

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

# EXHIBITION REVIEWS



Richard Avedon: *Allen Ginsberg's family; Hannah (Honey) Litzky, aunt; Leo Litzky, uncle; Abe Ginsberg, uncle; Anna Ginsberg, aunt; Louis Ginsberg, father; Eugene Brooks, brother; Allen Ginsberg, poet; Anne Brooks, niece; Peter Brooks, nephew; Connie Brooks, sister-in-law; Lyle Brooks, nephew; Eugene Brooks; Neal Brooks, nephew; Edith Ginsberg, stepmother; Louis Ginsberg, Paterson, New Jersey, May 3, 1970, gelatin silver print, 8 by 20 feet; at Gagosian.*

## NEW YORK

### RICHARD AVEDON GAGOSIAN

The four colossal black-and-white group portraits that Richard Avedon made between 1969 and 1971—most roughly 10 by 30 feet—created, in a recent show at Gagosian, a cruciform galaxy featuring the U.S. military, its antiwar opponents, Pop artists and Beat poets. But it is rockstardom that presides in spirit over this inventory of an era's luminaries, nowhere more, of course, than in the mural of Warhol's Factory crew. Alternately clothed and nude, glamorous and tragic, Paul Morrissey, Joe Dallesandro, Candy Darling, Gerard Malanga, Viva, Taylor Mead et al. are shown assembled into flirty little cliques. Nearly offstage to the right, Warhol looks away, too cool to care.

Staring them down from across the cavernous gallery were the sober-suited men of the Mission Council, planners of military strategy in Vietnam; Avedon lined them up in an implacable, dead-eyed row. While none of the Council members are now household names, the Chicago Seven, accused of intent to incite riots at the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago, remain legend. They include, in Avedon's image, an uncharacteristically downcast Abbie Hoffman; a wild-eyed Jerry Rubin, looking like Charles Manson; and a rumped and sheepish Tom Hayden, not yet Jane Fonda's husband. The camera angle is a little high, which makes them slightly top-heavy and heightens the pugnacity they project, and the latent haplessness as well.

Humor comes closer to the surface in the mural of Allen Ginsberg's family, the exhibition's most engaging. The Ginsbergs are Jewish (like Avedon), so they are eating, and carry books. There are a lot of them, standing very close. The brother who (an annotated checklist reveals) has changed his last name to Brooks has married a freckled blond, whom the camera catches staring away in dismay. Doubled at the center of the image (like all the murals, it is made from more than one negative), the famous poet seems internally split between good son and world-class subversive. On the other hand, the way his father appears on both sides of the huge portrait makes him seem like something of a tumbler—a figure of ethnicity played for laughs.

Tucked into triangular spaces created by freestanding walls that funneled out to frame the murals (the installation was designed by architect David Adjaye) were more modestly scaled photographs of some of the same subjects and others related to them. Politicos ranged from a young, defiant Bernardine Dohrn, here a pre-underground Weatherman, to Rose Mary Woods, Nixon's faithful secretary, wearing paisley and a lot of makeup and looking just like Cindy Sherman as a ravenous culture maven. Contact sheets of the Factory crowd show what Avedon chose not to enlarge, including images of Warhol more actively engaged with his friends. Also visible in these smaller prints was the illuminating contrast between the sexual politics of Ginsberg's circle and Warhol's. Shown naked in a multitude of tender embraces, Ginsberg

and his partner, Peter Orlovsky, seem paragons of warmth and candor.

Avedon's basic formal gesture—the placement of his subjects in featureless white space, where they float like astronauts—only heightens, with more than four decades' distance, our awareness of their context. Napalm victims, civil rights leaders, decorated soldiers and Vietnamese prostitutes glow equally under the camera's attention, its power to bestow prestige never greater.

—Nancy Princenthal