

# RICHARD AVEDON PEOPLE

National Portrait Gallery  
Learning resource

## About the exhibition

American photographer Richard Avedon produced portrait photographs that defined the twentieth century. The exhibition *Richard Avedon People* explores his photographic practice and includes iconic portraits from the Richard Avedon Foundation collection. Avedon's work as a fashion photographer was ground breaking for its flair and dynamism. He also photographed cultural and political figures who strongly influenced life and society in the twentieth century and he created inspiring photographic portraits of performers, artists, writers and countercultural leaders. Avedon was also committed to the freedom of the individual in society and he produced captivating photographs of people on the streets of New York in the late 1940s, at Santa Monica Beach in the 1960s, and across the American West. By embracing the differences that make us who we are, Avedon's portraits are compelling for the time in which they were made, and for our own time. All photographic prints in the exhibition are gelatin silver prints produced by Richard Avedon and his studio during his lifetime.

Curated by the National Portrait Gallery's Senior Curator, Dr Christopher Chapman in partnership with the Richard Avedon Foundation, New York, *Richard Avedon People* is the first Australian exhibition of Avedon's work. The Foundation was established by Avedon in his lifetime and encourages the study and appreciation of Avedon's photography through exhibitions, publications and outreach programs.

## About the resource

The learning resource is a companion to the exhibition *Richard Avedon People* and includes photographic portraits from each decade of Avedon's career and demonstrates his personal aesthetic, signature style and lifelong experimentation.

The resource has connections with the Australian Curriculum and is designed primarily for upper secondary school teachers of Visual Arts, English, History and Theory of Knowledge to enrich understanding of Avedon's photographic portraits and the life and times of the subjects portrayed.

The resource is divided into four curriculum areas with portraits of particular relevance as focus for discussion and research before, during and after the visit to the exhibition at the Gallery or online.

Curriculum links include:

Visual Arts

- Portraits as narrative
- Avedon's photographic practice and innovations
- Avedon and different genres of photography
- Curating a photographic exhibition

English

- Contesting the American dream
- Twentieth century American literature
- The photographic essay

Modern History

- The civil rights movement
- The Cold War/The Vietnam War

Theory of Knowledge

- Ethics
- Aesthetics

## National Portrait Gallery

23 August – 24 November 2013

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## Learning resources

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## Tell us what you think

The National Portrait Gallery is committed to providing opportunities for all audiences to access exhibitions and the Collection. We welcome any comments or suggestions about this learning resource. Please contact Krysia Kitch, Education and Access Manager [krysia.kitch@npg.gov.au](mailto:krysia.kitch@npg.gov.au) 02 6102 7084.

# NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY EXHIBITION

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### About Richard Avedon

Richard Avedon (1923–2004) was born to parents of Russian Jewish heritage in New York City. As a boy, he learned photography, joining the Young Men's Hebrew Association Camera Club at the age of twelve; later, he took up poetry, winning a citywide award for high school students during his senior year at DeWitt Clinton in the Bronx.

Avedon joined the armed forces in 1942 during World War II, serving as Photographer's Mate Second Class in the Merchant Marine. Making identification portraits of the crewmen with his Rolleiflex twin lens camera—a gift from his father—Avedon advanced his technical knowledge of the medium and began to develop a dynamic style. After two years of service he left the Merchant Marine to work as a photographer, making fashion images and studying with art director Alexey Brodovitch at the Design Laboratory of the New School for Social Research.

In 1945, Avedon set up his own studio and worked as a freelance photographer for various magazines. He quickly became the preeminent photographer used by *Harper's Bazaar*. There, under the tutelage of Brodovitch, his rise to the top of the profession was meteoric. Avedon developed an original approach to making fashion photographs. He showed the models full of expression: smiling, laughing, and often posed in action. Inspired by Hungarian photojournalist and fashion photographer Martin Munkácsi, Avedon photographed models and fashions on the streets, in nightclubs and circus arenas, and in other locations then uncommon. From the beginning, Avedon made portraits for editorial publication as well: in the pages of *Harper's Bazaar*, in *Theater Arts*, and in *Life* and *Look* magazines. From the outset, he was fascinated by photography's capacity for suggesting the personality and evoking the life of his subjects. Only rarely did he idealize people; instead, he presented the face as a kind of landscape, with total clarity. He registered poses, attitudes, hairstyles, clothing and accessories as vital, even revelatory elements of the personal image.

