

## Irving Penn (1917– )

**B**orn in New Jersey, Irving Penn studied design at the Philadelphia Museum School, where he became a student of Alexey Brodovitch. In 1937, the year before he graduated, several of his drawings were published by Harper's Bazaar. From 1940 to 1941, he worked for the art and advertising director of Saks Fifth Avenue, and the following year he spent in Mexico painting, a medium he subsequently abandoned. Returning to New York, Penn was hired by Vogue magazine, first to create ideas for cover illustrations, then to photograph covers as well as editorial illustrations for the interior of the magazine. Working closely with Alexander Liberman, Penn developed a highly stylized, graphically compelling form of fashion photography which did much to define post-war notions of feminine chic and glamour. In his fashion and portrait photography, Penn favored the use of a neutral backdrop of gray or white seamless paper, or alternatively, the use of constructed architectural sets which created striking effects with oblique, diving diagonals and upward tipped perspectives. Penn also created numerous still life compositions for the magazine: carefully orchestrated assemblages of food or objects characterized by a play of three-dimensional and two-dimensional forms. In 1953 Penn opened his own commercial studio and almost immediately became one of the most influential and successful advertising photographers in the world.

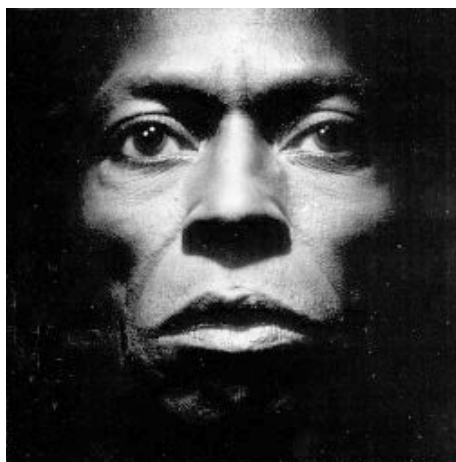


Eschewing any notions of naturalism, spontaneity, or chance, Penn has always favored the rigidly controlled, formal conditions of the studio. Thus, even when photographing North African nomads, New Guinea tribesman, Peruvian Indians, or Hell's Angels, Penn contrived portable studios that permitted much the same degree of elegant and structured lighting and composition that he used to photograph fashion models and socialites.

In addition to his fashion and commercial work, Penn has produced a body of art photography. Using platinum and other precious metal processes, Penn has photographed urban detritus (cigarette butts, crumpled wrappers, etc.), the torsos of plump artists' models, and most recently, still lifes of skulls, bones, and construction materials. While the subject matter represents the antithesis of his fashion and commercial work, as does the use of artisanal printing processes produced in numbered editions, both bodies of work reveal the same preoccupation: balance of form and carefully calibrated composition, with nuances of light and tone, presenting a subject that is emotionally neutral or kept always at emotional and psychological arm's length.



