

MEP

MAISON
EUROPÉENNE
DE LA
PHOTOGRAPHIE

Press release



PENN & FASHION
30.09.2026–17.01.2027

The Season

Opening the MEP's 30th anniversary season, *PENN & FASHION*, produced in close collaboration with The Irving Penn Foundation and the Nicola Erni Collection, celebrates one of the greatest masters of twentieth-century photography. For nearly six decades, Irving Penn's fashion photographs—created primarily for *Vogue*—embodied an aesthetic of timeless modernity in which the restraint of his compositions, the precision of his gaze, and the intensity of his relationship with his subjects reveal an uncompromising artistic vision. From the shoot to the final print—which he always produced himself—Penn devoted extraordinary care to every stage of the creative process, making the platinum-palladium printing technique his signature.

As a founding artist of the MEP collection, Irving Penn maintained a close relationship with the institution from the early 1990s onward. Today, the collection comprises more than one hundred prints spanning the full breadth of his career. It has been enriched by the exceptional gift of Tom Penn, featuring photographs that once belonged to Lisa Fonssagrives-Penn—pioneering model, artist, and collector. This exhibition celebrates an extraordinary photographic legacy and the enduring bond between the MEP and this essential body of work.

Echoing this tribute, the MEP continues its commitment to contemporary creation by presenting a new body of work by Nanténé Traoré, a rising figure on the French art scene, alongside a selection of works by the American artist David Gilbert, whose practice, at the intersection of photography, installation, and sculpture, is still insufficiently known in Europe.

Julie Jones
Director, MEP

The Exhibition

From 30 September 2026 to 17 January 2027, the MEP presents the exhibition *PENN & FASHION*, a tribute to Irving Penn, one of the most influential photographers of the twentieth century. With a body of work that was always ahead of its time, Irving Penn (1917, Plainfield – 2009, New York) left a profound mark on the history of fashion photography thanks to his collaboration with *Vogue* magazine spanning over sixty years. His refined aesthetic, like his exceptional mastery of composition, has influenced generations of photographers.

The exhibition unfolds chronologically, retracing Irving Penn's career from 1947 to 2008. It begins in the 1950s, with the presentation of his legendary photographs of Parisian haute couture collections such as those of Dior and Balenciaga, brought to life by the era's greatest models, including Lisa Fonssagrives and Jean Patchett. In the 1970s, the creations of Ungaro and Courrèges and the extravagant outfits worn by Marisa Berenson or Lauren Hutton caught the photographer's eye, followed by those of Yves Saint Laurent and Karl Lagerfeld in the following decade.

The exhibition also presents Penn's unique collaboration with the Japanese designer Issey Miyake, whose sculptural garments perfectly complemented his minimalist photographic style.

Throughout the last three decades of his career, Penn maintained a consistent approach with an emphasis on the silhouette, volume, and texture. He captured in colour the sumptuous gowns designed by John Galiano and the opulent creations of Christian Lacroix, as well as Chanel's spectacular feather headpieces, in breathtaking images.

Finally, his striking images for the beauty pages of *Vogue* magazine in the 1990s and 2000s bear witness to the creativity and modernity of an artist whose work is yet to be explored in full.

Always faithful to a demanding artistic vision, regardless of the context of the commission, Penn helped to bring art, fashion, and commerce together with unparalleled mastery. His work is characterised by an aesthetic of elegant simplicity. Each image is the result of a long process of reflection, culminating in timeless compositions created using sophisticated printing techniques, many of which have become icons in the history of photography.

The exhibition is drawn primarily from the collections of the MEP and that of Nicola Erni. Assembled over the last twenty-five years, the latter is now one of the most extensive and remarkable collections dedicated to fashion photography, covering the period from the 1930s to the present day.

The exhibition also benefits from numerous exceptional loans from The Irving Penn Foundation and the Miyake Issey Foundation.

Curated by:

Pascal Hoël, MEP in collaboration with Frédérique Dolivet, MEP

The exhibition is organised by the Maison Européenne de la Photographie, in collaboration with The Irving Penn Foundation and the Nicola Erni Collection.

On the occasion of this exhibition, the MEP is publishing a catalogue in collaboration with The Irving Penn Foundation and with the support of the Nicola Erni Collection. Available exclusively at the MEP bookshop.

