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INDIANAPOLIS MUSEUM OF ART ACQUIRES MAJOR WEEGEE PHOTOGRAPHY COLLECTION OF MORE THAN 300 WORKS

Weegee Holdings at IMA Are Second Only to the Artist's Estate at New York's ICP



Weegee, *Weegee with Movie Camera and Lufthansa Bag*, 1960. © Weegee / International Center of Photography.

Indianapolis, June 3, 2008—The [Indianapolis Museum of Art](#) announced today that it has received a gift of 210 photographs by acclaimed artist Weegee (Arthur Fellig, 1899-1968) as well as nearly 100 documents relating to his life. The collection, which is believed to have belonged at one time to Weegee's long-time companion Wilma Wilcox, contains photographs spanning Weegee's career and *portraying* all aspects of his idiosyncratic subject matter. Also included are numerous portraits of the artist, and various ephemera such as letters and postcards from Weegee to Wilma, newspaper clippings, press passes, and even Weegee's Social Security card. The collection is a partial gift of Steven H. Nowlin, and a partial purchase by the Caroline Marmon Fesler Fund and the Alliance of the Indianapolis Museum of Art.

The Weegee collection, considered second only to that from the artist's estate at the International Center of Photography in New York, was discovered in a trunk at a farmhouse yard sale in southern Kentucky in 2003 and acquired by Indianapolis historic documents dealer Steve H. Nowlin the same year. It includes works ranging from crime photographs, Harlem in the 1940s,

audiences at jazz concerts or in darkened movie theaters taken surreptitiously with infrared film, strippers, transvestites, Greenwich Village in the 1950s, and distortions of celebrities such as Marilyn Monroe, Judy Garland, Bette Davis, Elizabeth Taylor, Picasso, Eisenhower, Jackie Kennedy, and the Duke and Duchess of Windsor.

“Without an ounce of decorum, Weegee gave permission to us all to observe the dark corners and bright lights of modern urban America. The unscripted, unvarnished tone of Weegee's photographs anticipates the free-wheeling character of today's Internet-based candid photography,” said Maxwell L. Anderson, the Melvin & Bren Simon director and CEO of the IMA. “The incredible range and depth of this collection makes it an outstanding addition to our photography holdings and will enhance the IMA's role as a community resource and encyclopedic art museum.”

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Weegee was a photojournalist whose work was synonymous with New York City. From 1930 to the end of his life, he prowled the metropolis with his Speed Graphic camera—from Uptown to Downtown, from the upscale to the down-and-out. While Weegee's intent was simply to photograph "the soul of the city I knew and loved," his unflinching eye set the trend for young, edgy photographers in the 1960s, most notably Diane Arbus who was a great admirer. Ever the intrepid chronicler of the city, he began his career as a freelance photographer, providing gritty crime scene photos to the tabloids and he arrived on the scene so frequently in advance of the police that they told him that he must be using a Ouija board, which the photographer adopted as his moniker—"Weegee." In 1945, Weegee compiled a selection of his candid street photographs into a book, *Naked City*, which brought him fame and which inspired the film noir classic of the same title. This



Weegee, *Martian Woman on the Telephone*, *Distortion*, about 1955. © Weegee / International Center of Photography.

film drew Weegee to Hollywood in 1947 where he embarked on a second phase of his career. For five years, he photographed the glamorous at movie premiers and Oscar ceremonies and then, in the darkroom, distorted those portraits into wicked and perceptive caricatures of movie stars and personalities. These were published for the first time in Weegee's *Naked Hollywood* in 1953.

The Weegee works join the IMA's growing photography collection. In 1992, the Museum embarked on building a comprehensive photography collection. While still accounting for a small fraction of the IMA's collection of 28,000 works on paper, the photography holdings now number some 700 works and include vintage images by William Henry Fox Talbot, Julia Margaret Cameron, Carleton Watkins, Charles Sheeler, Andre Kertesz, Alexander Rodchenko, Brassai, Berenice Abbott, Margaret Bourke White, Dorothea Lange, Edward Weston, Walker Evans, Robert Frank, Diane Arbus, Cindy Sherman, James Casebere, Gregory Crewdson among other masters of the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries.

About the IMA

Encompassing 152 acres of gardens and grounds, the IMA connects visitors to its unique and expansive view of art with its Indianapolis Museum of Art, the future Virginia B. Fairbanks Art & Nature Park and Oldfields—Lilly House & Gardens. The Indianapolis Museum of Art is among the largest general art museums in the United States and features significant collections of African, American, Asian, European, contemporary and decorative art, including paintings, sculpture, prints, drawings and photographs, textiles and costumes.

The IMA's robust contemporary art program is evolving as a model for encyclopedic museums as they engage the art of our time. With a renewed focus on its contemporary collection, the IMA has been actively seeking out the works of new and emerging artists through both gift and acquisition, and in addition to organizing major traveling exhibitions, has established two innovative exhibition series to showcase the work of leading contemporary artists.

IMA has recently completed a \$74 million expansion project that features three new wings, 50 percent more gallery space, expanded educational spaces, two new restaurants by Wolfgang Puck Catering and an enhanced museum shop. The construction added 164,000 square feet to the Museum and includes renovation of 90,000 square feet of existing space, making the Indianapolis Museum of Art the fifth largest art museum building in the U.S.

For more information, call 317.923.1331 or visit www.imamuseum.org.

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