*Truman Capote, New York 1965*



*Miles Davis*



*Pablo Picasso, Cannes 1957*



*Ballet Society 1947*



*Woman with Roses (Lisa Fonssagrives-Penn), Paris 1950*



*Marcel Duchamp 1960*



*Harlequin Dress (Lisa Fonssagrives-Penn), Paris 1950*



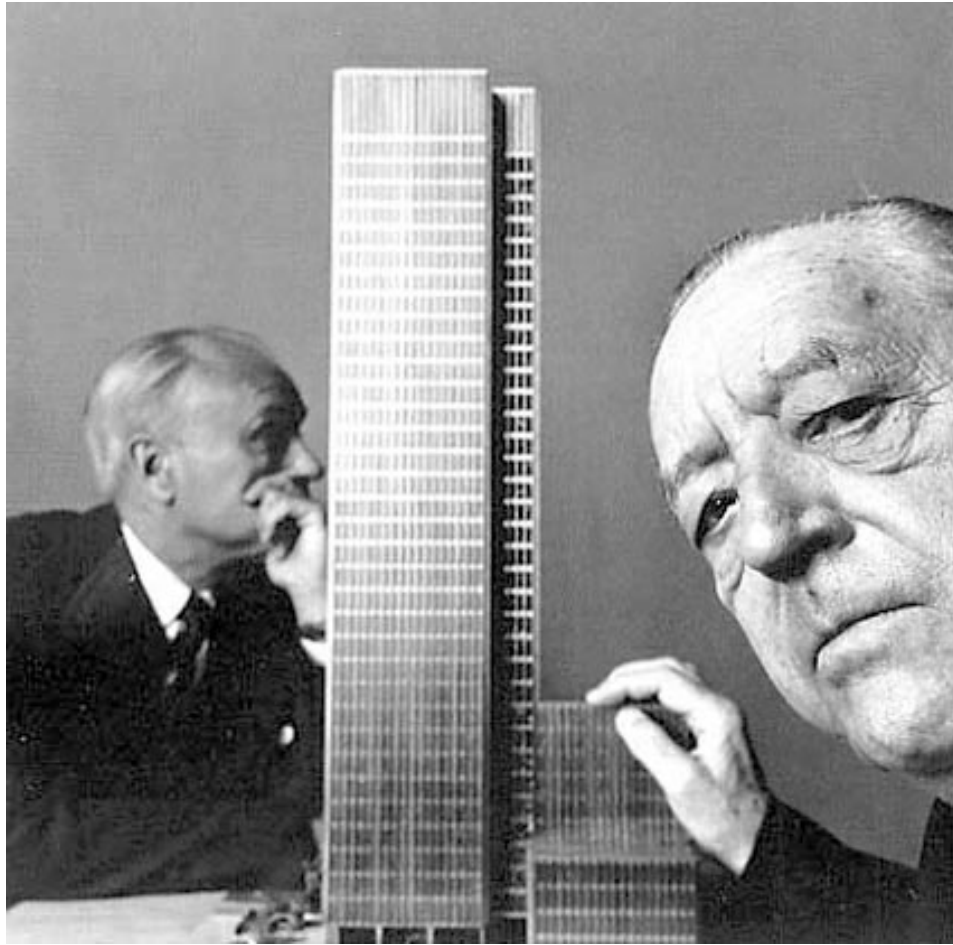
Upper left: *Tennessee Williams* 1951

Upper right: *Spencer Tracy*

Lower left: *Cigarette* 1972

Lower right: *Three Asaro Mud Men*  
*New Guinea* 1970





*Mies van der Rohe and Philip Johnson with model of Seagram Building 1955*

Lower left: *Vogue* cover 1951

Lower right: *Street Findings* 1999



## Imogen Cunningham (1883-1976)

from [http://www.historylink.org/essays/output.cfm?file\\_id=5220](http://www.historylink.org/essays/output.cfm?file_id=5220)

Imogen Cunningham was born in Portland, Oregon, on April 12, 1883. As a child, she and her family lived on a farming commune in Port Angeles. In 1889, the family moved to a home situated on Queen Anne Hill in Seattle. In 1903, Cunningham graduated from Broadway High School.

In 1905, she began taking photographs, developing and printing the images in a darkroom her father had constructed for her in a shed behind the house. As a chemistry major at the University of Washington (no art degree was available at the time), Cunningham undertook her first photographic experiments in the wilds surrounding her home and on the University of Washington campus. She graduated with honors in 1907. She then went to work in the photographic studio of Edward S. Curtis, the eminent photo-documentarian of Native Americans and their lives.

A 1909, Pi Beta Phi fellowship funded a transcontinental rail journey across Canada, ship passage to Europe, and a year in Germany, where Cunningham studied photochemistry at the Technische Hochschule.

