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**DELAWARE ART MUSEUM PRESENTS
BARE WITNESS: PHOTOGRAPHS BY GORDON PARKS**

Wilmington, DE (September 23, 2008)—The Delaware Art Museum presents *Bare Witness: Photographs by Gordon Parks*, featuring 73 works selected by the artist himself as examples of his most potent imagery, on view October 11, 2008 – January 4, 2009. During the exhibition’s run, there will be several related programs, including a panel discussion, film series, and lecture, and all of these programs are presented by the Delaware Art Museum and the Christina Cultural Arts Center.

After rising as a portrait and fashion photographer, Gordon Parks (1912 – 2006) also began documenting social ills as part of the Farm Security Administration. In 1948, he became the first African American staff photographer for *Life* magazine and established an international reputation for his photo essays chronicling the lives of the poor and the Civil Rights movement. He was also an author, poet, filmmaker, and musician, a renaissance man whose career embodies the American ideal of equality.

“Gordon Parks’ photographs are powerful documents of tumultuous times,” said Heather Campbell Coyle, Associate Curator at the Delaware Art Museum. “His pictures for *Life* magazine stay with you and come to define their subjects. His photographs work because every element—the sign in the background, the angle of a figure’s arm, the floral pattern on the wallpaper—adds something to the narrative or the composition of the picture.”

Gordon Parks was born in 1912 in Fort Scott, Kansas. He grew up in poverty and dropped out of high school. He purchased a camera in 1938 and quickly found work in portrait and fashion photography, including freelance assignments for *Vogue*. In 1942, Parks joined the New Deal’s Farm Security Administration as a photographer. During his time there, he captured what may be his most well-known image, *American Gothic* (1942). This photograph depicts Ella Watson, an African American cleaning woman, holding a mop and broom while standing in front of the American flag.

MORE

Parks became a staff photographer at *Life*, the magazine of current events, in 1948 and remained until 1972. He continued to focus on the black urban and rural poor while also photographing aspects of the Civil Rights movement and individuals associated with the Black Panthers and Black Muslims. Additionally, he created intimate portraits of public figures such as Ingrid Bergman and Muhammad Ali.

Parks wrote fiction, memoirs, and poetry. His first work of fiction, *The Learning Tree* (1963), is a coming-of-age novel about a black adolescent in Kansas in the 1920s. His autobiographies include *A Choice of Weapons* (1966), *Voices in the Mirror* (1990), and *A Hungry Heart* (2005). He combined poetry and photography in multiple books, from *A Poet and His Camera* (1968) to *Eyes with Winged Thoughts* (2005).

In 1968, Gordon Parks adapted *The Learning Tree* as a film, becoming the first African American to direct a major motion picture. He also wrote the screenplay, composed the musical score, and produced the film. His next feature as a director, *Shaft* (1971), followed the mob-busting actions of a private detective, John Shaft, in Harlem. The success of this film helped give rise to the “blaxploitation” genre of African American films.

Organizer

Bare Witness: Photographs by Gordon Parks was organized by the Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts at Stanford University. The exhibition and its accompanying catalogue are made possible by generous support from The Capital Group Foundation, the Cantor Arts Center’s Hohbach Family Fund, and Cantor Arts Center’s Members.

Sponsors

Bare Witness: Photographs by Gordon Parks is presented in Delaware by DuPont and JPMorgan Chase Foundation.

In Delaware, this exhibition is made possible, in part, by grants from the Delaware Division of the Arts, a state agency dedicated to nurturing and supporting the arts in Delaware, in partnership with the National Endowment for the Arts.

Press Preview

Members of the press are invited to preview *Bare Witness: Photographs by Gordon Parks* on Thursday, October 9, 2008, from 10:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. at the Delaware Art Museum. Heather Campbell Coyle, Associate Curator at the Delaware Art Museum, will lead a tour and answer questions. Please RSVP to Dennis Lawson, Manager of Public Relations, by Monday, October 6, 2008.

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Programs & Events

- **The Arts as Catalysts for Social Justice (Panel Discussion)**

Saturday, October 11 | 10:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. (coffee and exhibition viewing at 10:00 a.m.)

