

THE GORDON PARKS FOUNDATION

American Champion

New exhibition opens at The Gordon Parks Foundation's 48 Wheeler exhibition space

Pleasantville, New York – The Gordon Parks Foundation announces the opening of a new exhibition of photographs. *American Champion* opens Monday, June 6 and will be the Foundation's fourth show in its exhibition space at 48 Wheeler Avenue in Pleasantville, New York. *American Champion* showcases many intimate and never published photographs of the notorious Olympic gold medalist and world heavyweight champion boxer Muhammad Ali taken in 1966 and 1970.

Gordon Parks photographed Ali for *Life* magazine when the athlete was in the midst of an intense national controversy after changing his name from Cassius Clay, converting to Islam, and joining the Black Muslim cause. He was chastised for anti-white sentiments and for declaring himself a conscientious objector to the Vietnam War (on grounds that his religion forbade him to fight in this conflict). Amid the uproar, Parks met Ali in Miami in 1966, where the champ was training, then accompanied him to London for his next fight. In his photographs and text, Parks crafted a psychological portrait of Ali that most Americans might never have imagined; he hoped to rehabilitate Ali's image by showing the human side of the smooth-talking fleet-footed boxer who often came off as supremely confident, even arrogant, in his public appearances. The article was tremendously popular and helped redefine Ali's career.

Four years later, in 1970, Parks profiled Ali again—this time as he was attempting to win back his world heavyweight crown from Joe Frazier. While the initial images in the 1970 *Life* article express the ferocity the twenty-eight-year-old boxer brought to his training, Parks again evinced sympathy for Ali through disarming images, such as the famous picture of him glancing wide-eyed in the locker room.

The twenty-two photographs on display in *American Champion* provide a glimpse into these two picture stories and the burgeoning friendship between Ali and Parks at a pivotal moment in each man's career. The exhibition remains open through September 24.

About Gordon Parks

Gordon Parks was one of the seminal figures of twentieth century photography. A humanitarian with a deep commitment to social justice, he left behind a body of work that documents many of the most important aspects of American culture from the early 1940s up until his death in 2006, with a focus on race relations, poverty, civil rights, and urban life. In addition, Parks was also a celebrated composer, author, and filmmaker who interacted with many of the most prominent people of his era - from politicians and artists to celebrities and athletes.

About The Gordon Parks Foundation exhibition space

The Gordon Parks Foundation's mission is to permanently preserve the work of Gordon Parks, make it available to the public through exhibitions, books, and electronic media, and support artistic and educational activities that advance what Parks described as "the common search for a better life and a better world." The primary purpose of The Gordon Parks Foundation's exhibition space is to present focused exhibits of Parks' photography, as part of the Foundation's commitment to educating the public and preserving his work.

For more information and press images please contact Amanda Smith: amanda@mkfound.org or 914-238-2619.

Hours & Admission

Free and open to the public.
M-Th: 10am - 4pm
F: 10am - 1pm

General Information

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Tel: (914) 238-2619
Website: www.gordonparksfoundation.org

Social Media

Facebook: The Gordon Parks Foundation
Twitter: @GparksFound
Instagram: gordonparksfoundation