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GETTY MUSEUM PRESENTS *IN FOCUS: EXPRESSIONS*

At the J. Paul Getty Museum, Getty Center
May 22—October 7, 2018

LOS ANGELES—From Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*, to Edvard Munch's *The Scream*, to Dorothea Lange's *Migrant Mother*, the human face has been a crucial, if often enigmatic, element of portraiture. Featuring 45 works drawn from the Museum's permanent collection, *In Focus: Expressions*, on view May 22 to October 7, 2018 at the J. Paul Getty Museum, addresses the enduring fascination with the human face and the range of countenances that photographers have captured from the birth of the medium to the present day.

The exhibition begins with the most universal and ubiquitous expression: the smile. Although today it is taken for granted that we should smile when posing for the camera, smiling was not the standard photographic expression until the 1880s with the availability of faster film and hand-held cameras. Smiling subjects began to appear more frequently as the advertising industry also reinforced the image of happy customers to an ever-widening audience who would purchase the products of a growing industrial economy. The smile became "the face of the brand," gracing magazines, billboards, and today, digital and social platforms.



Storefront Churches, Buffalo, 1958–1961, Milton Rogovin (American, 1909–2011). Gelatin silver print. Image: 11 x 10.5 cm (4 5/16 x 4 1/8 in.). The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, Gift of Dr. John V. and Laura M. Knaus. © Milton Rogovin

As is evident in the exhibition, the smile comes in all variations—the genuine, the smirk, the polite, the ironic—expressing a full spectrum of emotions that include benevolence, sarcasm, joy, malice, and sometimes even an intersection of two or more of these. In Milton Rogovin's (American, 1909–2011) *Storefront Churches, Buffalo* (1958–1961), the expression of

the preacher does not immediately register as a smile because the camera has captured a moment where his features—the opened mouth, exposed teeth, and raised face—could represent a number of activities: he could be in the middle of a song, preaching, or immersed in prayer. His corporeal gestures convey the message of his spirit, imbuing the black-and-white photograph with emotional color. Like the other works included in this exhibition, this image posits the notion that facial expressions can elicit a myriad of sentiments and denote a range of inner emotions that transcend the capacity of words.



Mary, Milwaukee, WI, 2014, Alec Soth (American, born 1969). Inkjet print. Image: 40.1 × 53.5 cm (15 13/16 × 21 1/16 in.). The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, Gift of Richard Lovett. © Alec Soth/Magnum Photos

In Focus: Expressions also probes the role of the camera in capturing un-posed moments and expressions that would otherwise go unnoticed. In Alec Soth's (American, born 1969) *Mary, Milwaukee, WI* (2014), a fleeting expression of laughter is materialized in such a way—head leaning back, mouth open—that could perhaps be misconstrued as a scream. The photograph provides a frank moment, one that confronts the viewer with its candidness and calls to mind today's proliferation and brevity of memes, a contemporary, Internet-sustained visual phenomena in which images are deliberately parodied and altered at the same rate as they are spread.

Perhaps equally radical as the introduction of candid photography is the problematic association of photography with facial expression and its adoption of physiognomy, a concept that was introduced in the 19th century. Physiognomy, the study of the link between the face and human psyche, resulted in the belief that different types of people could be classified by their visage. The exhibition includes some of the earliest uses of photography to record facial expression, as in Duchenne de Boulogne's (French, 1806–1875) *Figure 44: The*

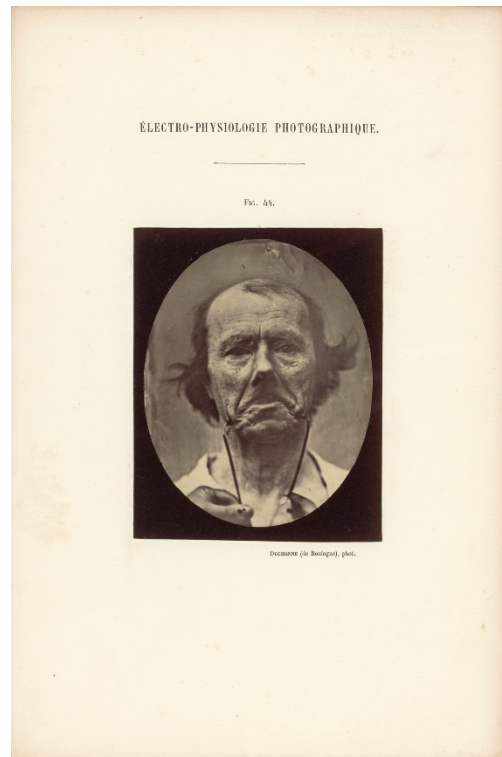
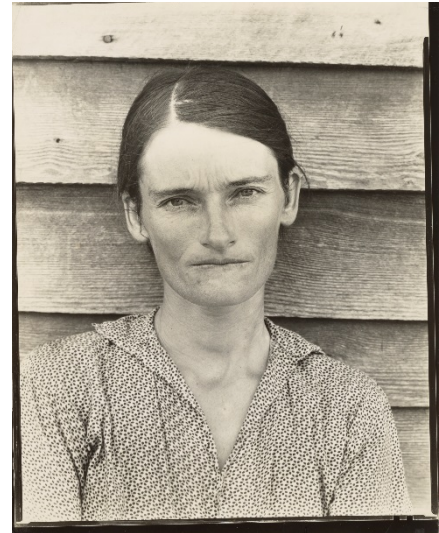


