

ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

Many Faces of Muhammad Ali Portrayed in Photos

A Chronicle of the Days of Action in the Ring and the Years of Retirement

The exhibition "The Greatest of All Time: Muhammad Ali" at the Hofstra University Museum is more social history than art — a visual commentary on the life and times of the boxing champion Muhammad Ali told through news and documentary photographs. Organized by Hava Gurevich, and touring nationally, it assembles more than 60 rare and vintage photographs of Mr. Ali ranging from the early 1950s to now.

ART REVIEW

BENJAMIN GENOCCHIO

Mr. Ali makes a compelling subject for a photography exhibition. He is renowned not only as a three-time world heavyweight boxing champion but also for his views on his Muslim faith and his stand on racial issues in America. The photographs here show us the man through multiple lenses.

Born in Louisville, Ky., in 1942, Cassius Marcellus Clay (he changed his name to Muhammad Ali in 1964) began boxing in his early teens and was an Olympic gold medalist by age 18. The show begins with a news photograph from 1960 of Mr. Ali and other American Olympic gold medalists.

Later photographs show the boxer at home in Louisville with his family and friends. One funny picture by Steve Schapiro, who took several of the best photos from the 1960s here, shows Mr. Ali shadow boxing with his mother. In another photograph by Mr. Schapiro, he

A local boxer made good, and then an international star.

flexes his arm muscles for a group of local children.

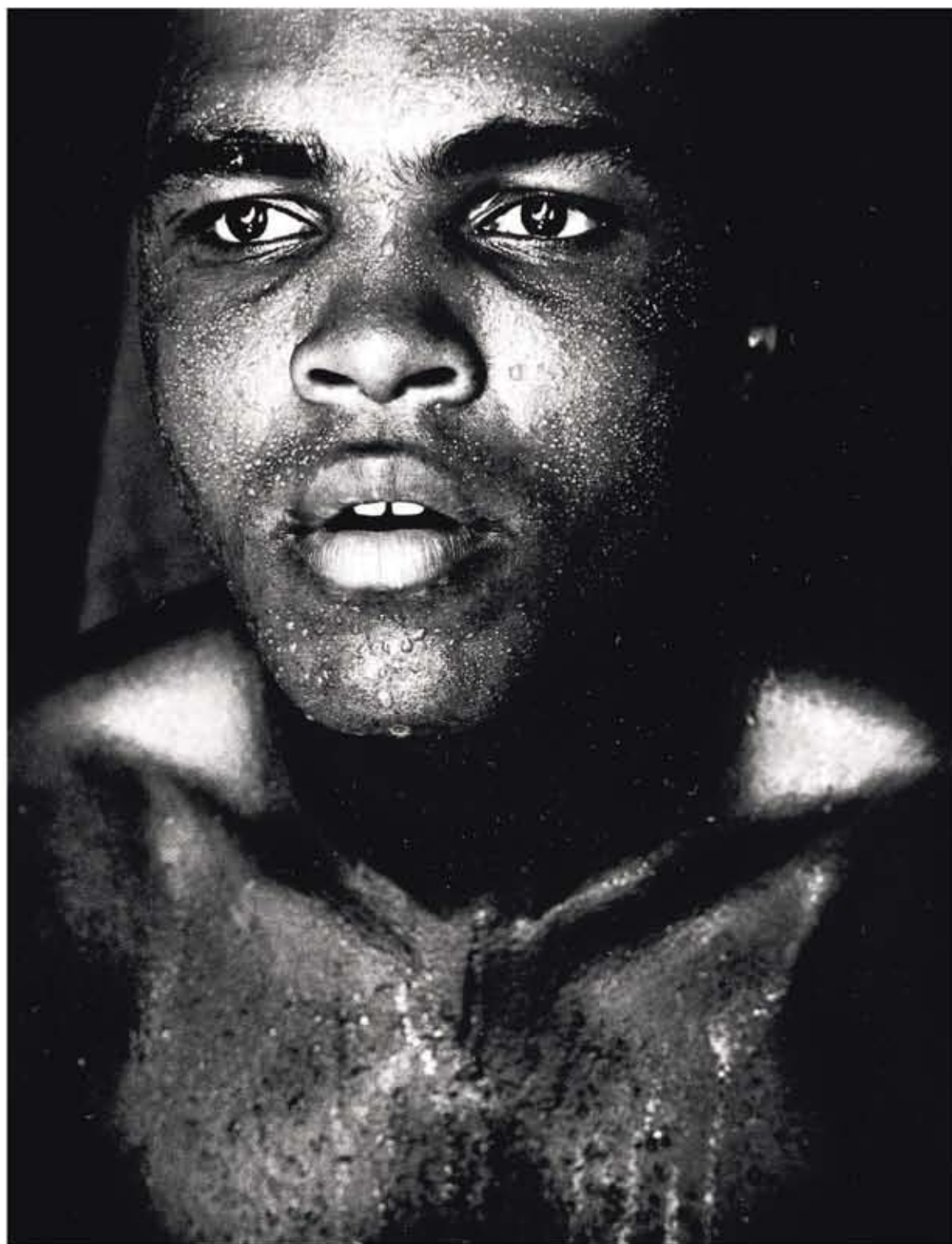
But already something has changed. The sweet, shy boy smiling nervously in the early photographs has morphed into an actor performing for the camera. The pictures, like a pair of images of Mr. Ali getting a haircut in a barbershop in Louisville in 1963, start to seem staged. He is more than a local boxer made good; he is a celebrity.

