EXHIBITION FEATURES 200 WORKS BY AMERICAN PHOTOGRAPHER DONALD BLUMBERG, WHO FIRST GAINED NATIONAL ATTENTION WITH HIS SERIES IN FRONT OF SAINT PATRICK’S CATHEDRAL

Donald Blumberg Photographs: Selections from the Master Sets
Yale University Art Gallery: August 21–November 22, 2015

July 23, 2015, New Haven, Conn. — Drawn from the artist’s master sets, now held in their entirety at the Yale University Art Gallery, Donald Blumberg Photographs: Selections from the Master Sets features approximately 200 works by Blumberg (born 1935), who began his career making black-and-white photographs of the streets and people of New York. He first gained national attention and widespread recognition for his 1965–67 series In Front of Saint Patrick’s Cathedral. Blumberg is a shrewd observer, democratic in his vision—a politically conscious artist with a penchant for memorializing both events and societal attitudes. His work ranges from highly orchestrated compositions to raw snapshots of mass media, offering viewers moments of both quiet beauty and vociferous critique.

Exhibition Overview

The exhibition features more than 60 works from Blumberg’s series In Front of Saint Patrick’s Cathedral, first published in 1973. This series reflects Blumberg’s early experimentations with light, scale, motion, time, serial imagery, and darkroom processing techniques, which produced work of compelling formal beauty. In the series, the artist photographed worshippers exiting the famed Roman Catholic cathedral in New York City, fascinated by the drama of the figures emerging from the dark interior into bright sunlight. As Blumberg developed the first rolls of film, he noticed that the dark bands between negatives frequently dissolved into the background of the photographs, allowing him to merge sequential negatives and create rich panoramas that upend normal perceptions of space and time. He played with the scale of figures, heightening the light levels, and slowed his shutter speed, transforming the worshippers into spectral blurs, as exemplified in his photograph known as The Family (1967), a work featured in the exhibition and also included in the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York. Many of the photographs have a fleeting or ethereal quality; others present figures in stark relief against solid blackness, defining features and apparel in striking detail and obliterating any notion of place.

In the late 1960s, Blumberg began to focus his attention on the Vietnam War, the civil rights movement, and other political and cultural issues, such as workers’ rights, that remain relevant today. His series Daily Photographs (1969–70) features images of newspaper articles about the war and the politics
of the time; the photographs demonstrate what would become a sustained interest in the blending of text and image. He also began photographing television broadcasts and made multi-image collages of televised events such as speeches by President Richard Nixon, freezing media moments for reflection and reconsideration well before VCRs or DVRs became commonplace. La Tanya Autry, the Marcia Brady Tucker Fellow in modern and contemporary art and co-curator of the exhibition, explains how Blumberg’s *Daily Photographs* series broadens our understanding of Vietnam War photography, stating, “While most photograpers focus on images of combat or scenes of protest, Blumberg’s appropriated images urge us to reconsider standard military portraiture. By rescuing the portraits of fallen servicemen from fleeting news reports, the artist has created enduring image memorials that compel the public to remember individual loss.”

More recently, Blumberg’s exploration of the American media has led him to photograph programs with closed-captioning, combining text with often provocative images in a series titled *In Their Own Words*. Over the last several years, he has focused on themes of contemporary culture, including Americans’ obsessions with wealth, fame, body image, material goods, and violence. These photographs, taken directly from Blumberg’s television screen, capture glimpses of soap operas, reality shows, Ultimate Fighting Championship contests, poker tournaments, home-shopping programs, infomercials, and news coverage of the 2012 school shooting in Newtown, Connecticut.

“The Gallery is honored to be the steward of Donald Blumberg’s master sets and delighted to present this exhibition to the public,” says Jock Reynolds, the Henry J. Heinz II Director and co-curator of the exhibition. “In his quiet way, Blumberg has made significant contributions to both the field of photography and the national discourse. His work on the American media over the last half-century asks viewers to pause and reflect on that which we consume and that which consumes us. The two publications accompanying the exhibition—a revised and expanded edition of *In Front of Saint Patrick’s Cathedral* and *Words and Images from the American Media*—are important documentations of Blumberg’s place in contemporary photography.”