Upon her return to Seattle in September 1910, Cunningham established her commercial portrait studio at 1117 Terry on Seattle's First Hill. The small basement space was furnished in Bohemian comfort with deep blue velvet draperies covering the walls, and was designed to put sitters at ease. It served Cunningham as both home and studio. Imogen also photographed customers in their own homes, traveling by streetcar and carrying her equipment in a wicker case.

In 1915, Cunningham married artist and etcher Roi Partridge. Partridge, who grew up in Seattle, was studying in Paris at the time he and Cunningham began to exchange letters. Their romance built by post, culminating in their marriage a few months after Partridge's return to Seattle at the outbreak of World War I. Cunningham's nude studies of her husband, taken on Mt. Rainier and printed in the *Town Crier*, scandalized Seattle society. These shots are credited as the first male nude photographs taken by a female photographer.

The birth of their son Gryffyd in 1916, combined with Partridge's frequent absences for sketching trips, complicated Cunningham's professional situation considerably and created a situation in which producing photographs was difficult. Servant problems, the lack of help with childcare, and several fires in the household led Cunningham to close her successful studio and decamp to the San Francisco Bay area. Her parents had moved to Sonoma County during her time in Germany.

In preparation for her move, she stood on the street outside her studio and smashed her glass plate negatives against a garbage can, then tossed the pieces in: They were too heavy to make the move with her. With the exception of about a hundred glass plates she wrapped and used to weigh down prints during packing, only the prints she made before 1917 survive to document Cunningham's Seattle years.

Pregnant with twins Rondall and Padraic, Cunningham lived near her



parents. Roi Partridge, who had been sketching in Carmel, California, at the time Imogen moved the household, soon rejoined her and found work as a professor at Mills College. Cunningham spent the next decade photographing what was close at hand: her children and her garden. Speaking later of herself in the third person, Cunningham said of these years:

“(With) one hand in the dishpan, the other in the darkroom ... she had a skill with the camera which she was not willing to sacrifice to maternity, so she turned her camera to use and photographed the things she had around her--her own children of course and plants that she cultivated. It is quite easy to do a bit of gardening work and yet attend children. It is not as easy to do good photographic work, but it can be done. She did both” (Heiting, p. 112).

Cunningham moved in artistic circles in the Bay area. She befriended photographers Edward Weston and Ansel Adams, as well as fledgling photographer Dorothea Lange. She was a member of the seminal photography group f/64, which promoted sharp focus and specificity of image in photographic work. The 1930s brought Cunningham greater freedom from the duties of motherhood, and she resumed commercial work. She published photographs in *Vanity Fair Magazine* and her work was included in many photographic exhibitions.

In 1934 Cunningham and Partridge divorced and in 1947 Imogen established a home and studio at 1331 Green Street in San Francisco. She would occupy this space for the remainder of her life.

Cunningham did not sever her ties to Seattle when she moved south. In 1935, she produced the photographs for the Cornish School catalog. In 1965, the Henry Gallery mounted a solo show of her work. In 1970, following her receipt of a Guggenheim Fellowship, the University of Washington Press published *Imogen Cunningham: Photographs*.