Free with Museum admission

Participate and engage in a lively conversation and call to action concerning the arts as a catalyst for social change. Following opening remarks by Wilmington Mayor James M. Baker, speakers including Jane Golden (Director, Mural Arts Project) and the Twin Poets will address ways in which the arts can change lives and transform communities based on their own personal experiences and observations. After the panel discussion, participants are invited to engage in break-out sessions that further discuss the next steps they see for themselves as artists, activists, and community members.

- **Gordon Parks Film Series**

Second Sundays at 1:30 p.m. for the duration of the *Bare Witness* exhibition | Free

Enjoy the following films directed by Gordon Parks in the Museum's DuPont Auditorium:

- **Sunday, October 12:** *The Learning Tree* (1969, 107 minutes). Selected as one of the first films for the National Film Registry by the Library of Congress, *The Learning Tree* explores the racial conflicts in early 20th-century America through the eyes of a teenage boy.
- **Sunday, November 9:** *Shaft* (1971, 100 minutes). Hailed as a prime example of the genre of popular film termed "blaxploitation," *Shaft* follows the suave detective John Shaft (Richard Roundtree) through his battles in Harlem and with the Italian mob to find a missing girl. *Shaft* received an Academy Award for Best Original Song for Isaac Hayes' "Theme from Shaft" and was chosen by the Library of Congress for the National Film Registry.
- **Sunday, December 14:** *Leadbelly* (1976, 126 minutes). This film chronicles the life of folk singer Huddie William Ledbetter, also known as "Leadbelly."

- **Unlocked Doors: The Art of Gordon Parks**

Saturday, October 18 | 2:00 p.m. | Free with Museum admission

Philip Brookman, director of curatorial affairs at Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., and a noted writer, filmmaker, and photographer, will discuss the works of Gordon Parks.

MORE

- **Celebration for the “Eye/I Witness Gordon Parks Arts Competition”**

Friday, November 7 | 4:00 p.m. – midnight | Free

Regional artists were invited to submit Photographs, Poems, and Short Films reflecting the themes of Gordon Parks’ works for the “Eye/I Witness Gordon Parks Arts Competition.”

(Submission period: September 1 – September 26, 2008.)

The Delaware Art Museum is celebrating the works and artists selected from the “Eye/I Witness” competition on Friday, November 7. The Museum will be open late and offer free admission 4:00 p.m. – midnight as part of Wilmington’s Art on the Town program. Throughout the evening, visitors can see selected photographs in the Bank of America Education Wing, where they will be on view through January 4, 2009. Bobbi Brown Burrows of *Life* magazine will present a gallery chat at 6:00 p.m., and selected poets will read their works at 7:00 p.m.

The celebration continues later in the month, when selected films from the “Eye/I Witness” competition will be screened. The chosen films will be shown on Sunday, November 23, at 2:00 p.m. at the Delaware Art Museum, and Sunday, November 30, at the Christina Cultural Arts Center.

- **Gallery Chat with Bobbi Baker Burrows, *Life* Editor**

Friday, November 7 | 6:00 p.m. | Free

Join Bobbi Baker Burrows, Photo Editor at *Life* magazine, for an informal chat while viewing *Bare Witness: Photographs by Gordon Parks*.

About the Museum

The Delaware Art Museum, located at 2301 Kentmere Parkway, Wilmington, DE 19806, is open Tuesday through Saturday 10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. and Sunday noon – 4:00 p.m. Admission fees are charged as follows: adults (18 – 59) \$10, seniors (60+) \$8, college students \$5, and youth (7 – 17) \$3, with children 6 and under entering for free. Admission fees are waived every Sunday thanks to support from AstraZeneca. For more information, call 302-571-9590 or 866-232-3714 (toll free), or visit the website at www.delart.org.

Founded in 1912, the Delaware Art Museum holds a world-renowned collection that focuses on American art and illustration from the 19th century to the present as well as the British Pre-Raphaelite movement. The Museum offers the outdoor Copeland Sculpture Garden, the Helen Farr Sloan Library & Archives, studio art classes, the interactive Kids’ Corner learning area, the delART Café featuring free Wi-Fi access, and the Museum Store with distinctive books and gifts.