

## Art: Dickinson hosts exhibit of noted post-war photographers



submitted photo

Diane Arbus' Boy with a Toy Hand Grenade in Central Park, N.Y.C., 1962

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CARLISLE — The most gifted photographers have the ability to capture a moment in time and record history while maintaining their own unique perspective and point of view.

Three of the most celebrated photographers of the post World War II period are on display at Dickinson College's Trout Gallery.

Thirty-six vintage gelatin silver prints by Diane Arbus, Robert Frank and Irving Penn take the viewer along a journey of the 1950s and 1960s, with each artist representing the period in their own style. While there are similarities among the photographers, ultimately each of them developed their own way of capturing their subjects that makes their work instantly recognizable.

Arbus, Frank and Penn all began their journey in the world of commercial photography. Noted photojournalists of the time, all three were published in fashion magazines such as Vogue and Harper's Bazaar. It was in this postwar period when photography became more generally recognized as a fine art form and not just a commercial venture, allowing photographers to make social commentary and develop their own visions for the art form.

Where the differences among Arbus, Irving and Penn lie is in how each artist chose to relate to their subject. In looking at the images of Arbus, one can see how she chose to get personal with her subjects. Her portraits have a sense of intimacy. She photographed the outcasts who were marginalized at the time. Even when she elected to photograph more conventional subjects, her images still had a dark and surreal undertone. Her black and white square prints could appear cold and harsh, but ultimately reflected reality.

Arbus viewed her photography with a sense of responsibility stating, "I really believe there are things which nobody would see unless I photographed them." The selections of her works date from 1961 to 1970 and include many of her most celebrated portraits: "Identical Twins, Roselle, N.J."; "Boy in a Straw Hat Waiting to March in Pro-War Parade, N.Y.C."; and "Boy with a Toy Hand Grenade in Central Park, N.Y.C."

Penn's photographs date from 1948 to 1951, and cover his three most important series from those years: the "Small Trades," the "Big Nudes," and the portraits of the mountain-top inhabitants of Cuzco, Peru. Penn's prints are very formal and composed. The nudes focus upon the shapes and forms of the human body. The images in "Small Trades" and the Peruvian series are portraits of common individuals, posing in ways often reserved for the upper class, thus elevating the common man to a regal status.

Franks' photos on display date from 1953 to 1958 and feature some of the key works reproduced in "The Americans," arguably the most influential photography book of the past century. His photographs were taken with an outsider's perspective. Often the subjects appear unaware that they are even being photographed. Frank stated of his work, "There is one thing the photograph must contain, the humanity of the moment."

He captured images of everyday life in a period of transition in America, frequently focusing upon the underlying tensions of economic, racial and political divides. Frank was a contemporary of the Beatnik generation, so his work reflected an appreciation of spontaneity and of those outside the mainstream of American culture.

"Trolley, New Orleans" depicts the windows of a segregated trolley, showing the white adults riding in the front as African American adults occupy the rear seats. Most importantly, it is the wide-eyed innocence of the children gazing out of the center of the car, which draws attention to the disparate conditions. "Las Vegas, 1955" is the image of a lone street sign situated in the desert of Nevada. It alludes to an optimism of future growth while at the same time depicting a mood of loneliness and desolation.

This exceptional exhibit is effectively organized so that the viewer can move from wall to wall, and easily see the stylistic differences in each artist. The display includes many iconic images that will be familiar to many. It is fascinating to see a singular time period captured by three individuals, and see their unique perspectives and points of view. Together, these works illustrate the early divisions of the Eisenhower-era across racial, social, generational and urban/rural lines that were to explode in the decade to follow.

It is abundantly clear why Arbus, Frank and Penn are known as three of America's leading photographers, and their work in the 1950s and 1960s remains some of the most important images ever captured. The opportunity to tour the works of these three artists is a perfect reason to celebrate the presence of Dickinson College's Trout Gallery in our community.

"Arbus, Frank, Penn: Masterworks of Post-War Photography" is on display at the Trout Gallery until Nov. 1. The Trout Gallery, located on the campus of Dickinson College at 240 W. High St., Carlisle, is open 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays. Admission is free and open to the public. For more information on the gallery, its exhibitions and special events, visit [www.troutgallery.org](http://www.troutgallery.org) or call 254-8159.