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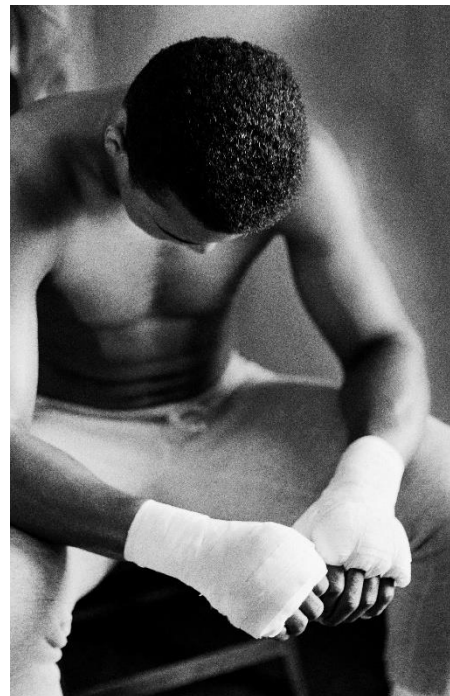
Gordon Parks, Muhammad Ali Exhibition to Open Feb. 14 at Nelson-Atkins

Many Works Never Before Published

Kansas City, MO. Feb. 4, 2020— The charismatic and controversial American heavyweight champion Muhammad Ali, as photographed by Gordon Parks, is the subject of an exhibition at The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City that runs through July 5. *Gordon Parks x Muhammad Ali: The Image of a Champion, 1966/1970* was organized by the Nelson-Atkins in collaboration with the Gordon Parks Foundation and features approximately 55 photographs Parks took of Ali while on assignment for *Life* magazine. The museum has recently acquired approximately 13 works, including selections from the *American Champion* portfolio, which will be on view.

The photographs in the exhibition derive from two in-depth assignments for *Life*, the first in 1966 and the second in 1970. *Image of a Champion* emphasizes the way Parks (1912-2006) and Ali (1942-2016) came together for these projects to shape a sympathetic public image of the young champion during this tumultuous period in Ali's career.

“During their lives, Parks and Ali transcended their respective roles as journalist and athlete to make sense of the American struggle against racial injustice,” said Julián Zugazagoitia, Menefee D. and Mary Louise Blackwell CEO & Director of the Nelson-Atkins. “Though they held different views on the challenges they faced as black men, they understood each other as few others could.”





Parks' esteemed position at *Life* gave him a vast influential platform. Parks had privileged access and pictured Ali in unguarded moments, devoid of the bravado that had come to define his public persona. He photographed Ali as he trained in Miami and London for an overseas fight against Henry Cooper, meeting with fans, practicing his religion and navigating throngs of reporters. Many of Parks' photographs suggest a meta-awareness of the media's fascination with Ali.

“As a seasoned journalist, Parks well understood the power wielded by the media to shape public opinion,” said April M. Watson, Photography Curator at the Nelson-Atkins and curator of the exhibition. “Ali, who was a master of media hype, could easily have been a challenging subject, were it not for the trust he placed in Parks. Their mutual respect resulted in a collective portrait that is at once intimate, nuanced, and earnest: qualities not often associated with the controversial young champion during these years.”

This exhibition will be accompanied by the publication *Gordon Parks x Muhammad Ali*, published in collaboration with the Gordon Parks Foundation and printed by Steidl. The book includes a foreword by Julián Zugazagoitia and Peter W. Kunhardt, Jr.; with essays by Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, April M. Watson, and Gerald Early.

The following programs accompany this exhibition.

Gordon Parks: A Renaissance Dance
Friday, February 21
6:30–7:30 p.m. Atkins Auditorium

Celebrating the many talents of Gordon Parks, Kansas City Friends of Alvin Ailey present a new mixed-media production inspired by Parks' photographs of Muhammad Ali and the artist's 1990 musical composition for the ballet, *Martin*.