Avedon continued to make portraiture and fashion photography for magazine publications throughout his career. After parting ways with *Harper's Bazaar* in 1965, he began a long-term relationship with *Vogue* that continued through 1988. In

later years, he established formidable creative partnerships with the French publication *Egoiste*, and with *The New Yorker*. In the pages of these periodicals, Avedon reinvigorated his formalist style, investing his imagery with dynamism and theatricality. In addition, he supported his studio by making innovative advertising work for print and broadcast—defining the look of brands like Calvin Klein, Versace, and Revlon.

As his reputation grew and his signature aesthetic evolved, Avedon remained dedicated to extended portraiture projects as a means for exploring cultural, political, and personal concerns. In 1963–64, Avedon examined the civil rights movement in the American South. During the Vietnam War, he photographed students, countercultural artists and activists, and victims of the war, both in the United States and in Vietnam. In 1976, on a commission for *Rolling Stone* magazine, he produced *The Family*, a composite portrait of the American power elite at the time of the country's Bicentennial election. Some of Avedon's most extraordinary portraits were taken of his father Jacob Israel Avedon during the last years of his life: a photographic confrontation with, and ultimate acceptance of, his illness and subsequent death.

In 1985, Avedon created his magnum opus—*In the American West*. He portrayed members of the working class: butchers, coal miners, convicts and waitresses, all photographed with precisionist detail, using the large format camera and plain white backdrop characteristic of his mature style. Despite their apparent minimalism and objectivism, however, Avedon emphasised that these portraits were not to be regarded as simple records of people; rather, he said, 'the moment an emotion or a fact is transformed into a photograph it is no longer a fact but an opinion.'

Avedon produced and published a number of books over the years. In addition to *In the American West* (1985), his books include *Observations* (1959), *Nothing Personal* (1964), *Portraits* (1976), and his fashion survey *Photographs 1947–1977* (1978). His first museum retrospective came in 1962, at the Smithsonian Institute, and his photographs have been widely exhibited in museums since then: *Avedon* at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts (1970); *In the American West* at the Amon Carter Museum (1985); *Richard Avedon:*

*Evidence 1944–1994* at the Whitney Museum of American Art (1994); and his final retrospective, *Portraits*, at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (2002). Since his death, his work has been included in a number of survey exhibitions. A complete chronology can be found at [avedonfoundation.org](http://avedonfoundation.org).

Biography provided by the Richard Avedon Foundation.

### More about Richard Avedon

Avedon, Richard *An Autobiography* New York: Random House/Eastman Kodak, 1993  
Avedon, Richard *In the American West 1979 – 1984* New York: Harry N Abrams, 1985  
Avedon, Richard *Nothing Personal* New York: Atheneum, 1964  
Avedon, Richard *Observations* New York: Simon & Schuster, 1959  
Michaelis, David 'The Now of Avedon' *Vanity Fair* no. 592 Dec. 2009 pp 127 – 137  
Shanahan, Mary (ed) *Evidence 1944–1994* Richard Avedon New York: Random House/Eastman Kodak in association with the Whitney Museum of American Art, 1994

[avedonfoundation.org](http://avedonfoundation.org)

The website is a rich resource, providing biographical information, a chronology, quotes and a learning resource. A wide range of photographs by Richard Avedon is included.