In addition to still photography, Donald Blumberg, in collaboration with his wife, Grace, produced eight experimental films during the 1960s, two of which—*Have You Been to Hamburg Lately* (1964) and *Buffalo to New York: New York to Buffalo* (1968) — are on view in the exhibition galleries.

**On View**

August 21–November 22, 2015
Related Programs

**Press Preview**
Wednesday, August 19, 3:00 pm

**Members’ Preview**
Thursday, August 20, 12:00 pm

**Gallery Talks**
Wednesday, August 26, 12:30 pm
“Capturing the Image World: Donald Blumberg’s Photographic Moments”
La Tanya Autry, the Marcia Brady Tucker Fellow, Modern and Contemporary Art

Wednesday, October 28, 12:30 pm
“Photography as Memorial: Donald Blumberg Constructs Cultural Memory from the American News”
La Tanya Autry, the Marcia Brady Tucker Fellow, Modern and Contemporary Art

Wednesday, November 18, 12:30 pm
“Donald Blumberg Photographs: Selections from the Master Sets”
Jock Reynolds, the Henry J. Heinz II Director

**Film Screening and Conversation**
Thursday, September 17, 5:30 pm
“To Show and Tell in Photography and Films: A Conversation with Donald and Grace Blumberg”
Donald Blumberg and Grace Blumberg with Jock Reynolds

For more than five decades, Donald Blumberg’s photography has explored formal properties of time, space, and movement as well as themes of politics and culture. Early on, Donald and his wife and longtime collaborator, Grace, also created experimental films. Join Donald, the Gallery’s Hayden Visiting Artist, and Grace for a screening and discussion of their artistic projects from the mid-1960s to today, with Jock Reynolds, the Henry Heinz II Director.

**Related Publications**

_In Front of Saint Patrick’s Cathedral: A New Edition_
Donald Blumberg
With an essay by Jock Reynolds

Donald Blumberg first gained national attention and widespread recognition for his 1965–67 series _In Front of Saint Patrick’s Cathedral_, published in 1973. In these thought-provoking photographs, Blumberg innovatively captured worshippers exiting the cavernous threshold of the famed Roman Catholic cathe-
Words and Images from the American Media
Donald Blumberg
With an introduction by Jock Reynolds

Words and Images from the American Media gathers over 160 images that Blumberg has photographed directly from newspapers and television screens since the 1960s. In his most recent work from this series, Blumberg’s photographs also include closed captioning texts. This new approach, in which Blumberg captures decisive moments, reveals numerous contemporary American cultural expressions and archetypes. Blumberg’s presentation of these images is often highly humorous and darkly satirical, and at times deeply poignant.

Exhibition Credits
Donald Blumberg Photographs: Selections from the Master Sets is organized by La Tanya Autry, the Marcia Brady Tucker Fellow, Department of Modern and Contemporary Art, and Jock Reynolds, the Henry J. Heinz II Director, both of the Yale University Art Gallery. Made possible by Eliot Nolen, B.A. 1984, and Timothy P. Bradley, B.A. 1983; Professor and Mrs. Robinson A. Grover, B.A. 1958, M.S.L. 1975; the Samuel Freeman Charitable Trust; the Janet and Simeon Braguin Fund; the Cathy M. Kaplan, B.A. 1974, Photography Endowment Fund; the James Maloney ’72 Fund for Photography; and the Nitkin Family Fund for Photography.

Yale University Art Gallery
The Yale University Art Gallery, the oldest college art museum in the United States, was founded in 1832 when the patriot-artist John Trumbull gave more than 100 of his paintings to Yale College. Since then its collections have grown to more than 200,000 objects ranging in date from ancient times to the present.

General Information
The Yale University Art Gallery is located at 1111 Chapel Street, New Haven, Connecticut. Museum hours: Tuesday–Friday, 10 am–5 pm; Thursday until 8 pm (September–June); and Saturday–Sunday, 11 am–5 pm. The Gallery is closed Mondays and major holidays. Free and open to the public. For general information, please call 203.432.0600 or visit the website at www.artgallery.yale.edu.

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