

GREY ART NYU GALLERY

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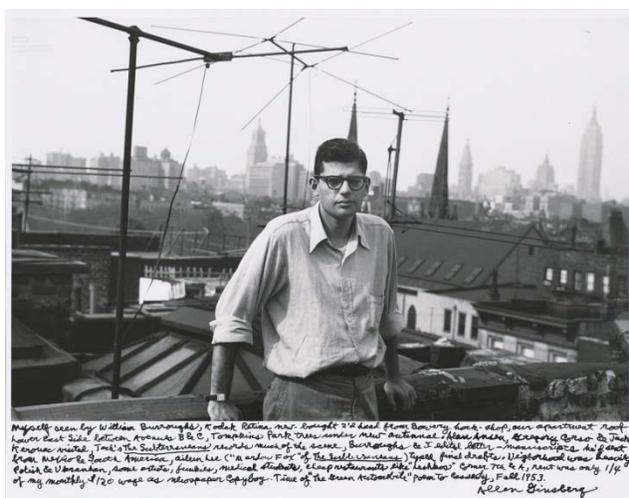
Beat Memories: The Photographs of Allen Ginsberg At NYU's Grey Art Gallery January 15–April 6, 2013

First major New York exhibition of Ginsberg's photographs

Spontaneous, uninhibited snapshots capture poet's contemporaries;
celebrate "the sacredness of the moment" through image and text

New York City (September 28, 2012)—Compelling photographs taken by renowned 20th-century American poet Allen Ginsberg (1926–1997) of himself and his fellow Beat poets are the subject of the first scholarly exhibition and catalogue of these works. **New York University's Grey Art Gallery** will present *Beat Memories: The Photographs of Allen Ginsberg*, which includes portraits of literary luminaries such as William S. Burroughs, Neal Cassady, Gregory Corso, and Jack Kerouac, on view from January 15 through April 6, 2013. Organized by the National Gallery of Art, Washington, and curated by senior curator of photographs Sarah Greenough, the exhibition features 94 black-and-white works—many accompanied by Ginsberg's intimate, handwritten captions—that convey the spontaneity, freedom, and exuberant lifestyle of the Beat Generation. The presentation at the Grey Art Gallery will be supplemented by original manuscripts, typewritten poems, correspondence, drawings, and sketches produced by Ginsberg and the individuals he photographed.

"We are pleased to host this exhibition of Ginsberg's celebrated portraits," notes Lynn Gumpert, director of the Grey Art Gallery. "Many were taken within walking distance of Greenwich Village, which holds countless favored Beat haunts. Exhibiting *Beat Memories* at the Grey Art Gallery displays these captivating works nearly next door to their original settings. We are also excited to collaborate again with NYU's **Fales Library**, whose special collections contain a fascinating array of Beat materials."



Allen Ginsberg, *Myself seen by William Burroughs...*, 1953.
Gelatin silver print, printed 1984–97. National Gallery of Art,
Gift of Gary S. Davis. © 2011 The Allen Ginsberg LLC. All
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The same approaches that inform Ginsberg's poetry—intense observation of the world, deep appreciation for the beauty of the vernacular, faith in intuitive expression—also permeate his photographs. When Ginsberg first began to take photographs in the 1950s, he, like countless other amateurs, had his film developed and printed at local drugstores. A selection of these “drugstore prints” is presented at the beginning of the show.

A number of early photographs—such as *Jack Kerouac wandering along East 7th Street...* (1953) and *Bob Donlon (Rob Donnelly, Kerouac's 'Desolation Angels'), Neal Cassady, myself in black corduroy jacket...* (1956)—capture the tender, playful quality of Ginsberg's close-knit group of friends. He later observed that his photographs were like “looking back to a fleeting moment in a floating world.” Ginsberg viewed his snapshots as casual and unselfconscious “keepsakes,” which he made to record “certain moments in eternity” without the intention of showing them to anyone outside his circle of friends. Other works, such as *The first shopping cart street prophet I'd directly noticed...* (1953) and *Rebecca Ginsberg...* (1953), reveal his self-taught visual skills.

The second section of the exhibition presents Ginsberg's later photographs, taken from the early 1980s until his death. These images were immediately embraced by the art world, and works such as *Publisher-hero Barney Rosset...* (1991) and *Lita Hornick in her dining room...* (1995) were exhibited in galleries and museums around the world. Prestigious institutions acquired Ginsberg's photographs for their permanent collections, and two books were published. Ginsberg was not simply a casual bystander; he actively promoted his photography.

Revisiting his early works in the 1980s, Ginsberg added extensive inscriptions beneath each image, describing both his relationship with the subject and his memories of their times together. Ginsberg's scrawling, handwritten captions establish a direct link between the artist and his audience, immersing us in the writer's process and setting a deeply personal tone. The descriptions often reflect on the passage of time and the collision between past and present, making the photographs both records and recollections of an era.