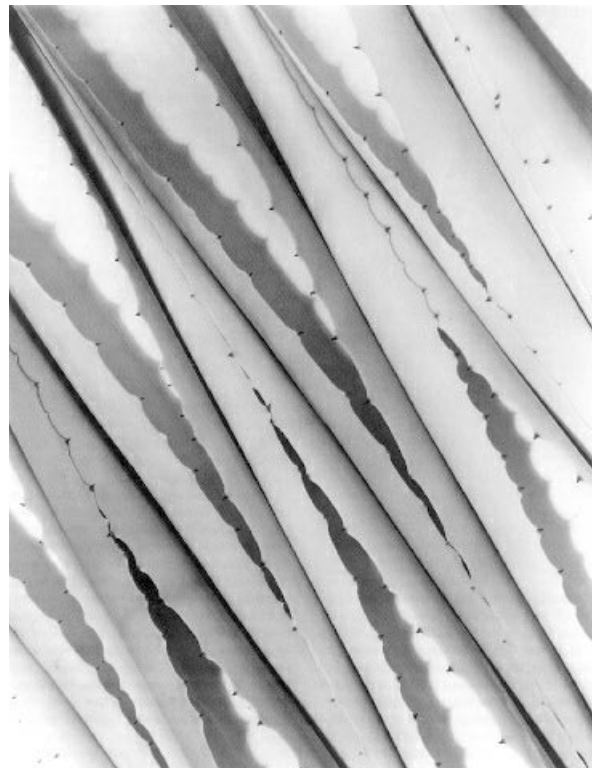
In 1971, the Seattle Art Museum gave her a solo exhibition. In 1974, Cunningham received the University of Washington’s Alumnus Summa Laude Dignatus award, and the UW Press published *Imogen! Imogen Cunningham Photographs 1910-1973*. Another one-person exhibition at the Henry Gallery followed. She made repeated trips to Seattle for these events and had countless friends and admirers here.

Imogen Cunningham’s death on June 23, 1976, did not end the long association between Seattle and one of the foremost photographers of the twentieth century. The University of Washington Press posthumously published her final portrait collection, *After Ninety*, in 1977. Cunningham’s work is well represented in local public and private collections, and continues to be exhibited regularly.

Through her last interview, Cunningham advocated self-education in photography.