[portrait.gov.au](http://portrait.gov.au)

*Richard Avedon: Darkness and Light*  
[youtube.com/watch?v=S1f3egvLwVE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S1f3egvLwVE)

*American Masters – Richard Avedon: Darkness and Light*  
Dir. Helen Whitney, PBS, 1996, DVD 90 minutes

**And if a day goes by without my doing something related to photography, it's as though I've neglected something essential to my existence, as though I've forgotten to wake up. I know that the accident of my being a photographer has made my life possible.**

Richard Avedon 1970



Richard Avedon, photographer,  
New York, July 23 1969  
gelatin silver print  
25.4 x 20.3 cm

Avedon disregarded the traditional separation of commercial and art photography insisting that his fashion photography was based on the same principles as his photography in other genres. Acutely aware of photographic tradition Avedon was also determined to remain unconstrained by those traditions and in doing so forged his own style. Avedon insisted on control of his images, managing image choice, how they were used in publications and retaining artistic rights of his photographs. As a professional photographer Avedon initially used a Rolleiflex camera which was compact, lightweight with a high quality lens and easy to operate. The negative was a large 2 1/4 inch square (6x6cm) format which Avedon sometimes cropped for his magazine work but for exhibition photographs he kept to the square format. The camera design of the Rolleiflex required the photographer to hold the camera at

waist height and look into the top of the camera.

The Rolleiflex had become such a habit that I felt the camera was taking the picture, and I had to look through the viewfinder, which made it physically and psychologically an intrusion between myself and my subject.

Richard Avedon 1993

Avedon's self portrait of 1969 was produced using an 8x10 inch (20.32 x 25.4cm) view camera. The large format camera allowed Avedon to feel more directly connected to his subjects as he stood next to the lens, facing them. Avedon said his 1969 self-portrait 'opened the way to a style I'm still exploring.' Avedon also encouraged his students to experiment and as their first assignment sent them into a photo booth. 'It's not the camera that makes a good picture, but the eye and mind of the photographer.'



Harlem, New York, September 6, 1949  
gelatin silver print  
50.2 x 40.6cm

In 1949 Avedon received a commission from *Life* magazine to produce a series about life in New York City. Over six months Avedon took photographs of New Yorkers in different neighbourhoods, inside and out, in summer and winter, going about their daily business. At the end of the assignment Avedon decided that he did not wish to hand over the photographic series to the magazine, concerned that he would have no influence on how the works would be displayed – the sequence of images, context, cropping and layout.

He returned the advance and it wasn't until the publication of his book *An Autobiography* in 1992 that some of the New York Life series were printed. The architecture of the city is a key component of the images and Avedon frames the figures within the compositional lines of the street scape. Even within Central Park, the brick Park fence, pathways and park furniture all give a sense of a built environment.

Years of fashion photography had developed Avedon's eye for capturing dynamic movement and arresting composition within the frame. This ability contributed to the success of the images in the New York Life series although at the time Avedon felt that his foray into reportage had contributed nothing new to the genre. Yet his distinct style is evident, the gaze and movement of the subjects engage directly with the viewer and we are drawn into the frame.



Björk, New York City, June 18, 2000  
gelatin silver print  
50.8 x 40.6cm

Avedon's portrait of the singer Björk was made just a month after she had won Best Actress at the 53rd Cannes Film Festival for her role as Selma in *Dancer in the Dark*. Although originally engaged to write the film score, Björk was convinced by director Lars van Trier to take on the lead role. Björk was involved in the production of another film, collaborating with her partner, American artist Matthew Barney, on the movie and soundtrack of *Drawing Restraint 9* (2005).

Björk was born and raised in Iceland and has an eclectic singing style and dramatic performance persona. The singer/songwriter has been composing, performing and recording since her early teens and has won many music awards. In a special feature in the November 27, 2008 issue of *Rolling Stone* magazine 179 experts ranked her sixtieth of the Greatest Singers of All Time. In his photographic portrait of Björk, Avedon has simultaneously captured a sense of movement and great stillness and poise. This work from Avedon's final decade can be seen to have a direct connection to his earliest photographic portraits and fashion photography through the movement of her hair, the tactile quality of her dress and the sense of having captured a moment in time.