Boxing fans will delight at the inclusion of some terrific shots of Mr. Ali in action in the ring. Art Shay's "Muhammad Ali Fighting" (1964) shows a pivotal punch in which he knocks back his opponent. Mr. Ali is perfectly balanced, his body leaning forward to put extra weight behind the blistering assault.

Other photographs, like one by Neil Leifer from 1965 of Mr. Ali standing over Sonny Liston, who is motionless on the floor of the ring, are not as pleasant to look at. Mr. Ali roars, an angry, defiant look on his face. The image reveals the ferocity of the fighter and the sport.

From here on out, the show deals more with the legend than the man. The images include Annie Leibovitz's memorable 1972 picture of Mr. Ali reclining on a red carpet, flaunting his celebrity, and a group of highly romanticized pictures from 1970 by Gordon Parks, who followed

"The Greatest of All Time: Muhammad Ali," Emily Lowe Gallery, Hofstra University Museum, Hempstead, through Dec. 2. Information: (516) 463-5672 or www.hofstra.edu/museum.



GORDON PARKS



HAZEL HANKIN



ART SHAY

COMPELLING Above, "Muhammad Ali Fighting" (1961). Below, Mr. Ali in a photo made in Chicago (1966).



THOMAS HOEPKER/MAGNUM PHOTOS

Mr. Ali around as he prepared for a fight. There are also photographs documenting Mr. Ali's interest in and involvement with the Nation of Islam, the black Muslim movement. One 1966 picture, by Thomas Hoepker, shows Mr. Ali talking with Elijah Muhammad, the Nation of Islam leader, in his Chicago home. For once, Mr. Ali looks deferential.

But it is really the boxing photographs that are most enticing, especially a half-dozen great pictures documenting the famous bout between Mr. Ali and George Foreman in Congo, then called Zaire, in 1974. Sonia Katchian's images from there are among the most compelling, showing Mr. Ali waving to the locals as he jogs by the side of a road, or signing autographs for kids.

One especially engaging picture by Ms. Katchian, "The Rope-a-Dope, Zaire" (1974), shows Mr. Ali's signature boxing move as he lay against the ropes, allowing Mr. Foreman to hit him, in the hope that his opponent would become tired and enable him to stage a counterattack. Indeed, Mr. Foreman ran out of steam halfway through the fight and Mr. Ali emerged victorious.

The final group of pictures concentrates on Mr. Ali's life in retirement from boxing. There is a picture by Hazel Hankin of him meeting Fidel Castro at the Presidential Palace in Havana in 1996, followed by several anonymous images of him later that year in Atlanta, holding the torch and being honored at the Olympics.

Mr. Ali looks old and frail in many of these photographs. Battling opponents in the ring was to be only a prelude to the fight of his life; in the mid-1980s he was found to have Parkinson's disease, a condition that some doctors believe was brought on, or at least exacerbated, by blows to the head.

There is little in this show about Mr. Ali's life that most people don't already know. But to see it in pictures makes his achievements all the more real, underlining his astonishing athletic ability and his courage in the face of prejudice. He deserves to be called the greatest.

CELEBRITIES

Above, Muhammad Ali in a photo taken in 1970. Left, Mr. Ali joking with Fidel Castro in Havana in a moment captured in 1996.