

## JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY

### GORDON PARKS

*Half and the Whole*

January 7 – February 20, 2021

Jack Shainman Gallery is pleased to announce **Gordon Parks: *Half and the Whole***, on view at both gallery locations. As a photographer, film director, composer, and writer, Gordon Parks (1912-2006) was a visionary artist whose work continues to influence American culture to this day. In collaboration with the Gordon Parks Foundation, this two-part exhibition featuring photographs that span from 1942–1970, demonstrates the continued influence and impact of Parks's images, which remain as relevant today as they were at the time of their making. The exhibition is accompanied by a short essay written by Jelani Cobb, Pulitzer Prize-nominated writer and Columbia University Professor, who writes of these photographs: "we see Parks performing the same service for ensuing generations—rendering a visual shorthand for bigger questions and conflicts that dominated the times. Bearing witness."

On view at our 20<sup>th</sup> Street location is a selection of works from Parks's most iconic series, among them *Invisible Man* and *Segregation Story*. These images, many of which have rarely been exhibited, exemplify Parks's singular use of color and composition to render an unprecedented view of the Black experience in America. The earliest photograph in the exhibition, a striking 1948 portrait of Margaret Burroughs—a writer, artist, educator, and activist who transformed the cultural landscape in Chicago—shows how Parks uniquely understood the importance of making visible both the triumphs and struggles of African American life.

Our 24<sup>th</sup> Street space features images of protest and portraits of leaders in the fight for social justice and racial equality, among them Malcolm X, Eldridge and Kathleen Cleaver, Muhammad Ali, and a woman only known via Parks's searing portrait, Ella Watson. In the weeks and months since the murder of George Floyd, these images—many made over half a century ago—resonate louder than ever. Of particular note are 1963 images of protests relating to incidents of police brutality, equally striking for their relevance as for their contemporary compositions. Regardless of subject, Parks was more than a keen observer, he was a witness who through his photographs was able to channel the humanity that powered such struggles. As Jelani Cobb writes:

Parks was also aware that no group of people, no culture, was simply the sum of its worst tragedies. Always, there is a glimpse of the joy that perseveres even in the most hostile circumstances, the glint of light peering through foreboding clouds. The snatched-from-the-headlines quality of these images attest to the fact that our conflicts have not changed, but neither has the willingness to confront them. There is nothing in Parks's body of work that includes the phrase "Black Lives Matter," but it didn't need to. He'd already shown that they do, minute after minute, across the void from his time to our own.

Gordon Parks was born in Kansas in 1912. He relocated to St. Paul, Minnesota as a teenager and began taking fashion photographs for a local clothing store. In 1940, he moved to Chicago, where he operated a portrait studio on the city's South Side. After being awarded the prestigious Julius Rosenwald Fund Fellowship, he moved to Washington D.C. and worked for the Farm Security Administration. In 1948, after working as a freelance photographer for publications such as *Ebony* and *Vogue*, he was hired as the first African American staff photographer at *Life* magazine. He held the position at the magazine until the early 1970s, completing groundbreaking assignments that are some of the most important and iconic documentation of the civil rights movement. Parks was also a noted composer and author, and in 1969, became the first African American to write and direct a Hollywood feature film based on his bestselling novel *The Learning Tree*. This was followed in 1971 by the classic motion picture *Shaft*. He was awarded the National Medal of Arts in 1988, and continued working until his death in 2006. That year, he established The Gordon Parks Foundation to continue his influential legacy. Current institutional exhibitions include *Gordon Parks and "The Atmosphere of Crime"* in the permanent collection galleries of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY and *Gordon Parks X Muhammad Ali, The Image of a Champion, 1966/1970* at The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, MO.

Upcoming exhibitions at the gallery include **Paul Anthony Smith** at 20<sup>th</sup> Street, and **Jackie Nickerson** at 24<sup>th</sup> Street, both opening February 25, 2021.

Gallery hours are Tuesday through Saturday from 10am to 6pm. For inquiries please contact the gallery at [info@jackshainman.com](mailto:info@jackshainman.com). For press inquiries and photographic material please contact Kate Morais, SUTTON, [kate@suttoncomms.com](mailto:kate@suttoncomms.com), +1 212 202 3402.