### **Before the visit**

Familiarise yourself with Avedon's work. Visit the websites of the Richard Avedon Foundation ([avedonfoundation.org](http://avedonfoundation.org)) and the National Portrait Gallery ([portrait.gov.au](http://portrait.gov.au)) Choose a photographic portrait by Avedon from the National Portrait Gallery website. Complete a visual analysis and interpretation of the portrait, considering historical context. Use this as a point of reference when you visit the exhibition. How does your interpretation change after seeing the original portrait?

### **In the Gallery**

Richard Avedon was a skilled craftsman and issued highly detailed instructions to his printers, subtly enhancing the details he wished to emphasize. The quality of gelatin silver prints is unique so that although the image may be familiar the quality of the surface cannot be effectively reproduced in other print forms. Examine the surface of the photographs and discuss the qualities specific to this printing process. Throughout his career Avedon experimented with his visual vocabulary and the composition of his photographs, how the figure was placed within the frame. Sometimes his figures are front and centre, others pushed to the extremities of the frame and sometimes only part of the face or body appears. Find examples of each of these composition formats in the exhibition. Choose a portrait that appeals to you and analyse its composition.

### **After the visit**

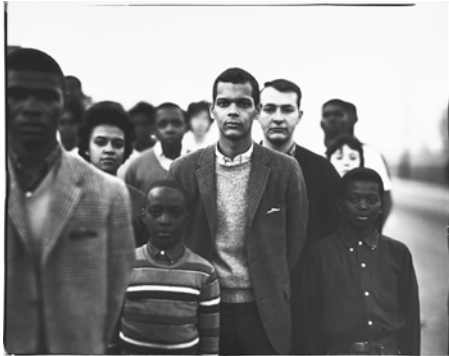
Avedon provided the images and Truman Capote supplied the text for the book *Observations* 1959. Collate a collection of photographic portraits and source written material that complements the photographs. The photographs and written material could be your own work. Plan a layout and present your work as a booklet or magazine article.

Seasonal variations of weather and light are evident in Avedon's New York Life series. Create two or more photographic portraits that show different weather and light conditions – on a bright sunny day, a windy day, dull and overcast, early morning, dusk, night time. What variety of techniques do you need to use to create effective images? How do different conditions affect the mood of your portraits? Create a photographic portrait series that captures a strong sense of place.

What criteria did you consider? Which of Avedon's portraits do you think achieves a strong sense of place? Why? Develop an exhibition using photographs from your portfolio. Consider the space the photographs will be displayed in, possible themes, sight lines within the exhibition and the style of presentation – will you hang the photographs in clusters, along a single line, crowded together or with generous wall spaces between? How do the photographs relate to one another – visually, thematically? What story are they telling? Write a short 500 word introductory panel to explain your rationale.



**A portrait is not a likeness.  
The moment an emotion or fact  
is transformed into a photograph  
it is no longer a fact but an opinion.**  
Richard Avedon



*Julian Bond and members of the Student  
Nonviolent Coordinating Committee,  
Atlanta, Georgia, March 23, 1963*  
gelatin silver print  
40.6 x 50.8 cm

Horace Julian Bond (b. 1940) became an activist in the civil rights movement when he was a student at Morehouse College in 1960. He was a founding member of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) which was inspired by Gandhi's non-violent campaign to effect change in India. In 1965 new state congressional districts were created in Georgia and the SNCC campaigned to increase voter registration. Aged 25 Bond won a seat in the Georgia House of Representatives with 82% of the vote. Just prior to taking up his seat the SNCC issued a statement to the press opposing the Vietnam War which Bond publicly supported. The Georgia Legislature voted to refuse Bond his seat on the grounds of treasonous behaviour. Martin Luther King Jnr led a protest rally in support of Bond and was his co-plaintiff in his successful appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court. Bond went on to serve for 20 years in the Georgia House of Representatives and the Senate. Bond was the first president of the Southern Poverty Law Center. From 1998 to 2010 Julian Bond was chairman of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People and he continues as a board member. Bond has been a commentator on radio and television and his poems and essays have been published in newspapers and

magazines including *Life* and the *New York Times*. He holds academic positions at American University in Washington, D.C., and the University of Virginia and has received 25 honorary degrees. In all his roles he continues to promote the cause of African-Americans and educate the public about the history of the civil rights movement.

