of the most revealing records of the Beat and counterculture generation from the 1950s to the 1990s, tracing their journey from youthful characters to aging, often spent figures, his pictures are far more than historical documents. Drawing on the most common form of photography—the snapshot—he created spontaneous, uninhibited pictures of ordinary events to celebrate and preserve what he called "the sacredness of the moment."

Curator and Exhibition Catalogue

Sarah Greenough, senior curator, department of photographs, National Gallery of Art, is the curator of the exhibition.

Published by the National Gallery of Art and DelMonico Books, an imprint of Prestel Publishing, a fully illustrated catalogue includes an essay by Greenough, exploring the connection between Ginsberg's poetry and photography, and a 1991 interview between Ginsberg and Thomas Gladysz. The 137-page catalogue will include 92 illustrations and will be available for purchase in the Gallery Shops in

hardcover and softcover. To order, please visit our Web site at <http://shop.nga.gov/>; call (800) 697-9350 or (202) 842-6002; fax (202) 789-3047; or e-mail mailorder@nga.gov.

General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets at Constitution Avenue NW, and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. For information call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176, or visit the Gallery's Web site at www.nga.gov. Follow the Gallery on Facebook at www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt and on Twitter at <http://.twitter.com/ngadc>.

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

For additional press information please call or send inquiries to:

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[Beat Memories: The Photographs of Allen Ginsberg](#)

May 2 through September 6, 2010

[Robert Bergman: Portraits, 1986–1995](#)

October 11, 2009 through January 10, 2010

[Looking In: Robert Frank's "The Americans" \(2009\)](#)

[Oceans, Rivers, and Skies: Ansel Adams, Robert Adams, and Alfred Stieglitz \(2008\)](#)

[Richard Misrach: On the Beach \(2008\)](#)

[The Art of the American Snapshot, 1888-1978: From the Collection of Robert E. Jackson \(2007\)](#)

[Photographic Discoveries: Recent Acquisitions \(2006\)](#)

[Irving Penn: Platinum Prints \(2005\)](#)

[André Kertész \(2005\)](#)

Biography

SARAH GREENOUGH



Sarah Greenough is senior curator of photographs at the National Gallery of Art, Washington. She has organized numerous exhibitions for the Gallery, including *Alfred Stieglitz (1983)*, *On the Art of Fixing a Shadow: 150 Years of Photography (1989)*, *Modern Art and America: Alfred Stieglitz and His New York Galleries (2001)*, *André Kertész (2005)*, and *Irving Penn: Platinum Prints (2005)* that have also traveled to museums around the world. Most recently, she was co-curator of *The Art of the American Snapshot, 1888-1978: From the Collection of Robert E. Jackson (2007)* and organized *Richard Misrach: On the Beach (2008)* for exhibition at the National Gallery of Art.

Greenough is the author of many publications, including *Walker Evans: Subways and Streets (1991)*, *Robert Frank: Moving Out (1994)*, *Harry Callahan (1996)*, *Alfred Stieglitz: The Key Set (2002)*, and *All the Mighty World: The Photographs of Roger Fenton, 1852–1860 (2004)*, with Malcolm Daniel and Gordon Baldwin.

Her exhibitions and publications have won many awards, including the International Center of Photography Publications Award for *On the Art of Fixing a Shadow: 150 Years of Photography* and the

All The Mighty World: The Photographs of Roger Fenton, 1852-1860
(2004)

Modern Art and America: Alfred Stieglitz and His New York Galleries (2001)

On the Art of Fixing a Shadow: 150 Years of Photography (1989)

Alfred Stieglitz (1983)

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George Wittenborn Memorial Book Award for *Alfred Stieglitz: The Key Set*. In 2007, she and co-author Diane Waggoner won the College Art Association's Alfred H. Barr, Jr. award for outstanding museum scholarship for their exhibition catalogue, *The Art of the American Snapshot: 1888-1978*.

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