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BARE WITNESS: PHOTOGRAPHS BY GORDON PARKS NOW ON VIEW AT PHOENIX ART MUSEUM

Retrospective Includes Documentary, Fashion and Portrait Photography

PHOENIX (August 25, 2011) – Gordon Parks spent the majority of his professional career at the crossroads of the glamorous and the ghetto – two extremes the noted photographer knew well. Perhaps best recognized for his works chronicling the African-American experience, Parks was also an accomplished fashion photographer. Bare Witness: Photographs by Gordon Parks, on view now through November 6, 2011, at Phoenix Art Museum provides a revealing look at the diversity and breadth of Parks's most potent imagery. Featuring 73 works specifically selected by Parks for the photographic collection of the Los Angeles-based Capital Group, Bare Witness divulges heart wrenching images, iconic moments, celebrities and slices of everyday life.

Born in 1912 in Fort Scott, Kansas, Parks, who died in 2006 at age 93, was an African American photographer who began working professionally in the 1930's. Parks tackled the harsh truth and dignity of the black urban and rural poor in the United States. He photographed aspects of the Civil Rights movements and individuals associated with the Black Panthers and Black Muslims. For nearly 25 years, from 1948 to 1972, he served as staff photographer for *Life* magazine. He also established himself as a foremost fashion photographer, providing spreads for respected magazines such as *Voque*.

Bare Witness features many of Parks's most memorable images such as "American Gothic." Taken during Parks's brief time with the Farm Security Agency, the photograph depicts a black cleaning woman named Ella Watson standing stiffly in front of an American flag, a mop in one hand and a broom in the other. Also included in the exhibition is a series of photos from Parks's most famous *Life* magazine essay about Flavio da Silva, a malnourished and asthmatic boy living in a Rio de Janerio slum. Portraits of Muhammad Ali, Duke Ellington, Alexander Calder, Ingrid Bergman, Langston Hughes and Malcolm X among others will also be on view.

"Whether photographing celebrities or common folk, Harlem gang leaders or intellectuals, children or the elderly, Parks brought his straightforward, sympathetic eye and mind to bear witness to late-20th century civilization," commented Hilarie Faberman, Robert M. and Ruth L. Halperin Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at Cantor Arts Center and organizer of the exhibition. "His photographs balance the dichotomies of black and white, rich and poor, revealing his strengths and struggles as an artist and a man."

Bare Witness - add one

In addition to his documentary and fashion photography, Parks was a filmmaker, author, musician and publisher. He was the first black artist to produce and direct a major Hollywood film, "The Learning Tree" in 1969, which was based on his early life experiences. He subsequently directed the popular action films "Shaft" and "Shaft's Big Score." He was a founder and editorial director of *Essence* magazine and wrote several autobiographies, novels and poems. In 1988, he received the National Medal of Arts award and throughout his lifetime was the recipient of 40 honorary doctorates from colleges and universities in the United States and England.

"Parks was a renaissance man whose career embodied the American ideal of equality and whose art was deeply personal. This exhibition is an exciting opportunity for Museum visitors to experience the poignant images he made over five decades," commented Rebecca Senf, Norton Curator of Photography, Phoenix Art Museum.

Bare Witness: Photographs by Gordon Parks was organized by the Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts at Stanford University. The exhibition and its accompanying catalogue are made possible by generous support from The Capital Group Foundation, the Cantor Arts Center's Hohbach Family Fund and Cantor Arts Center's Members.

Bare Witness: Photographs by Gordon Parks is presented in Phoenix Art Museum's Norton Photography Gallery August 20, 2011 through November 6, 2011. Admission to the exhibition is included in general museum admission, which is \$10 for adults, \$8 for senior citizens (65+), \$8 for full-time college students with ID, \$4 for children ages 6-17 and free for children under 6 and for museum members.

Phoenix Art Museum is located in downtown Phoenix at the corner of Central and McDowell Road. Museum Hours are Wednesday, 10:00 a.m. – 9:00 p.m., Thursday thru Saturday, 10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. and Sunday, Noon – 5:00 p.m. The museum will be closed on Mondays, Tuesdays and major holidays. Admission is free on Wednesdays from 3:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m. and for everyone on First Fridays, 6:00 p.m. – 10:00 p.m.

About Phoenix Art Museum

Phoenix Art Museum is the Southwest's premier destination for world-class visual arts. Popular international exhibitions are shown along side the Museum's outstanding collection of more than 18,000 works of American, Asian, European, Latin American, Western American, modern and contemporary art, and fashion design. A vibrant destination for over fifty years, Phoenix Art Museum presents festivals, live performances, independent art films and educational programs that enlighten, entertain and stimulate. Visitors also enjoy PhxArtKids an interactive space for children, vibrant photography exhibitions through the Museum's landmark partnership with the Center for Creative Photography, the lushly landscaped Sculpture Garden, dining at Arcadia Farms café at Phoenix Art Museum, and shopping at The Museum Store.

To learn more about Phoenix Art Museum, visit <u>PhxArt.org</u>, or call the 24-hour recorded information line at (602) 257-1222.

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