

PRESS INFORMATION

Richard Avedon is awarded the 1991 international Photography Prize of the Hasselblad Foundation

The Erna and Victor Hasselblad Foundation Photography Prize of 1991 has been awarded to Richard Avedon, the American portrait, fashion and reportage photographer.

The prize consists of the Erna and Victor Hasselblad Foundation gold medal and a cash sum of US \$ 43 000. It will be presented to Richard Avedon at a ceremony in Göteborg on November 8, 1991.

The Foundation motivates its choice as follows: "For more than 40 years, Richard Avedon has been a leading exponent of the art of modern photography. His work in *Harper's Bazaar* and *Vogue* in particular has contributed to a 'new look' in fashion photography and graphic design. His advertising photography impresses with its visual elegance and as a portrait photographer, Richard Avedon is among the very best in modern times."

This is the eleventh time this photography prize is being awarded. Former prize-winners are Lennart Nilsson, Sweden; Ansel Adams, USA; Henri Cartier-Bresson, France; Manuel Alvarez Bravo, Mexico; Irving Penn, USA; Ernst Haas, USA; Hiroshi Hamaya, Japan; Edouard Boubat, France; Sebastio Salgado, Brazil/France and William Klein, USA/France.

Fashion photography and portraits

Richard Avedon was born in 1923 in New York. After a short spell in the American Merchant Marines' photography unit, he made his debut at the tender age of 21 as a fashion photographer for *Harper's Bazaar* under the guidance of a dominant and creative art director, Alexey Brodovitch, who quickly discovered the young Avedon's talent. For decades he was the featured photographer of this fashion magazine. He also participated in the editorial work of *Theatre Arts* and *Vogue* and his works have been published internationally. Richard Avedon has also devoted his professional skills to commercial photography and he has acted as consultant to feature film producers and as director for TV productions.

As a fashion photographer, Avedon has shared top billing with Irving Penn in the USA since the 1940s. Inspired by the Hungarian photojournalist and fashion photographer Martin Munkácsi, Avedon has photographed fashion creations and fashion models in exciting journalistic studies on the streets, in nightclubs, circus arenas, together with fire-eaters, competition cyclists etc. In his studio photography for instance, he has refined fashion photographs into graphically simple compositions. He is the master of movement in fashion photography, using subtle gray nuances and a mild shadow-free light. Alternatively, as in the case of many of his female portraits of the 1950s he uses a flat, harsh light in which all the halftones have been eliminated.

As a portrait photographer and observer of the world's elite or of the representatives of the Civil Rights Movement (1963) and of the Anti-War Movement (1969), Avedon has adopted, as it seems, the posture of the aloof observer. He has created a unique set of camera portraits of famous as well as unknown people. His portraits are no idealizations -- they present the landscape of the face with acute clarity. At the same time, he registers poses, attitudes, hairstyles, clothing and accessories as part of the personal image. He has said: "My photographs don't go below the surface. I have great faith in surfaces. A good one is full of clues." His picture-book *In the American West* (1985) portrays the working class -- butchers, coal miners, convicts, waitresses -- all photographed in precise detail with a large-format camera. However, he does emphasize that these portraits are not to be regarded as just records of people; he points out that: "The moment an emotion or fact is transformed into a photograph it is no longer a fact but an opinion."

Avedon has produced and published several other photographic books over the years, such as *Observations* (1959) with text by Truman Capote; *Nothing Personal* (1964) with text by James Baldwin; *Avedon: Photographs 1947 - 1977* (1978). He has had a number of exhibitions which have won him widespread accolade, and he has received a series of awards such as the "Art Directors' Highest Achievement Award", the "National Magazine Visual Excellence Award" and the American Institute of Graphic Arts "Certificate of Excellence". He has also been appointed "One of the World's Ten Greatest Photographers" by the magazine *Popular Photography*. In 1989 he received a "Lifetime Achievement Award" from the Council of Fashion Designers in America and a Honorary Doctorate from the Royal College of Art in London. He is at present engaged in preparing a major retrospective exhibition and series of books.

Research and education

The Photography Prize was instituted by Erna and Victor Hasselblad, who donated all their assets to a foundation. According to the Foundation's statutes, a Photography Prize and the Erna and Victor Hasselblad gold medal are to be awarded every year or every alternate year, as means permit, to a person of particular merit.

In addition, the Foundation is to promote scientific education and research in the natural sciences and in photography. A number of projects are granted funds each year, to a total of approximately 1.2 million US \$.

In the autumn of 1989, the Foundation opened a Photographic Center in Göteborg, Sweden. It operates a continuous exhibition and lecture programme. A photographic research and reference library is also being built.

Göteborg, March 21, 1991

ERNA AND VICTOR HASSELBLAD FOUNDATION

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