Figure 44: The Muscle of Sadness, negative, 1850s, Guillaume-Benjamin Duchenne (French, 1806–1875). Albumen silver print. The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles

Muscle of Sadness (negative, 1850s). This also resonates in the 20th-century photographs by Walker Evans (American, 1903–1975) of *Allie Mae Burroughs, Hale County Alabama* (negative 1936) in that the subject's expression could be deemed as suggestive of the current state of her mind. In this frame (in others she is viewed as smiling) she stares intently at the camera slightly biting her lip, perhaps alluding to uncertainty of what is to come for her and her family.

The subject of facial expression is also resonant with current developments in facial recognition technology. Nancy Burson (American, born 1948) created works such as *Androgyny (6 Men + 6 Women)* (1982), in which portraits of six men and six women were morphed together to convey the work's title. Experimental and illustrative of the medium's technological advancement, Burson's photograph is pertinent to several features of today's social media platforms, including the example in which a phone's front camera scans a user's face and facial filters are applied upon detection. Today, mobile phones and social media applications even support portrait mode options, offering an apprehension of the human face and highlighting its countenances with exceptional quality.

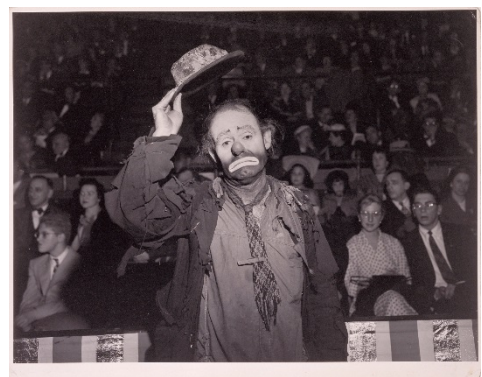
In addition to photography's engagement with human expression, *In Focus: Expressions* examines the literal and figurative concept of the mask. Contrary to a candid photograph, the mask is the face we choose to present to the world. Weegee's (Arthur Fellig's) (American, born Austria, 1899–1968) *Emmett Kelly, Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus* (about 1950) demonstrates this concept, projecting the character of a sad clown in place of his real identity as Emmett Kelly.



Allie Mae Burroughs, Hale County, Alabama, negative 1936; print 1950s, Walker Evans (American, 1903 - 1975). Gelatin silver print. Image: 24.3 x 19.2 cm (9 9/16 x 7 9/16 in.). The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles



Androgyny (6 Men + 6 Women), 1982, Nancy Burson (American, born 1948). Gelatin silver print. Image: 21.6 x 27.7 cm (8 1/2 x 10 7/8 in.). The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles. © Nancy Burson



Emmett Kelly, Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus, negative May 1943; print about 1950, Weegee (Arthur Fellig) (American, born Austria 1899 - 1968). Gelatin silver print. Image: 26 x 34.4 cm (10 1/4 x 13 9/16 in.). The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles. © International Center of Photography

The mask also suggests guises, obscurity, and the freedom to pick and create a separate identity. *W. Canfield Ave., Detroit* (1982) by Nicholas Nixon (American, born 1947) demonstrates this redirection. Aware that he is being photographed, the subject seizes the opportunity to create a hardened expression that conveys him as distant, challenging, and fortified, highlighted by the opposing sentiments of the men who flank him. In return, the audience could be led to believe that this devised pose is a façade behind which a concealed and genuine identity exists.



W. Canfield Ave., Detroit, 1982, Nicholas Nixon (American, born 1947). Gelatin silver print. Image (irregular): 19.7 × 24.6 cm (7 3/4 × 9 11/16 in.) The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles. © Nicholas Nixon

In Focus: Expressions is on view from May 22 to October 7, 2018 at the J. Paul Getty Museum, Getty Center. This exhibition is curated by Karen Hellman, assistant curator of photographs at the J. Paul Getty Museum.

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