*The Dream, 1910*



*Agave Pattern, 1920*

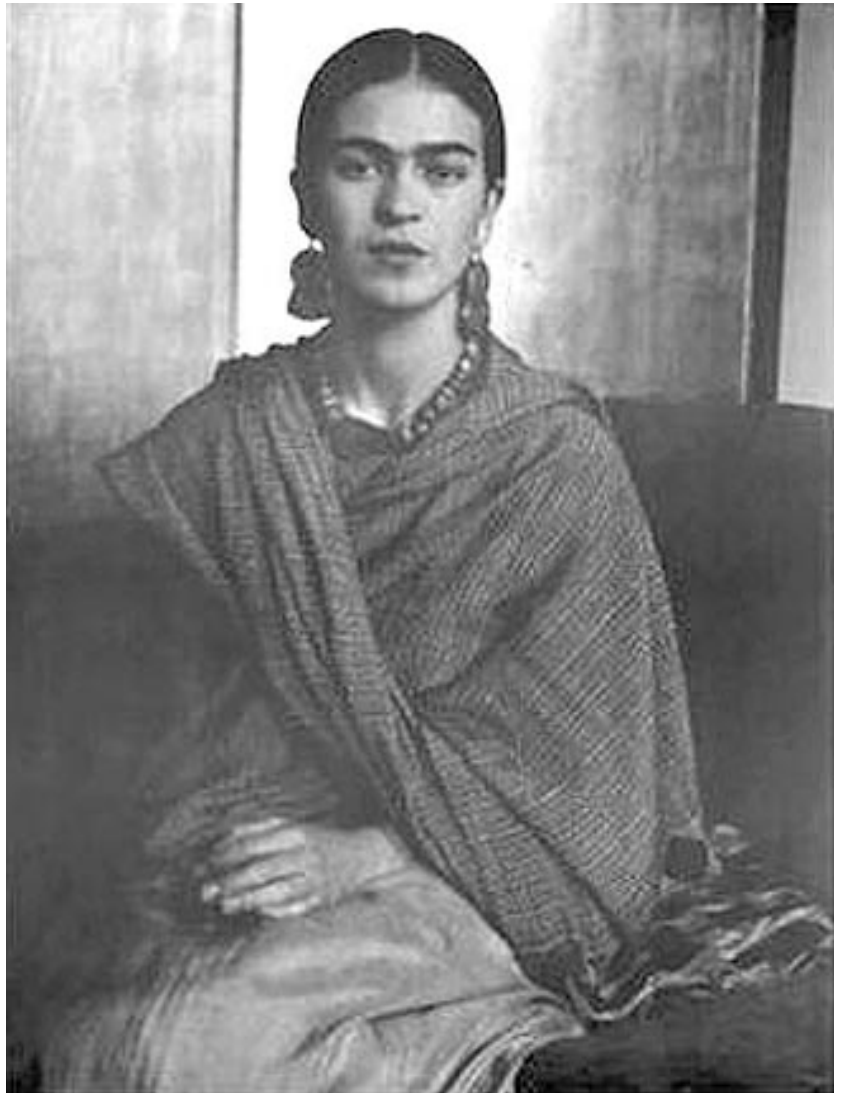


*2 Callas, 1929*

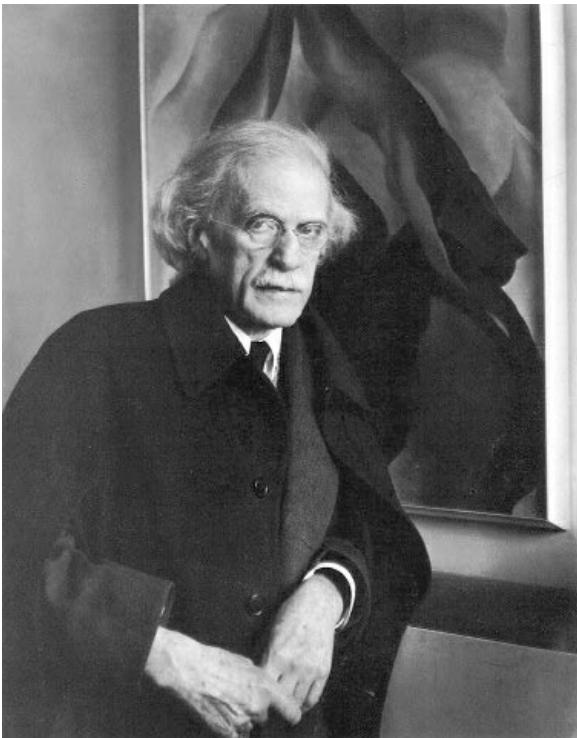


*Magnolia, 1925*

*Frida Kahlo c.1930s*

