

Entertainment / Visual Arts

**Famed Beat poet Allen Ginsberg's photos donated to University of Toronto**  
More than 7,600 pictures capture five decades of the cultural icon's life.

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ALLEN GINSBERG PHOTOGRAPHY COLLECTION  
Jack Kerouac in Villa Muneria, Tangier, 1957.

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By: Murray Whyte Visual arts, Published on Thu Jan 23 2014

Allen Ginsberg left his mark on the world largely through an unorthodox gift with language, but the Beat poet was an avid photographer, too. A recent gift of some 7,686 of the late cultural icon's pictures were recently donated to the University of Toronto, making it the largest such trove of Ginsberg's images in the world.

Anne Dondertman, associate librarian for special collections at U of T, called it "the ultimate insider group of photographs on the Beats." For more than 50 years, Ginsberg snapped both informal moments of he and his cohorts' daily life, as well as their travels and brushes with celebrity. The collection contains a wealth of images of Ginsberg himself, as well as his famous friends: Willem de Kooning, Iggy Pop, Beck, Paul McCartney and Bob Dylan among them.

Most significant, though, are Ginsberg's pictures of he and his Beat movement confreres through their formative years. The pictures span 1944 to his death in 1997, capturing the vital years of the 1950s and '60s where the Beats were a central part of the counter-cultural movement. Among them are spontaneous scenes, like Jack Kerouac wrestling with Ginsberg's spouse, Peter Orlovsky, on the beach in Tangiers, or Paul Bowles squinting awkwardly for a photo-op with Gregory Corso and William Burroughs in the hot Moroccan sun.

U of T has made some of the images public online at [go.utlib.ca/ginsberg](http://go.utlib.ca/ginsberg).

Ginsberg kept up his photo practice throughout his life. Revered by artists in all fields for his foundational work with the Beats, he was a frequent guest of celebrities, and his camera went with

him. One picture in the collection shows a very young Madonna cozied up to Warren Beaty at a New Year's Eve party, sitting on his lap. In another, Paul and Linda McCartney pose for a loose family picture in front of a modest summer cottage, surrounded by family.

A large part of Ginsberg's photography was his self-portraiture, which he seemed to be shooting almost constantly. The collection has images of him as a young man, writing at his desk in San Francisco, and older, naked and in the lotus position, taken through his bathroom mirror.

The donation, from the Larry and Cookie Rossy Family Foundation, based in Montreal, will be held largely in the university's Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, an internationally renowned centre for the conservation of sensitive materials. Some 236 larger silver-gelatin prints from the collection will be kept at the University of Toronto Art Centre. The Rossy family owns a Montreal-based retail empire that includes the Dollarama chain of stores.

The Rossy donation was directed to U of T due to the combination of the Fisher's reputation as a conservator, and its affiliation with UTAC, which has ample exhibition space to display the works. UTAC will stage an exhibition of the Ginsberg photo collection this fall.

The donation was received in December 2012. Given the volume of the collection and the time involved in cataloguing and processing it, it was only announced this week.