During the early 60s Avedon travelled across the southern states photographing civil rights protests. This photograph is the concluding image in Avedon's book *Nothing Personal* (1964). A second Avedon portrait of Bond from 2004, when he was Chairman of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People, is included in the exhibition.

by the government of the United States as a potential threat to capitalism and the American way of life. The US actively campaigned against further spread of Communist influence both within its borders and outside them. United States involvement in conflicts such as the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Korean War and the Vietnam War were founded in its anti-Communist stance. Avedon was personally and professionally involved in protesting United States engagement in the Vietnam War and travelled to Saigon in 1971, creating his own documentary series of the war.



*Brandenburg Gate, Berlin, Germany,  
New Year's Eve, 1989*  
gelatin silver print  
127 x 200.7 cm

Avedon's large scale image of a young man gazing upwards is from a series of dramatic photographs – both reportage and portraiture – taken at the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin on New Year's Eve 1989, less than two months after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Avedon captured the feverish excitement and joyous frenzy of hundreds of people pulling the Berlin Wall down, bringing about physical unification of the city, not only celebrating a New Year but a new era. This photograph is a portrait of a time and place as much as a portrait of the individuals included and is the result of Avedon being in the right place at the right time. The large format adds to the arresting quality of the image. The fall of the wall signalled the end of The Cold War, over four decades of sustained political and military tension between the US and the USSR (Soviet Russia). The rise of communism, particularly post World War II, was seen

### **Before the visit**

Through discussion create a definition of reportage photography, documentary photography and photojournalism. What kind of information do you think this type of photography should disseminate?

What visual vocabulary is needed to understand a photograph? Create a list of points to consider when conducting visual analysis.

Conduct an in-class debate on the topic 'Photography is inherently truthful'.

### **In the Gallery**

Analyse the portrait Julian Bond and members of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, Atlanta, Georgia, March 23, 1963. What contributes to the success of this photograph? What message do you think is conveyed?

If, as Avedon suggests, a portrait is not a fact but an opinion, what is Avedon's opinion about the American civil rights movement?

Use evidence from the exhibition to support your case.

Avedon photographed a wide range of subjects who have a connection to The Cold War – political leaders, activists against The Vietnam War, defectors from the USSR, peace campaigners, victims of McCarthyism, journalists, scientists and musicians. As a group, identify subjects in the exhibition that you know have a connection to The Cold War and discuss the links between them.

### **After the visit**

Investigate the effect of the American civil rights movement on Australian life and politics. What non-violent forms of protest found expression in the Aboriginal rights movement in Australia in the 1960s?

Find other primary historical documentation that supports or opposes Avedon's reportage of The Vietnam War.

**I've worked out of a series of no's. No to exquisite light, no to apparent compositions, no to the seduction of poses or narrative. And all these no's force me to the 'yes.' I have a white background. I have the person I'm interested in and the thing that happens between us.**

Richard Avedon 1994



*James Baldwin, writer, Harlem, New York 1945*  
Gelatin silver print  
50.8 x 40.6 cm

James Baldwin (1924-1987) and Richard Avedon met in high school at DeWitt Clinton in the Bronx and co-edited the school literary magazine. Baldwin's semi-autobiographical novel *Go tell it on the Mountain* 1953 is one of the first American novels written from an African-American perspective and Baldwin became a spokesperson of the civil rights movement. Throughout his writings Baldwin eloquently explored the American condition with the aim to transform the consciousness of the American people, stating 'Not everything that is faced can be changed but nothing can be changed until it is faced'. He lived much of his life in France, feeling that he could write more freely and honestly at a distance from his birthplace. In 1964 Baldwin and Avedon collaborated to produce the book *Nothing Personal*. Both text and imagery examine American society and create a portrait of the time. One of Baldwin's essays was a powerful indictment of the reality of being an African-American man living in New York City. Baldwin's work is regularly included in tertiary courses in African American studies and is considered a classic of twentieth century American literature.



