

JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY

GORDON PARKS

I Am You | Part 2

February 15 – March 24, 2018

Opening reception for the exhibition: Thursday, February 15th from 6 – 8 PM at 524 West 24th Street.

What I want. What I am. What you force me to be is what you are. For I am you staring back from a mirror of poverty and despair, of revolt and freedom. Look at me and know that to destroy me is to destroy yourself.

Gordon Parks, *Diary of a Harlem Family*, 1968

Jack Shainman Gallery is pleased to announce **Gordon Parks: *I Am You | Part 2***. As a photographer, film director, composer, and writer, Gordon Parks (1912-2006) was a multi-disciplinary artist whose art and advocacy for social justice still resonates in contemporary culture. In collaboration with the Gordon Parks Foundation, this second half of a two-part exhibition will focus on some of Parks' most celebrated and iconic imagery; demonstrating his abilities as a photographer and journalist who moved just as seamlessly documenting everyday life and injustice facing African American families across the country, framing his subjects with compassion amidst unvarnished reality.

During the late 1940s through the 1960s, Parks produced some of his most renowned photographic essays on issues relating to civil rights. A stoic portrait of Red Jackson, from a 1948 series on the Harlem gang leader, reveals a man seemingly hemmed in by his options as he stares intently out a broken window; the darkness of the interior contrasts forebodingly with the light illuminating him from the street.

In 1952 Parks partnered with close friend and author Ralph Ellison for *A Man Becomes Invisible*. United by a shared goal of addressing racial injustices, they brought Ellison's now classic novel to life with a series of haunting scenes, such as *Invisible Man Retreat, Harlem, New York*. The series aimed to counter negative imagery of African Americans in the media through the communicative power of photography and offer a meaningful, alternative view of that community in the hopes of confronting the root causes of racial inequality.

The short film produced for public television, *Diary of a Harlem Family* (1968), demonstrates Parks' mastery of telling stories across media. The film opens with the above quote, and chronicles the day-to-day experience of one family, the Fontenelles. Still black-and-white photographs flicker on screen as Parks narrates instances of decrepit living conditions and unstable employment, shedding light on the real life effects of discrimination. Poignant lyricism shines through the somber images.

By showing the individual faces and families behind essentializing headlines of violence and relentless poverty, Parks stressed similarity over difference. His legacy, and the legacy of those he captured, remains very much alive in today's America. Parks' innovative artistry, with its enduring appeal to empathy, continues to breathe new vigor into the humanity that unites us.

Gordon Parks was born into poverty and segregation in Fort Scott, Kansas, in 1912. An itinerant laborer, he worked as a brothel pianist and railcar porter, among other jobs, before buying a camera at a pawnshop, training himself, and becoming a photographer. During his storied tenures photographing for the Farm Security Administration (1941–1945) and *Life* magazine (1948–c. 1971), Parks evolved into a modern-day Renaissance man; he found success as a film director, writer, and composer. The first African American director to helm a major motion picture, he helped launch the blaxploitation genre with his film *Shaft* (1971). He wrote numerous memoirs, novels, and books of poetry, and received countless awards, including the National Medal of Arts in 1988, and more than fifty honorary degrees. Parks died in 2006.

Concurrently on view at 513 West 20th Street is ***Them Changes***, an exhibition of works on paper by **Barkley L. Hendricks**. ***The Coffins of Paa Joe and the Pursuit of Happiness*** is on view at The School in Kinderhook through February 24th. Upcoming exhibitions at the gallery include **Hank Willis Thomas** at our 20th Street location, opening March 29, 2018.

Gallery hours are Tuesday through Saturday from 10am to 6pm. For additional information and photographic material please contact Victoria Kung, SUTTON, victoria.kung@suttonpr.com, +1 212 202 3402.