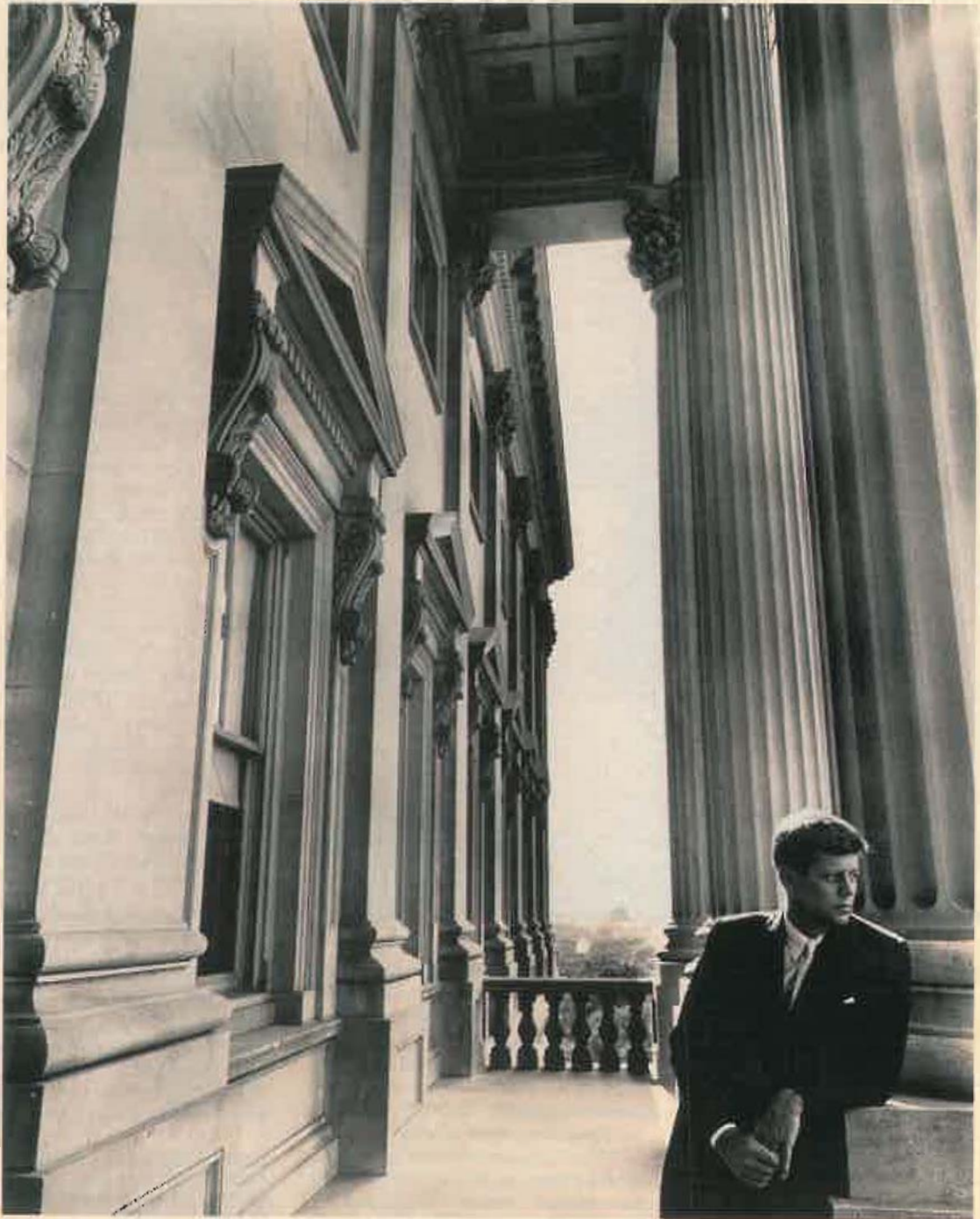


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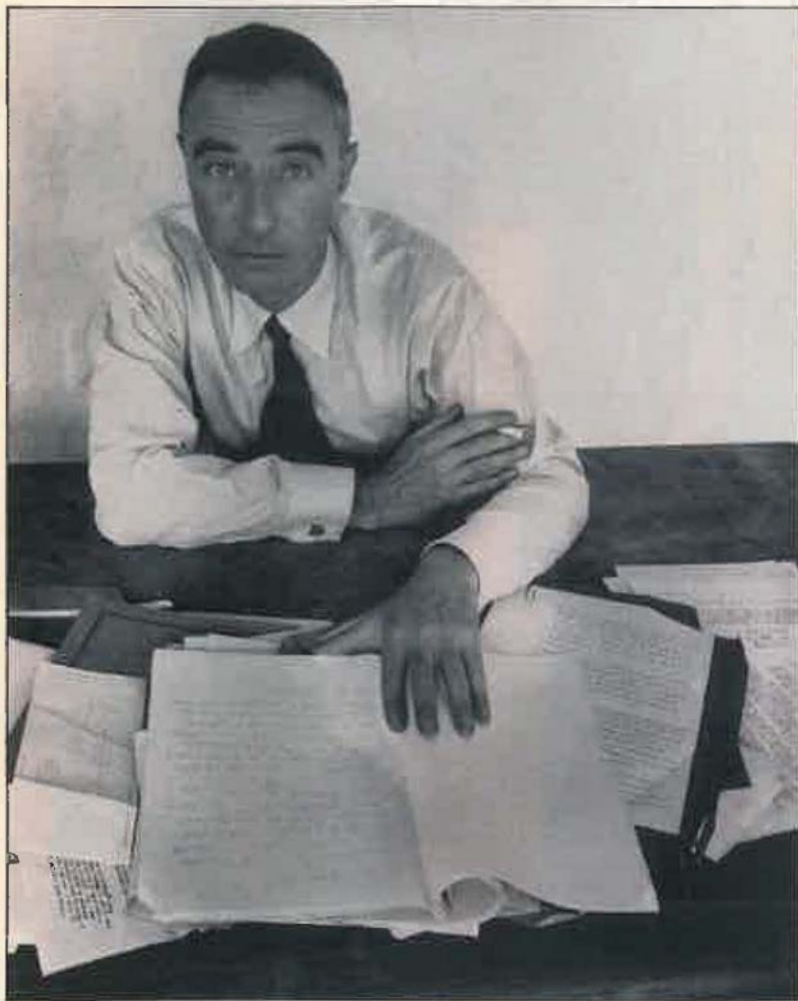
THE DETROIT INSTITUTE OF ARTS



ARNOLD NEWMAN'S AMERICANS
One Man's View

ENVIRONMENTAL PORTRAITS

Insightful photographs reveal intriguing Americans.



By Cindy Frenkel Kanter

In 1945, nuclear physicist Robert Oppenheimer became famous overnight after his secret work was revealed to the world; the atomic bomb exploded and a mushroom cloud erupted over Hiroshima. Three years later, *Fortune* magazine sent a 30-year-old photographer named Arnold Newman to California to photograph scientists, including Oppenheimer. Newman recounts the visit: "When I got to Berkeley, I saw that Oppen-

heimer had a very ordinary office under the eaves of the science building. When asked where he worked he said, 'I work here or at home with paper and a pencil.'" Then Oppenheimer invited Newman home for lunch.

Newman remembers Oppenheimer's eccentricity; after he walked into his house, he rang the keys of an ornate iron mechanical cash register to announce his arrival. Then he was surprised that Newman recognized the artist of an inherited but never-reproduced painting — a van Gogh! — which

hung over the fireplace. "We then had some scotch before lunch and red wine with lunch," Newman recalls. "I'm not much of a drinker. By the time we were done I practically had to hold onto my tripod, but I was able to take some of the best pictures of my career. I observed the tension within him."

Today Arnold Newman's photographs are recognized around the world. The photograph of Oppenheimer and 100 other portraits comprise *Arnold Newman's Americans*, works Newman selected along with William Stapp, former curator of photographs at the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C., and Beverly Cox, curator of exhibitions there. The exhibit originated at the National Portrait Gallery, which just acquired the photographs as part of its permanent collection.

Spanning more than 50 years of Newman's career, these portraits show such diverse subjects as Igor Stravinsky, Carl Sandburg and John F. Kennedy. Others represented include Eugene O'Neill, Marilyn Monroe, Harry Truman and Zero Mostel. Although Newman has produced significant work not included in the show, the variety of people represented here is wide; the show's theme, however, is limited to the National Portrait Gallery's mission of acquiring portraits of Americans who have made "significant contributions to history and society." Ellen Sharp, the DIA's curator of graphic arts, says, "My favorites are the reclining portraits, such as Kuniyoshi, Gypsy Rose Lee and Truman Capote — there's something about the person relaxing a little bit that tells you more about how they want to be

COVER: Arnold Newman, American; John F. Kennedy, 1953, photograph. National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution. From *Arnold Newman's Americans*.