Biography

Irving Penn was an American photographer born in 1917 into a family of Russian origin. He studied at the Pennsylvania Museum School of Industrial Arts from 1934 to 1938, where he trained under Alexey Brodovitch in his Design Laboratory. Following a year of painting in Mexico, Penn returned to New York and was hired in 1943 by *Vogue*'s new art director, Alexander Liberman, to prepare layouts and suggest ideas for covers to the magazine's photographers. Recognising in him "a mind, and an eye that knew what it wanted to see," Liberman urged Penn to take the photographs himself.

In 1948, as the aspiring photographer was building a reputation with his eye-catching still lifes and portraiture, Liberman sent Penn to Peru for a fashion assignment in Lima. Once his task in Lima was complete, Penn traveled to Cuzco where he produced an extensive series of portraits of the ancient city's inhabitants. This formative experience confirmed Penn's preference for the controlled environment of the studio, where he could eliminate anything that was not essential to his compositions and focus solely on his subject.

Parallel to his obligations for *Vogue*, Penn embarked on a personal project in the summer of 1949 photographing corpulent nudes and experimenting with their printing through the use of bleach and redevelopment techniques. A year later, Penn traveled to Paris to photograph the haute couture collections and begin his *Small Trades* series. The resulting images were published as extensive portfolios in *Vogue* magazine. Many of the fashion photographs feature Lisa Fonssagrives, a remarkable model whom Penn married in London immediately after their work together in Paris was complete.

From 1964 to 1971, Penn travelled extensively for *Vogue*, producing photographic essays on Japan, Crete, Spain, Dahomey, Nepal, Cameroon, New Guinea, and Morocco. In 1973, he closed his Manhattan studio and immersed himself in platinum-palladium printing in the darkroom he built on his family's Long Island farm. This experience led him to create three of his most iconic series: *Cigarettes* (1972); *Street Material* (1975); and *Archaeology* (1979–80); respectively exhibited in New York at The Museum of Modern Art in 1975, The Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1977, and Marlborough Gallery in 1982.

In 1983, Penn re-opened a studio in Manhattan and resumed a schedule of commercial work and magazine assignments. The following year, he was honored with a retrospective curated by John Szarkowski at The Museum of Modern Art, which toured internationally until 1989. After the retrospective, Penn resumed painting and drawing as a creative pursuit. He also found artistic freedom through his thirteen year collaboration with the fashion designer Issey Miyake.

Penn's creativity flourished during the last decades of his life. His innovative portraits, still life, fashion, and beauty photographs continued to appear regularly in *Vogue*. Determined to shape the body of work he left behind from such a prolific career, he donated his professional archives to the Art Institute of Chicago in 1995 and established The Irving Penn Foundation in 2005.

Penn died in New York in 2009 at the age of 92.

The catalogue

Penn & Fashion



On the occasion of the *PENN & FASHION* exhibition, the MEP is publishing an exceptional catalogue produced in collaboration with The Irving Penn Foundation and with the support of the Nicola Erni Collection. Designed with great care, the printing of this volume is exemplary, in keeping with the high standards and expertise of Irving Penn, the undisputed master of photographic printing.

Richly illustrated, it features 43 plates, including 8 in colour, as well as 4 illustrations. It includes a text by Pascal Hoël, curator of the exhibition, and a foreword by Julie Jones, director of the MEP. The catalogue also features a complete list of the works in the exhibition, making it an essential reference for those wishing to explore Irving Penn's work further.

Hardcover, cloth-bound, 24.5 x 24.5 cm

112 pages

Bilingual English / French

2,500 copies

On sale exclusively at the MEP until May 2027

Press images

The press photos are copyright free solely for the promotion of the exhibition *PENN & FASHION* at the MEP and for its duration only. They cannot be cropped or modified, or have any text added over them.

[Download the visuals here.](#)



Irving Penn, *Christian Dior*, New York, 1947
MEP Collection, Paris. Acquired in 1992.
© The Irving Penn Foundation



Irving Penn, *Standing Woman with Braids*, Cuzco, 1948
Collection of The Irving Penn Foundation, New York
© The Irving Penn Foundation



Irving Penn, *Fashion Photograph (Jean Patchett)*, New York, 1949
 Nicola Erni Collection, Zug
 © The Irving Penn Foundation



Irving Penn, *Balenciaga Mantle Coat (Lisa Fonssagrives-Penn)*, Paris, 1950
 MEP Collection, Paris. Acquired in 1992.
 © Condé Nast