Parks X Ali: Black Athletes, the Media, and “the Champ” in the 1960s
Thursday, March 12
6–7 p.m. Atkins Auditorium

What did Muhammad Ali symbolize during his early, controversial career? How did the mass media attempt to shape his public image, and how has this legacy informed the actions of contemporary black athletes? Join curator April M. Watson for a lively conversation with Damion Thomas, Curator of Sports, National Museum of African American History, and William Rhoden, former New York Times sports columnist & author, as they discuss these fascinating topics.

The Curator is IN!
Friday, April 17
6:30–7, 7:30–8 p.m. Gallery L11

Join curator April M. Watson for a thoughtful conversation about works in this exhibition.

Film Programs

The Learning Tree
Saturday, March 21
1:30–3:30 p.m. Atkins Auditorium
1969 | M | 107 min.

The Learning Tree (1969) is a semi-autobiographical tale based on Parks' 1963 coming-of-age novel about a boy confronting racism and tragedy in rural Kansas. The film, for which Parks served as writer, director, producer, and composer, was the first release from a major Hollywood studio to be directed by an African American.

Shaft
Saturday, March 28
1:30–3:30 p.m. Atkins Auditorium
1971 | R | 100 min.

One of the earliest Blaxploitation films, *Shaft* is perhaps Parks' most well-known movie. Released in 1971 and starring Richard Roundtree, the action film follows ultra-cool private detective John Shaft as he works to recover the kidnapped daughter of a Harlem mob boss.

Concerned Student 1950
Thursday, June 25
6:30–7:30 p.m.
2016 | NR | 32 min.
OFF-SITE | Bruce R Watkins Cultural Center

FREE tickets through Eventbrite

6–6:30 p.m. Light Reception

This documentary looks inside the peaceful student protests that took place in 2015 over racist incidents at the University of Missouri. Bolstered by support of the University's football team, the film offers a 21st century example of how young athletes have built upon Ali's legacy of social activism. A panel discussion with Delia Gillis, Professor of History and Africana Studies at the University of Central Missouri and Raymond Doswell, Curator and Education Director for the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum will follow the screening.

Image captions: Gordon Parks, American (1912–2006). Muhammad Ali in Training, Miami Beach, Florida, 1966. Gelatin silver print, 16 x 20 inches. Courtesy of and copyright The Gordon Parks Foundation.

Gordon Parks, American (1912–2006). Untitled, Miami, Florida, 1966. Gelatin silver print, 11 x 14 inches. Courtesy of and copyright The Gordon Parks Foundation.

This exhibition is organized by The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in collaboration with The Gordon Parks Foundation. In Kansas City, the exhibition is supported by the Hall Family Foundation and Elizabeth and James E. C. Tinsman.

The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art

The Nelson-Atkins in Kansas City is recognized nationally and internationally as one of America's finest art museums. The museum, which strives to be the place *where the power of art engages the spirit of community*, opens its doors free of charge to people of all backgrounds. The museum is an institution that both challenges and comforts, that both inspires and soothes, and it is a destination for inspiration, reflection and connecting with others.

The Nelson-Atkins serves the community by providing access to its renowned collection of more than 42,000 art objects and is best known for its Asian art, European and American paintings, photography, modern sculpture, and Native American and Egyptian galleries. Housing a major art research library and the Ford Learning Center, the Museum is a key educational resource for the region. In 2017, the Nelson-Atkins celebrates the 10-year anniversary of the Bloch Building, a critically acclaimed addition to the original 1933 Nelson-Atkins Building.

The Nelson-Atkins is located at 45th and Oak Streets, Kansas City, MO. Hours are Monday, Wednesday, 10 a.m.–5 p.m.; Thursday/Friday, 10 a.m.–9 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m.–5 p.m.; Sunday, 10 a.m.–5 p.m. The museum is closed Tuesday. Admission to the museum is free to everyone. For museum information, phone 816.751.1ART (1278) or visit nelson-atkins.org.

For media interested in receiving further information, please contact:

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