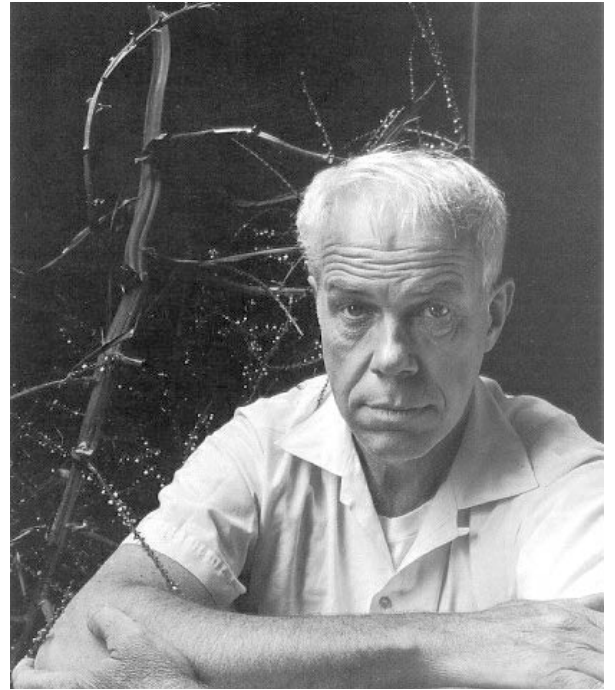


*Alfred Stieglitz, 1934*

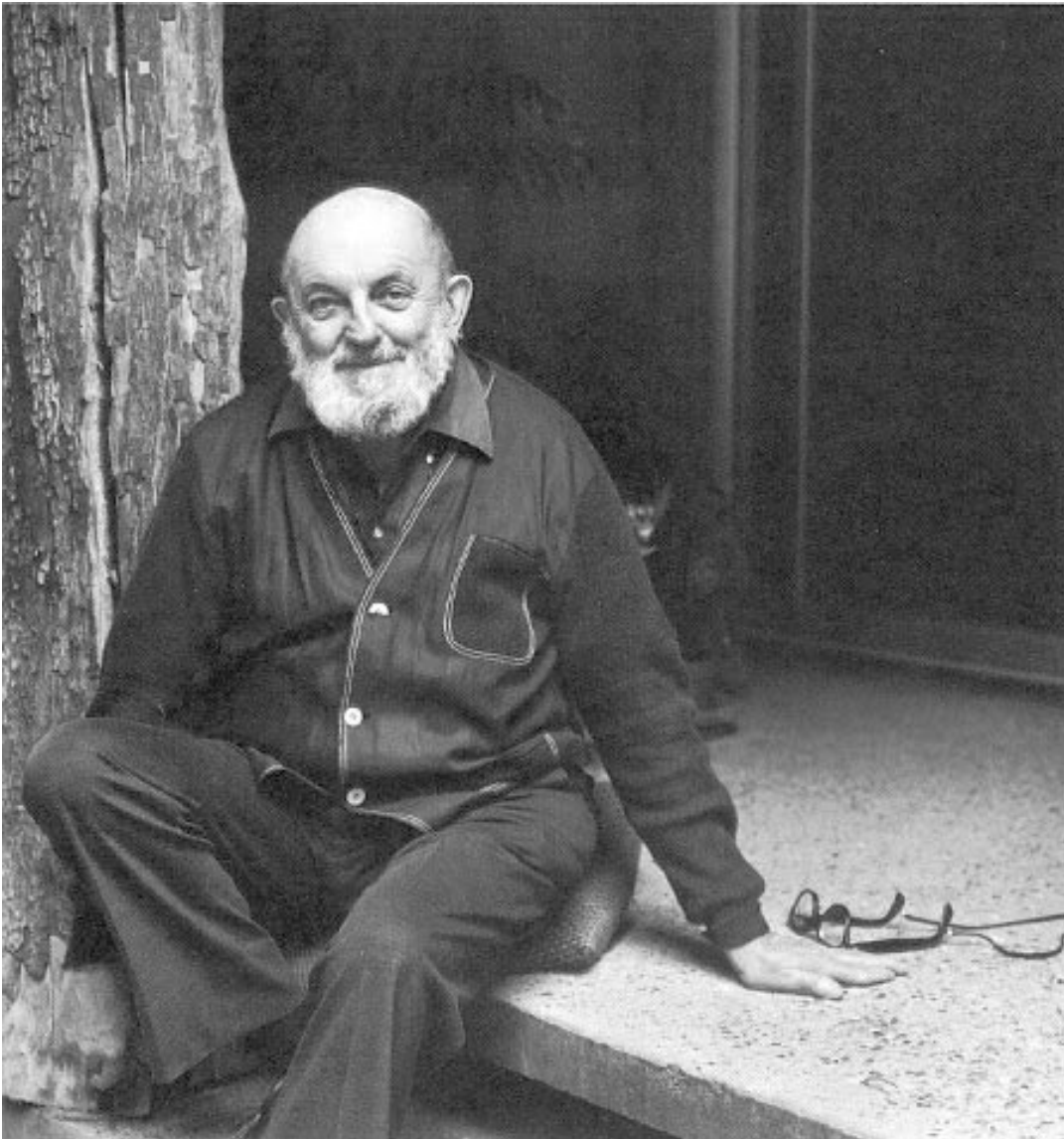




*The Unmade Bed, 1957*



*Minor White, 1963*



*Ansel Adams, 1975*