*Marilyn Monroe and Arthur Miller, New York, May 8, 1957*  
Gelatin silver print  
50.8 x 40.6 cm

Avedon included this portrait in *Observations*, one of six photographs described as A brief anthology in honor of love with each photograph accompanied by an excerpt of poetry. The Monroe/Miller portrait was accompanied by a line from John Keats

They could not sit at meals but feel  
how well

It soothed each to be the other by.  
Arthur Miller (1915-2004) is considered one of the greatest writers of the twentieth century and Marilyn Monroe (1926-1962) attained legendary status as movie star and celebrity. They married in 1956 and later in that same year Miller was brought before the House Un-American Activities committee (HUAC) to answer accusations of disloyalty driven largely by his play *The Crucible*. The play, ostensibly about witch hunts in Salem Massachusetts in the seventeenth century, was a thinly disguised critique of McCarthyism. In the early 1950s Senator Joseph McCarthy accused hundreds of writers and entertainers of communist ties and blacklisted them, which resulted in many never working again. Miller wrote *The Crucible* in 1953 in protest against McCarthy's unsubstantiated accusations. *The Crucible* continues to be performed, often in times of political unrest and persecution. Miller also wrote *Death of a Salesman* in 1949 which won him a Pulitzer Prize. It is the story of travelling salesman Willy Loman; his life, loves and the unravelling American dream. Writing with great compassion, Miller makes a tragic hero of the common man. *The Crucible* and *Death of a Salesman* are both considered classics of twentieth century literature.

Marilyn Monroe began life as Norma Jean Mortenson and had a difficult childhood, in and out of foster care due to her mother's mental illness. Monroe dreamt of making it in Hollywood and her breakthrough came in 1945 when at the age of nineteen her photo was taken while she was working in an aeronautical factory. Modelling opportunities quickly followed. After a successful screen test with 20th Century Fox in 1946, she recreated herself, changing her name to Marilyn Monroe and dyeing her hair platinum blonde, and the rest is history. Her curvaceous hourglass figure and distinctive breathy voice captivated audiences and they loved her comedic roles in *How To Marry A Millionaire*, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, *The Seven-Year Itch* and *Some Like It Hot*. Marilyn won a Golden Globe for her performance in *Some Like It Hot*. Her serious roles include *All About Eve*, *Niagara*, *Bus Stop* and Monroe's final film *The Misfits*, which has a screenplay written by Miller. Marilyn Monroe has inspired many artists including Andy Warhol, Elton John, Madonna and Lady Gaga.



*Boyd Fortin, thirteen-year-old, Streetwater, Texas, March 10, 1979*  
Gelatin silver print  
151.4 x 119.7cm

Avedon produced the series *In the American West* between 1979 and 1984, travelling the western states capturing striking portraits of unknown Americans. The subjects were largely poor and working class and included carnival performers, oil workers, coal miners, prison inmates and

drifters. Avedon observed that 'these were people with an extraordinary appearance. This is a class that had not been described or observed at all.'

Photographed against a white background, subjects were placed in the shade so that no shadows influenced the reading of the face and the finished portraits were printed larger-than-life. Avedon believed that 'the white background isolates the subject from itself and permits you to explore the geography of the face; the unexplored continents in the human face.'

Thirteen-year-old Boyd Fortin was working with his father, skinning snakes at the Sweetwater Rattlesnake Roundup when Avedon saw him. His pay was all the snake meat and french fries he could eat. After asking to take his photograph Avedon gave detailed instructions, with a clear concept of what the final photograph would look like. Avedon wanted the bloodied overalls and delicate trailing intestines of the snake to be visible. The size of the resultant portrait grants the young man heroic status, filled with determination and intensity he has the presence of a gladiator, returning victorious from battle.

