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Major Collection of Allen Ginsberg Photos Donated to University of Toronto



By University of Toronto News

The University of Toronto is home to the world's largest collection of photographs by the late beat poet, Allen Ginsberg, thanks to a donation by the Larry & Cookie Rossy Family Foundation.

The 7,686 photographs housed in the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library and 236 silver gelatin prints at the University of Toronto Art Centre include portraits of figures as prominent as John Cage, Bob Dylan, William de Kooning, Paul McCartney and Iggy Pop.

Comprising a nearly complete archive of Ginsberg's surviving photographs, the collection, spanning the years 1944 to 1997, includes original snapshots and prints of various sizes. The silver gelatin prints are unique in that they are hand-captioned by Ginsberg. All of these images will be available to scholars, and some will be on display.

"This is an exciting and remarkable gift," says U of T President Meric Gertler.

He continues:

It builds on U of T's strength as one of the world's greatest research resources, and our global stature in the humanities. We are very grateful to the Larry & Cookie Rossy Family Foundation for entrusting us with this truly fascinating collection.

Allen Ginsberg (1926-1997) was an American poet and nonconformist whose influence extended far beyond the United States. Along with his friends Jack Kerouac, William S. Burroughs and Gregory Corso, Ginsberg was at the centre of a network of writers and artists dubbed the Beat Generation. In the 1950s and 1960s, their work and their personal example would forever alter the cultural scene. The Beats also influenced postmodern and avant-garde Canadian poetry.

Although known primarily as a writer, Ginsberg was an avid photographer. The collection includes images of writers Amiri Baraka (formerly known as LeRoi Jones), Paul Bowles, Doris Lessing, Josef Skvorecky (who was a professor of English at U of T) and Evgeny Yevtushenko. Other Ginsberg subjects were photographer Robert Frank, psychologist R.D. Laing, author and activist Dr. Benjamin Spock and psychologist, and drug guru, Timothy Leary. Ginsberg's friend and, fellow writer, Burroughs appears in more than 300 photographs. Another frequent subject is Ginsberg's lifelong partner, Peter Orlovsky.

The Ginsberg prints provide visual insight into New York urban landscape from the 1950s to the 1990s. They also document Ginsberg's international travels to Canada, France, India, Mexico, Morocco, Nicaragua, the USSR and many other nations.

"This constitutes the ultimate 'insider' group of photographs on the Beats," says Anne Dondertman, associate librarian for Special Collections, University of Toronto Libraries. "It contains important research material for the study of the life, family, work, travels and friendships of Allen Ginsberg from the 1940s to the 1990s."

"This fabulous collection provides both scholars and students unique entrée to Ginsberg's passionate eye and helps to confirm his status as a major 20th-century American poet with the camera," says Louis Kaplan, professor of History and Theory of Photography and New Media, Graduate Department of Art. "One cannot overestimate its photo-historical, pedagogical and cultural value."

Many of the prints have been digitized, and are available via the Fisher Library's Flickr site at <http://go.utlib.ca/ginsberg> and the UTAC Collections Online portal which can be accessed from the University of Toronto Art Centre's homepage at www.utac.utoronto.ca. This fall UTAC in collaboration with the Fisher Library will present an exhibition of the Ginsberg photographs.

The University of Toronto Libraries system is the largest academic library in Canada and is ranked third among peer institutions in North America, behind Harvard and Yale. The system consists of 44 libraries located on three university campuses. Its Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library houses the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, including books, manuscripts and other materials, and is the largest rare book library in the country. For more information about the Fisher Library's collections, visit <http://fisher.library.utoronto.ca/resources>.

The University of Toronto Art Centre is the third-largest fine art gallery in Toronto, and home to three collections comprising more than 6,000 objects. Collection highlights include works by European Old Masters and the early 20th-century avant-garde as well as the Group of Seven, and Modern and Contemporary Canadian artists.

The Montreal-based Larry & Cookie Rossy Family Foundation was established by Larry Rossy, founder and CEO of Dollarama Inc.

Boundless: The Campaign for the University of Toronto is the most ambitious fundraising initiative ever undertaken by a Canadian university. Meeting global challenges and preparing global citizens are the twin

pillars of the campaign, which will support the exploration of new frontiers and the limitless possibilities of human experience. This gift will provide students and faculty alike with a new opportunity to explore human expression and social progress. Boundless has surpassed the milestone of \$1.35 billion, more than two-thirds of the goal of \$2 billion.

By Margaret Wall. Margaret Wall is a writer with the University of Toronto Libraries System.

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