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Avedon exhibit features portraits of 1960s-70s

newsmakers



By **KATHY MATHESON**



People view the exhibit titled "Richard Avedon: Family Affairs" Tuesday, March 31, 2015, during press preview at the National Museum of American Jewish History in Philadelphia. The exhibit features dozens of newsmakers in U.S. culture and politics. (AP Photo/Matt Rourke)

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — A new exhibit focusing on Richard Avedon's photos of political and cultural newsmakers invites visitors to rethink the concept of portraits in the age of the selfie.

"Richard Avedon: Family Affairs" opens Wednesday at the National Museum of American Jewish History in Philadelphia.

The collection starkly depicts dozens of U.S. movers-and-shakers from the 1960s and '70s in the artist's trademark black-and-white style. Also featured is a small biographical display on Avedon, who was raised Jewish in New York.

"Avedon's work is generally shown in art museums as art, with very little historical interpretation," said chief curator Josh Perelman. "We invite Avedon in both as a creator and a character."

Avedon made his name shooting fashion models for magazines like Harper's Bazaar and Vogue, but "Family Affairs" stems mainly from his work covering the 1976 presidential election for Rolling Stone magazine.



Originally planning to spotlight the campaigns of incumbent Gerald Ford and challenger Jimmy Carter, Avedon soon realized he wanted to include a wider array of the era's most influential people, Perelman said.

Men in suits comprise nearly all his subjects, distinguished by variations in their stances and expressions: Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, former California Gov. Ronald Reagan, consumer advocate Ralph Nader and NFL commissioner Pete Rozelle, to name a few.



Only a handful of the 12-by-15-inch framed images portray women or minorities, among them Washington Post publisher Katharine Graham and labor activist Cesar Chavez.

Rolling Stone called the 69 portraits "The Family," though the only people with biological ties are Ted Kennedy and his

mother, Rose. Visitors can also page through hard copies of the 40-year-old magazine issue, or look at a digital edition.

Yet the exhibit space is dominated by a wall-size display of poet Allen Ginsberg's family. It's one of four featured group portraits that Avedon took between 1969 and 1971. Much smaller pictures include Andy Warhol and members of The Factory; the Chicago 7, who were arrested during the 1968 Democratic National Convention; and the Mission Council, who were key players in the Vietnam War.

The exhibit notes Avedon stood next to his camera, not behind it, when making his photos.

"I am close enough to touch the subject, and there is nothing between us except what happens as we observe on another during the making of the portrait," Avedon said.

Museum officials have set up a computer to take Avedon-inspired pictures of guests against a white backdrop edged in black; the images can be both printed and shared via social media, blending the concepts of portraits and selfie.

Avedon died in 2004, before selfies entered popular culture, but even he wasn't immune to the concept. As a teen, Avedon used a mirror to take a picture of himself and high school classmate James Baldwin, who later went on to literary fame. That photo is on display as well.

"Family Affairs" is based on an exhibition held last year at The Israel Museum in Jerusalem. The Philadelphia site will be the only U.S. venue for the images, which are on view through Aug. 2.

