

Irving Penn: *Burning Off the Page*

July 30 – September 3, 2022
 1201 South La Brea Avenue
 Los Angeles



Irving Penn, *Girl with Fruit, Shoe, and Butterflies*, 1946 © Condé Nast

Los Angeles – Pace is pleased to present a solo exhibition of work by Irving Penn at its Los Angeles gallery from July 30 to September 3. Titled *Irving Penn: Burning Off the Page*, the exhibition brings together 40 works created by the artist—whose work transcended the pages of magazines to the walls of museums and galleries—between the late 1930s and early 2000s.

Photographing for *Vogue* for nearly 70 years, Penn left an indelible mark on the history of the medium. His inventive fashion photographs, which transformed American image-making in the postwar era, continued to appear in the magazine up until his death in 2009. The artist was also highly accomplished and experimental in the darkroom, having engineered, among other innovations, a complex technique for making platinum-palladium prints. Four works of this kind figure in Pace’s upcoming exhibition, which is curated by art historian Michaëla de Lacaze Mohrmann.

Burning Off the Page centers on the formal strategies and experimentations that shaped Penn’s distinctive style, which he termed “photographism.” Penn, who was trained as a painter before becoming a photographer, found inspiration in the fine arts and often began his photographic process by drawing. As traced in Pace’s 2021 exhibition *Irving Penn: Photographism* in New York, Penn’s creative process entailed the translation of drawing, painting, and sculpture, among other art forms, into photography—a hybridization that blurred the line between high art, graphic design, fashion, and photography.

The gallery’s latest exhibition of Penn’s work continues this exploration of his photographism by focusing on how the printed page’s mediation of photography impacted the artist’s compositional choices, yielding an arresting simplicity that belies Penn’s complex interpenetration of media. Pace’s exhibition takes its title from a quote by the artist, who believed that a powerful image should “burn off the page,” a notion revealing Penn’s intention to create photographs that could exist as timeless and autonomous works of art well beyond the magazine pages shaping their immediate reception. *Burning Off the Page* also aims to highlight the often-overlooked physicality of Penn’s oeuvre and his virtuosic handwork in the creation of photographic prints.

Burning Off the Page foregrounds Penn’s fine-tuning and reinvention of certain visual devices over time. Works in the show are grouped into five categories—“Focus and Dissolve,” “Balance,” “(De)colorize,” “Materialize,” and

“Estrange”—reflecting Penn’s creative agency in his experimentations with composition and form throughout his seven-decade career.

In the “Focus and Dissolve” section, works such as *Isamu Noguchi* (1983), *Georgia O’Keeffe* (1949), and *Girl Behind Glass (Jean Patchett)* (1949) demonstrate how Penn skillfully directed the gaze through lighting, internal frames, and his iconic corner backdrop but also different blurring and fragmenting techniques. “Balance” focuses on the artist’s ability to forge harmonious yet tense compositions, featuring works including *After Dinner Games* (1947), a dynamic still life of cards, dice, poker chips, a cordial, and a cup of coffee.

“(De)colorize” explores Penn’s penchant for restricted color palettes, evident in photographs like *Lisa Cant in Dior Haute Couture by John Galliano* (2005) and *Bedside Lamp* (2006), which reveal the power of a single hue and the iridescence that can emanate from seemingly monochromatic objects. “Materialize” underscores Penn’s interest in conveying a sense of materiality and tangibility in his images, with *Three Steel Blocks* (1980), a striking photograph of three robust blocks of varied sizes and hefts, among the pieces included. Finally, “Estrange” examines the ways that Penn defamiliarized the everyday through juxtapositions, unusual poses, and plays of scale. *Girl with Fruit, Shoe, and Butterflies* (1946)—a surreal tableau featuring a figure, a bisected fruit, and a few articles of clothing, all adorned with winged creatures—is among the works in the “Estrange” section of the exhibition.

Burning Off the Page will also feature a selection of archival materials—including drawings, props, and contact sheets—that shed light on Penn’s process in the studio. Additionally, several archival issues of *Vogue* will be on view, illustrating the transformation of Penn’s images on the page and their simultaneous ability to function as standalone works of art.

Irving Penn (b. 1917, Plainfield, New Jersey; d. 2009, New York) studied design from 1934–38 with Alexey Brodovitch at the Philadelphia Museum School of Industrial Art, Pennsylvania. Following a year painting in Mexico, he returned to New York City and began working at *Vogue* magazine in 1943, where Alexander Liberman was art director. Penn photographed for *Vogue* and commercial clients in America and abroad for nearly 70 years. Whether an innovative fashion image, striking portrait, or compelling still life, each of Penn’s pictures bears his trademark style of elegant aesthetic simplicity. In addition to his editorial and advertising work, Penn was also a master printmaker. Beginning in 1964, he pioneered a complex technique for making platinum-palladium prints, a 19th century print process to which he applied 20th century materials. The first retrospective of Penn’s work was organized by The Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1984. Following the landmark exhibition which traveled to over 14 countries after MoMA, he resumed painting and drawing as a full-fledged creative endeavor. Until his death in 2009, his innovative photographs continued to appear regularly in *Vogue*, and his studio was busy with assignments and experimental personal work. Recent exhibitions include *Irving Penn: Beyond Beauty* at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C. (2015–16) and *Irving Penn: Centennial* at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (2017).

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 President and 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.

The gallery has also spearheaded explorations into the intersection of art and technology through its new business models, exhibition interpretation tools, and representation of artists cultivating advanced studio practices. Pace’s presence in Silicon Valley since 2016 has bolstered its longstanding support of experimental practices and digital artmaking. As part of its commitment to technologically engaged artists within and beyond its program, Pace launched a hub for its Web3 activity, Pace Verso, in November 2021.



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