

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Acting the Part: Photography as Theatre **Takes Centre Stage at the Vancouver Art Gallery**

VANCOUVER, BC — *Acting the Part: Photography as Theatre*, on display at the **Vancouver Art Gallery** from **February 3 to May 21, 2007**, is one of the first exhibitions to explore the history of staged photography from the 19th century to the present. Since the medium was invented, photographers have composed scenes by directing models and using props, costumes and lighting to create images that tell stories. Organized and circulated by the National Gallery of Canada with additional works borrowed by the Vancouver Art Gallery, this groundbreaking touring exhibition explores photographic theatrically from the earliest salted paper prints to the latest digitally manipulated images.



Madame Yevonde, *Lady Malcolm Campbell as Niobe, from the Goddesses series*, 1935. Pigment transfer print, 40.6 x 50.7 cm, Yevonde Portrait Archive, Winchester, England

“As the holder of one of Canada’s most important collections of photography, we are extremely pleased to present this innovative exploration into the world of staged images,” said Vancouver Art Gallery director Kathleen Bartels. “The works in this exhibition are extremely compelling and provide a fascinating investigation into photography’s history.”

Comprised of 90 photographic treasures, *Acting the Part* features works by such renowned artists as Robert Doisneau, Yasumasa Morimura, Man Ray, Oscar Gustave Rejlander, Cindy Sherman, Yinka Shonibare, Jeff Wall, Weegee and many others. To enhance the exhibition and in recognition of Vancouver’s strong photographic tradition, the Vancouver Art Gallery will add a selection of works by internationally renowned Vancouver artists Scott McFarland, Rodney Graham, Tim Lee, Kevin Madill, Judy Radul and Jin-me Yoon.

Acting the Part is divided into three sections: *The Actor* presents images that incorporate the photographer in the frame; *The Artist* includes works that reference other art forms; and *The Storyteller* is comprised of images with a strong sense of narrative. Among the ‘actors’ is Gustave Rejlander in his famed double self-portrait as artist and military volunteer, which amusingly illustrates the use of photography to assume multiple personas. *The Artist* includes an array of images that strongly reference other artistic mediums depicting scenes from classical mythology, sculpture and paintings, including Yasumasa Morimura’s gender bending photographic re-enactment of Edouard Manet’s *Olympia*. On display in *The Storyteller* is Robert Doisneau’s iconic *The Kiss at the Hôtel de Ville*, the famed image of a young Parisian couple engaged in a seemingly spontaneous kiss on a Paris sidewalk – an image the artist admitted publicly was staged more than forty years after it was taken.

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The practice of staging photographs was prominent as early as the 1840s, when the French photographer Hippolyte Bayard played the role of a drowned man for an early salted paper print – an ingenious pose to strike as it took advantage of the slow exposure time of the era. By the mid-1850s many photographers were staging more elaborate scenes resembling allegorical paintings. In the early 20th century, artists such as Man Ray and Madame Yevonde represented fantasy personas and emphasized the surreal elements of everyday life, and in the 1940s, the staged photograph became an important tool in the world of advertising. Photographers like Duane Michals took the genre in a new direction in the 1960s when he posed models and himself in dramatic narratives that explored subjects such as love and death. The return of pictorial concerns to art making in the late 1970s led artists such as Cindy Sherman and Jeff Wall to assert the prominence of photography in contemporary art. Several artists working within the genre today, including Yasumasa Morimura and Wang Qingsong, use staged photographs to probe sexual or cultural identity, while others, blend advertising and art history into biting social satire, making the practice of staged photography one of the most vital and important genres of contemporary artistic practice.

Curated by Lori Pauli, assistant curator of photographs at the National Gallery of Canada, the exhibition is accompanied by an illustrated publication with contributions by Pauli, Marta Weiss, Ann Thomas and Karen Henry. The essays explore Victorian tableaux vivants, Surrealism and iconic photographs from the 1930s and 1940s that were previously thought to be documentary but were in fact staged, as well the changing contemporary context of photography as theatre.

Acting the Part: Photography as Theatre is organized and circulated by the National Gallery of Canada.

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