Irving Penn, *Girl with Tobacco on Tongue (Mary Jane Russell)*, New York, 1951
 Collection of The Irving Penn Foundation, New York
 © Condé Nast



Irving Penn, *Balenciaga Rose Dress*, Paris, 1967
 Nicola Erni Collection, Zug
 © Condé Nast



Irving Penn, *Yves Saint Laurent Embroidered Cubist Cape with Braque-Inspired Design*, Paris, 1988
Nicola Erni Collection, Zug
© Condé Nast



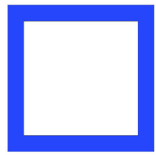
Irving Penn, *Issey Miyake Fashion: Face Covered with Hair*, New York, 1991
Collection of The Irving Penn Foundation, New York
© The Irving Penn Foundation



Irving Penn, *Red-Lacquered Lid*, New York, 1994
MEP Collection, Paris. Partial gift from The Irving Penn Foundation in 2020.
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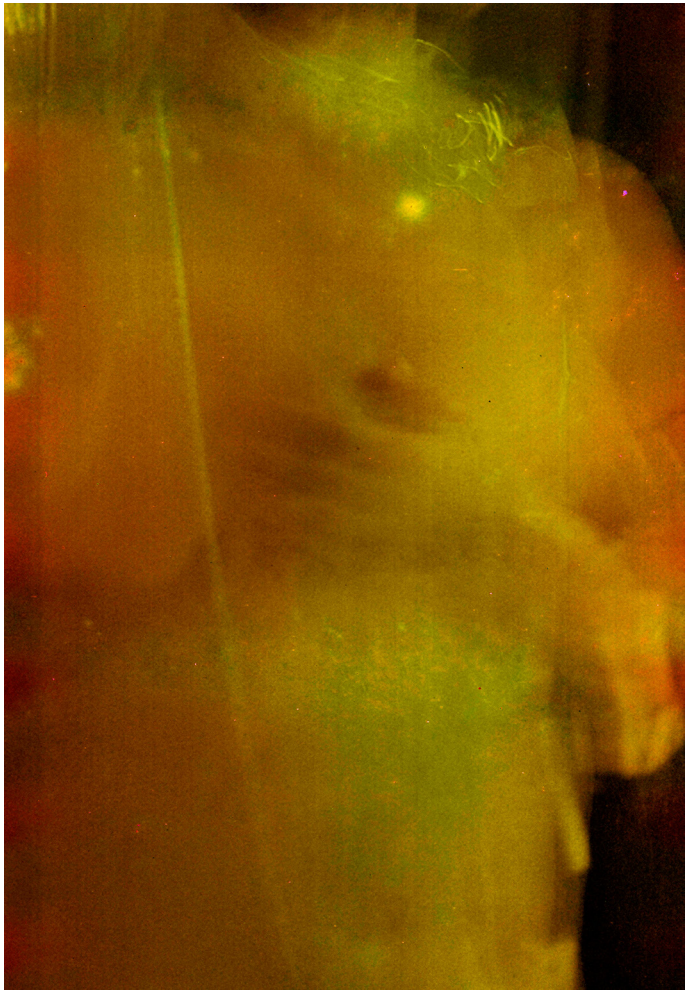


Irving Penn, *Young Woman with Headdress*, New York, 2005
Collection of The Irving Penn Foundation, New York
© The Irving Penn Foundation



MEP

STUDIO



Nanténé Traoré

30.09.2026–29.11.2026



David Gilbert

04.12.2026–17.01.2027

President : Jacques Bungert
Director : Julie Jones

Institutional partner of the MEP



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Patron of the Season

NICOLA ERNI COLLECTION

The MEP would like to thank the
Collectors' Circle and the Friends
of the MEP Association for their
continued support.

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Useful information

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Opening hours

Wednesday and Friday from 11 am to 8 pm
Thursday from 11 am to 10 pm
Saturday and Sunday from 10 am to 8 pm
Ticket office open till 7:30 pm
Closed on Monday and Tuesday

Admission fee

Full price: €13
Reduced price: €8

MEP Solo Pass

Full price 40€ | Reduced price* 30 €

MEP Duo Pass

Full price 60€ | Reduced price* 50 €

MEP Youth Pass**

Solo 20 € | Duo 40 €

Pass MEP Patron

150€ ***

*Job seekers, retired people, members of our partners institutions.

**Students and/or under 25 years old

***Tax-deductible

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