

Gordon Parks

July 12 – August 24, 2024
1201 South La Brea Avenue
Los Angeles



Gordon Parks, *Mr. and Mrs. Albert Thornton, Mobile, Alabama, 1956* © The Gordon Parks Foundation, courtesy Pace Gallery

Los Angeles – Pace is pleased to present an exhibition of work by Gordon Parks at its Los Angeles gallery from July 12 to August 24. This show—organized by Pace’s Curatorial Director Kimberly Drew—marks the gallery’s first solo presentation of the artist’s work as part of its ongoing partnership with the Gordon Parks Foundation. The exhibition will be complemented by a celebratory summer block party at Pace’s LA gallery on July 13. This event will be open to the public and will feature food and music.

A photographer, filmmaker, composer, and writer, Parks was one of the most influential artists of the 20th century, describing himself as “an objective reporter with a subjective heart.” Born in segregated Fort Scott, Kansas in 1912, he was first drawn to photography as a young man when he encountered magazine images of migrant workers produced by the Farm Security Administration (FSA). Though he never received formal photographic training, he would go on to create a body of work documenting American society and culture from the 1940s to the 2000s, focusing in on race relations, poverty, civil rights, and urban life.

“I saw that the camera could be a weapon against poverty, against racism, against all sorts of social wrongs,” Parks once said. “I knew at that point I had to have a camera.”

Following his early work with government agencies—including the FSA and the Office of War Information (OWI)—and the Standard Oil Company, he became the first Black staff photographer for *Life* magazine in the late 1940s. Covering social issues, fashion, entertainment, and sports, Parks captured iconic images of Muhammad Ali, Malcolm X, Duke Ellington, Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., Stokely Carmichael, and others during his two decades at the publication.

The first exhibition dedicated to Parks’s work to be mounted in LA since a 2019 presentation of his Flávio da Silva series at the Getty, Pace’s upcoming show will bring together some 40 photographs spanning four decades of his career, from the early 1940s to the mid 1980s. Organized thematically, these works reflect the empathy and care with which he approached image making and storytelling, creating nuanced, intimate portraits of his subjects’ interior lives and their private spaces as part of that practice.

Highlights in the show include *American Gothic, Washington D.C.* (1942), an iconic image of Ella Watson, a government employee at the FSA, who poses with a mop and broom against an American flag in the background; *Baptism, Chicago, Illinois* (1953), one of several photographs on view that speak to Parks's interest in documenting worship and spirituality within Black communities; and a close-up portrait of Ali from 1966. The exhibition will also include selections from Parks's *Segregation Story*—a series of more than 70 color photographs of Black life in segregated America that he created in 1956—as well as a video installation of his short film *Diary of a Harlem Family* (1967).

This exhibition follows past collaborations between Pace and the Gordon Parks Foundation, including the gallery's presentation of the artist's work in several recent group shows—*Diamonds on the Soles of Her Shoes*, an online exhibition in 2020, and *Studio to Stage* in New York in 2022—and on its booth at Frieze LA in 2024. Located in Pleasantville, New York, the Gordon Parks Foundation preserves the work of the artist, making it available to the public through exhibitions, publications, and programs. The foundation—which Parks himself cofounded in 2006—supports artistic and educational activities that advance what he described as "the common search for a better life and a better world."

In recent years, major exhibitions of Parks's work have been presented at the Museum of Modern Art and Jack Shainman Gallery in New York; the Carnegie Museum of Art in Pittsburgh; the Art Institute of Chicago; the Getty Museum in LA; the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.; and other institutions around the world.

The Gordon Parks Foundation supports and produces artistic and educational initiatives that advance the legacy and vision of Gordon Parks—recognized as the most significant American photographer of the 20th century, as well as a writer, musician, and filmmaker, who used the arts to further "the common search for a better life and a better world." Through exhibitions, publications, and public programs organized in collaboration with national and international institutions at its exhibition space in Pleasantville, New York, the Foundation provides access to, and supports understanding of, the work and contributions of Gordon Parks for artists, scholars, students, and the public. Through its year-round educational programming and annual grant-making initiatives, the Foundation champions current and future generations of artists and humanitarians whose work carries on Parks's legacy. <https://www.gordonparksfoundation.org>

In a career that spanned more than fifty years, photographer, filmmaker, musician, and author **Gordon Parks** (American, 1912–2006) created a groundbreaking body of work that made him one of the most influential artists of the twentieth century. Beginning in the 1940s, he documented American life and culture with a focus on social justice, race relations, the civil rights movement, and the African American experience. Born into poverty and segregation in Fort Scott, Kansas, Parks was drawn to photography as a young man. Despite his lack of professional training, he won a Julius Rosenwald Fellowship in 1942; this led to a position with the photography section of the Farm Security Administration (FSA) in Washington, D.C., and, later, the Office of War Information (OWI). By the mid-1940s, he was working as a freelance photographer for publications such as *Vogue*, *Glamour*, and *Ebony*. Parks was hired in 1948 as a staff photographer for *Life* magazine, where more than two decades he created some of his most notable work. In 1969 he became the first African American to write and direct a major feature film, *The Learning Tree*, based on his semiautobiographical novel. His next directorial endeavor, *Shaft* (1971) helped define a genre then referred to as Blaxploitation films. Parks continued photographing, publishing, and composing until his death in 2006.

Pace is a leading international art gallery representing some of the most influential contemporary artists and estates from the past century, holding decades-long relationships with Alexander Calder, Jean Dubuffet, Barbara Hepworth, Agnes Martin, Louise Nevelson, and Mark Rothko. Pace enjoys a unique U.S. heritage spanning East and West coasts through its early support of artists central to the Abstract Expressionist and Light and Space movements.

Since its founding by Arne Glimcher in 1960, Pace has developed a distinguished legacy as an artist-first gallery that mounts seminal historical and contemporary exhibitions. Under the current leadership of CEO Marc Glimcher, Pace continues to support its artists and share their visionary work with audiences worldwide by remaining at the forefront of innovation. Now in its seventh decade, the gallery advances its mission through a robust global program—comprising exhibitions, artist projects, public installations, institutional collaborations, performances, and interdisciplinary projects. Pace has a legacy in art bookmaking and has published over five hundred titles in close collaboration with artists, with a focus on original scholarship and on introducing new voices to the art historical canon.

Today, Pace has seven locations worldwide, including European footholds in London and Geneva as well as Berlin, where the gallery established an office in 2023. Pace maintains two galleries in New York—its headquarters at 540 West 25th Street, which welcomed almost 120,000 visitors and programmed 20 shows in its first six months, and an adjacent 8,000 sq. ft. exhibition space at 510 West 25th Street. Pace’s long and pioneering history in California includes a gallery in Palo Alto, which was open from 2016 to 2022. Pace’s engagement with Silicon Valley’s technology industry has had a lasting impact on the gallery at a global level, accelerating its initiatives connecting art and technology as well as its work with experiential artists. Pace consolidated its West Coast activity through its flagship in Los Angeles, which opened in 2022. Pace was one of the first international galleries to establish outposts in Asia, where it operates permanent gallery spaces in Hong Kong and Seoul, along with an office and viewing room in Beijing. In 2024, Pace will open its first gallery space in Japan in Tokyo’s new Azabudai Hills development.

Press Inquiries

Sara Fox
Director of Public Relations
sfox@pacegallery.com
+1 646 522 5480

Talia Trauner
Public Relations Manager
ttrauner@pacegallery.com
+1 305 778 9349

Emily Kopp
Public Relations Manager
ekopp@pacegallery.com
+1 516 426 4146

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