“Ginsberg had the remarkable ability to focus on the present,” notes Sarah Greenough, senior curator and head of the department of photographs at the National Gallery of Art. “Although his later prints are less exuberant than his earlier photographs, they speak of the acceptance and insight of a quiet yet continual celebration of life.”

Most of the later works were recently donated to the National Gallery by Gary S. Davis; others are lent from Mr. Davis's personal collection and by the Howard Greenberg Gallery.

Allen Ginsberg (1926–1997)

Born and raised in New Jersey, Allen Ginsberg moved to New York City in 1943 to begin undergraduate study at Columbia University. There he met Jack Kerouac, William S. Burroughs, and Neal Cassady, who would become leading Beat figures. In 1953, Ginsberg purchased a small, secondhand Kodak camera and began photographing himself and his friends in New York, San Francisco, and on his travels around the world. At the same time, he was developing his poetic voice. In 1955 he read his provocative and now-famous poem *Howl* to a cheering audience at the Six Gallery in San Francisco. Both Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957) and

Ginsberg's *Howl* were immediately hailed as captivating if challenging expressions of new voices and new visions for American literature. Celebrating personal freedom, sexual openness, and spontaneity, the two writers came to be seen as the embodiment of a younger generation—the Beats—who rejected middle-class American values and aspirations, and decried materialism and conformity.

Ginsberg abandoned photography in 1963, concentrating instead on his literary career. He wrote and published deeply moving and highly influential poetry for the rest of his life, including *Kaddish and Other Poems, 1958–1960* (1961) and *The Fall of America: Poems of These States, 1965–1971* (1972), which was awarded a National Book Award in 1974. Using his fame to advance social causes, he also continued to capture public attention as an outspoken opponent to the Vietnam War and American militarism, and as a champion of free speech, gay rights, and oppressed people around the world.

In 1983 Ginsberg became increasingly interested in ensuring and perpetuating his legacy. Inspired by the discovery of his old negatives and encouraged by photographers Berenice Abbott and Robert Frank, he reprinted many early photographs and took new portraits of friends and acquaintances, such as the musician Bob Dylan (*Bob Dylan, Tompkins Square Park...* [1990]) and the painter Francesco Clemente (*Francesco Clemente looking over hand-script album...* [1984]).

With their casual style, immediacy, emphatic autobiographical focus, and peculiar combination of past visions and present voice, Ginsberg's photographs resonate with audiences. Although these photographs form one of the most revealing records of the counterculture Beat generation from the 1950s through the 1990s—tracing its journey from youth to old age—Ginsberg's pictures are far more than historical documents. Drawing on the most common form of photograph, the snapshot, he created spontaneous, uninhibited pictures of ordinary events to celebrate and preserve what he called “the sacredness of the moment.”

Exhibition Catalogue:

Beat Memories: The Photographs of Allen Ginsberg is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue with an essay by Sarah Greenough that explores the connection between Ginsberg's poetry and photography, and a 1991 interview between Ginsberg and Thomas Gladysz. Co-published by the National Gallery of Art and DelMonico Books, an imprint of Prestel Publishing, the catalogue also includes a selected bibliography and chronology of Ginsberg's photographic activity.

Exhibition Tour:

Beat Memories: The Photographs of Allen Ginsberg will travel to the Contemporary Jewish Museum in San Francisco from May 23 to September 9, 2013.

Sponsorship:

Beat Memories: The Photographs of Allen Ginsberg is organized by the National Gallery of Art, Washington, and curated by Sarah Greenough. It is made possible through the generous support of the Trellis Fund. Additional support is provided by The Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation, Inc. Funding for the presentation at the Grey Art Gallery is provided by the Howard Greenberg

Gallery; the Grey's Director's Circle, Inter/National Council, and Friends; and the Abby Weed Grey Trust.

About the Grey Art Gallery:

The Grey Art Gallery is New York University's fine-arts museum, located on historic Washington Square Park in New York City's Greenwich Village. It offers the NYU community and the general public a dynamic roster of engaging and thought-provoking exhibitions, all of them enriched by public programs. With its emphasis on experimentation and interpretation, and its focus on exploring art in its historical, cultural, and social contexts, the Grey serves as a museum-laboratory for the exploration of art's environments.

Exhibitions organized by the Grey have encompassed all the visual arts: painting, sculpture, drawing and printmaking, photography, architecture and decorative arts, video, film, and performance. In addition to producing its own exhibitions, which often travel to other venues in the United States and abroad, the Gallery hosts traveling shows that might otherwise not be seen in New York and produces scholarly publications that are distributed worldwide.

General Information:

Grey Art Gallery, New York University, 100 Washington Square East, New York, NY 10003

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E-mail: greyartgallery@nyu.edu

Web site: <http://www.nyu.edu/greyart>

Hours:

Tuesday, Thursday, Friday: 11 am–6 pm

OPEN LATE Wednesday: 11 am–8 pm

Saturday: 11 am–5 pm

Sunday, Monday, and major holidays: Closed

Admission: Suggested donation: \$3; NYU students, faculty, and staff: free of charge