ABOVE: Arnold Newman, American; Dr. Robert Oppenheimer, 1948, photograph. National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution. From *Arnold Newman's Americans*.



perceived."

Newman's talent for taking great portraits can be attributed in part to his tremendous skill behind a camera, but also to his fascination with people and his ability to capture them through their poses and the objects with which they surround themselves. "Sometimes you get close to them, sometimes not. There's some aspect of contact which leaves you exhilarated and with a better understanding of them and you and life. The most interesting thing about life is exchanging ideas with people," Newman says, "even strangers. Nothing's more satisfying than interesting people sitting around after dinner talking about work and life." He's also enthralled by history and advises students, "Know the past and use it, not as an anchor, but as a springboard."

Born in New York City in 1918, Newman was raised in Atlantic City and Miami Beach. He studied painting during the Depression under a scholarship at the University of Miami, but in 1938, after just two years, he had to leave school due to lack of funds.

That year he was offered work in Philadelphia with a photography studio chain in a department store. Nights were spent taking pictures with former students from the School of Industrial Art (now called the Philadelphia Museum School of Industrial Art). Those students had studied under Alexey Brodovitch, the art director at *Harper's Bazaar*. In 1939 Newman went to other cities to work for the same chain, then accepted a job in a portrait studio in West Palm Beach. In his spare time, he took pictures for himself outside the studio, experimenting and basing his work on his observations of the avant garde art and photogra-

Arnold Newman, American; Grandma Moses, 1949, photograph. National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution. From Arnold Newman's Americans.

phy of that time.

In 1941, Newman went to New York to see Beaumont Newhall, historian and the first curator of photography at the Museum of Modern Art. Newhall was so impressed he arranged for him to meet Alfred Stieglitz the same day at Stieglitz's gallery, An American Place. Stieglitz took him in and the following day he met a patron of the arts, Dr. Robert Leslie of the Composing Room. Leslie then offered Newman a two-person exhibit, along with Newman's friend Ben Rose, for the following fall, at Leslie's A D Gallery. Because the Composing Room typeset major publications in the city, the show attracted powerful figures in the art and publishing industry. Among those in attendance were Ansel Adams and Newhall, who purchased a print for MOMA.

Newman moved to New York in 1941 and began focusing on portraiture, realizing artists were the ideal subjects. His "environmental portraits" were new to the world of photography. "I wanted people in their own milieu," Newman says. "The word 'props' is abhorrent to me. Props are artificial. I use the actual everyday objects people live and work with."

He recalls his early days in New York: "I used to be invited to drop by An American Place whenever I wanted to visit with Stieglitz. One day, after leaving Stieglitz, I found I had an appointment to see Mondrian and it hit me: 'My God, how did this happen to me?' I was 24 years old and accepted, taken in by the masters. I'd watch Mondrian at work as he experimented with colored tapes, adjusting them slowly and carefully on his canvas."

After the start of the war, Newman returned to Florida for military duty, but was deferred. He remained there and opened a portrait studio in 1942. He visited New York frequently and began photographing artists. Artists introduced him to other artists. "I've made an awful lot of close friends through my work, including Chaim Gross and George Segal and many others," Newman says. He also began collecting art by trading his portraits for their work.

In 1945-46, the 27-year-old photographer attracted national attention with a one-man show, *Artists Look Like This*, at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. The following fall he moved to New York and soon began working for *Life*, *Fortune* and *Harper's Bazaar*. In 1949, he married Augusta Rubenstein, and they had two sons. His wife's devotion, research and keen eye for art have been invaluable.

Seeing the range of accomplished Americans Newman has photographed allows one a kind of access to each person represented, and offers insight into the diverse work that flourishes here. These are portraits of people impassioned about their work. Newman feels privileged to have recorded so many extraordinary people. In doing so, he, too, has made a contribution. When seeing his work, a statement of Newman's comes to mind, which seems fitting for the Americans represented: "The only thing that matters is the work you do." ♦

Arnold Newman, American; Yasuo Kuniyoshi, 1941, photograph. National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution. From Arnold Newman's Americans.



Arnold Newman's Americans

January 23 - March 21
Special Exhibition Galleries,
Second Floor

There will be docent tours at 11:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. daily. On March 14, Dirk Bakker will give a gallery talk on Arnold Newman's work. The catalogue, *Arnold Newman's Americans*, as well as posters, postcards and notecards, is available at the museum shops at the DIA, Twelve Oaks in Novi, and the Somerset Collection in Troy.