### **Before the visit**

Read or watch a film version of *Go Tell It on the Mountain* by James Baldwin and/or *Death of a Salesman* by Arthur Miller. How do they convey a sense of life in America in the late 40s and early 50s? What is their relevance today?

### **In the Gallery**

As a group create a descriptive oral portrait through close analysis of one of Avedon's photographic portraits. Allow each person to contribute. Nominate who your audience will be and discuss appropriate language. Consider pose, expression, dress, composition, lighting, perspective and mood.

Many of Avedon's portraits are part of a series and some of them are hung together within the exhibition. Discuss the narrative effect of a single portrait from a series. Compare and contrast it to the effect of the whole group from that series.

### **After the visit**

James Baldwin drew on his personal experience in writing, providing an opportunity for others to glimpse his reality. Write a short story or monologue based on your life experience. Consider including an aspect of your life which others may not understand or be familiar with. Arthur Miller said 'The American Dream is the largely unacknowledged screen in front of which all American writing plays itself out'. Compare and contrast Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* with Richard Avedon's *In the American West* in the light of this statement.

Develop a written creative response to Avedon's portrait of *Boyd Fortin, thirteen-year-old Streetwater, Texas, March 10, 1979*. Choose three to five portraits from the exhibition and create accompanying wall texts of 200 words each. Consider the role of interpretation in your text.



**You cannot take a photograph of a person without that person's presence and that very person's presence implies truth ... All photographs are accurate. None of them is the truth.**

Avedon 1986



*East Louisiana State Hospital, Jackson, Louisiana, February 15, 1963*  
gelatin silver print  
50.8 x 40.6 cm

In early 1963 Avedon created a series of portraits of inmates of the state mental hospital in Louisiana. This photographic series, more than most, demonstrates Avedon's lifelong exploration of the human condition, the essential isolation of every human being and the deep desire to connect to others. It also reveals Avedon's underlying moral intention to bring about transformation of society. Throughout his life Avedon gave a presence to disenfranchised members of society through his photographs. Several portraits from this series were included in the Avedon/Baldwin publication *Nothing Personal* and Baldwin's accompanying text also contains a call to action.

One day, perhaps, unimaginable generations hence, we will evolve into the knowledge that human beings are more important than real estate and will permit knowledge to become the ruling principle of our lives.

James Baldwin, *Nothing Personal*

The photographs are grainy and washed out, as though they have been over exposed and over enlarged, creating an almost dreamlike effect. Gentle winter light suffuses the images, softening the figures and the space they inhabit. Avedon's portraits simultaneously evoke a sense of knowing and unknowing; recognition of the inherent capacity for insanity in us all without an understanding of the reality of mental illness. The series had a partial reference to Avedon's sister Louise who spent the last years of her life in a psychiatric ward.

### **Before the visit**

Read or listen to the following programs on ethics and beauty

<http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/philosopherszone/the-art-of-ethical-relationships/3440252#transcript>  
<http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/philosopherszone/why-theres-no-getting-away-from-beauty/3284116#transcript>

### **In the Gallery**

How does Avedon hold up a mirror to the society he lived in through his photographic practice?

Interrogate how your own value system may influence your reading of Richard Avedon's portraits.

Closely analyse two portraits in the exhibition. How are they the same? How do they differ? Describe the underlying and unifying aesthetic?

In his discourse on the judgement of beauty Immanuel Kant suggested that when we describe something as beautiful we expect that others will agree with us. Look through the exhibition and choose the portrait you find most beautiful. Analyse why you find it beautiful. As a group share your opinions and discuss why there is consensus or widely differing views?

### **After the visit**

Socrates stated that 'The unexamined life is not worth living.' Write a response to this statement with reference to Richard Avedon's portraits.

To what extent do Avedon's photographic portraits of inmates of the East Louisiana Hospital act to redress hermeneutical injustice? How is that achieved?

Avedon has said 'Youth never moves me. I seldom see anything beautiful in a young face.' In response to this statement consider and discuss aesthetics in relation to portraiture.