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Ulrich Museum of Art acquires more than 100 photographs by Kansas-born artist Gordon Parks

Acquisition establishes Wichita State University as a hub for the study of Parks' work

WICHITA, KAN.—The Ulrich Museum of Art at Wichita State University has acquired 125 fine art photographs by the internationally acclaimed, Kansas-born artist Gordon Parks (1912–2006). The acquisition was made possible by a generous donation from The Gordon Parks Foundation (GPF), a \$150,000 challenge grant from Paula and Barry Downing and matching funds. Combined with the extensive collection of Parks papers, letters, personal photos and manuscripts housed in University Libraries Special Collections, Wichita State has become a significant institution of study for scholars of his life and work.

“Our commitment to Kansas as the magnet for study of the work of Gordon Parks began with the 2008 acquisition of Parks’ personal papers,” said Peter W. Kunhardt, Jr., Executive Director of The Gordon Parks Foundation, “with the unflagging support of Ted Ayres, WSU Vice President and General Counsel, and his Wichita State colleagues and donors, we are pleased to be able to contribute to expanding the collection into a comprehensive repository of the artist’s work.” With this acquisition, the Ulrich now holds 166 art works by the artist.

Born into poverty in Fort Scott, Kansas in 1912, Gordon Parks became one of the seminal figures of twentieth century photography, despite a lack of formal training. His body of work spans more than fifty years and documents many of the most important aspects of American culture from the early 1940s up until his death in 2006, with a focus on race relations, poverty, civil rights, and urban life. As LIFE magazine’s first African American staff photographer and writer, Parks documented boxer Muhammad Ali’s career and the Civil Rights March on Washington in 1963. In addition, Parks was also a celebrated composer, author and filmmaker.

The Ulrich collection of Parks photographs now includes several images taken in his hometown of Fort Scott, Kansas, candid images of Malcolm X, works from his landmark “Flavio” series, which chronicled abject poverty in a

slum of Rio De Janeiro, Brazil, and from “Harlem Gang Leader,” his first photographic essay for LIFE magazine in 1948.

“Gordon would be thrilled that such a beautiful selection of his photographs will be available to Kansans,” said GPF board member Genevieve Young, the former wife of the artist. “That the acquisition funds will support the endowment of The Gordon Parks Foundation makes this a perfect match.”

Ulrich Museum Director Bob Workman sees the effort to make WSU a hub for the study of Parks’ work as an opportunity to continue building the bridge between Parks’ professional life and his native roots. “Being entrusted with the responsibility of helping preserve Mr. Parks’ legacy is an honor,” Workman said. “This acquisition was a unique opportunity to marry the purchase of a significant selection of Parks photographs with the generosity of The Gordon Parks Foundation to quadruple the Ulrich holdings of Parks material.”

The successful fundraising campaign to match the pledge from Paula and Barry Downing took six months, with \$80,000 in private donations raised by the WSU Foundation, and a unanimous vote by the WSU Student Government Association for a \$70,000 commitment.

“It’s both gratifying and humbling to see how people have responded,” Paula Downing said. “Those who participated truly recognize the talent of Gordon Parks and his significance not only to Kansas but also his unique place in the world of art.”

Workman noted that Wichita State’s effort to acquire more photographs by Gordon Parks was orchestrated in large part by Ted Ayres, WSU Vice President and General Counsel, and former Ulrich Director Patricia McDonnell, now Director of the Wichita Art Museum.

“Gordon Parks’ life story is a magnificent one and this wonderful acquisition helps Wichita State University continue in its efforts to illuminate and celebrate that life,” Ayres said. “Mr. Parks’ journey is an inspiration to me and I am honored and humbled to have had the opportunity to play a small role in helping to continue and promote his legacy, and to make Wichita State University an unquestioned center for continuing studies about Gordon Parks, his life, his influence, and his accomplishments and achievements. I am especially grateful for the personal and professional relationships that have developed with The Gordon Parks Foundation, the Parks family and our many donors who have helped make my dreams a reality.”

An exhibition of the entire Gordon Parks collection is planned at the Ulrich Museum in early 2016.

About the Gordon Parks Foundation

The Gordon Parks Foundation permanently preserves the work of Gordon Parks, makes it available to the public through exhibitions, books, and electronic media and supports artistic and educational activities that advance what Gordon described as "the common search for a better life and a better world." The Foundation is a division of the Meserve-Kunhardt Foundation. Learn more at www.gordonparksfoundation.org.

About the Ulrich Museum of Art

Located on the campus of Wichita State University, the Edwin A. Ulrich Museum of Art is home to the renowned 76-piece Martin H. Bush Outdoor Sculpture Collection—rated one of the top collections of its kind by *Public Art Review*—and a permanent collection of more than 6,600 works of modern and contemporary art. Established in 1974, the Ulrich Museum seeks to expand human experience through encounters with the art of our time. To learn more about the programs, events and exhibitions at the Ulrich, visit www.ulrich.wichita.edu and follow the Ulrich on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#). The galleries are open Tuesday 11 a.m.–5 p.m., and for extended hours (through April 13, 2014) Wednesday through Friday 11 a.m.–8 p.m., and weekends 12–6 p.m. Admission, parking, and group tours are free.

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