

## ***Peter Hujar: Portraits in Life and Death***

**Collateral Event of the 60th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia**

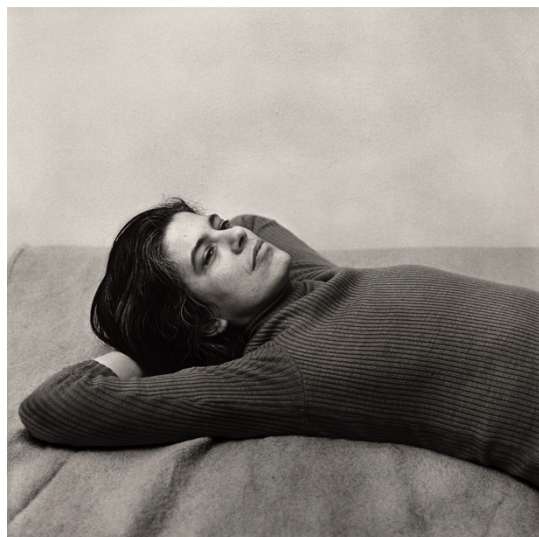
**Istituto Santa Maria della Pietà, Calle della Pietà, Castello 3703**



**La Biennale di Venezia**

**60. Esposizione  
Internazionale  
d'Arte**

**Eventi Collaterali**



Left: Peter Hujar, *Susan Sontag*, 1975; Right: *Palermo Catacombs #2*, 1963 © The Peter Hujar Archive, LLC,  
Courtesy of Pace Gallery, New York, Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco, Mai 36 Galerie, Zurich, and Maureen Paley Gallery, London

**The Peter Hujar Foundation announces a major exhibition of Peter Hujar's (b. 1934, Trenton, New Jersey; d. 1987, New York) complete works from the series *Portraits in Life and Death*, during the 60th Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte Venice, 2024.**

Venice—The Peter Hujar Foundation, New York, will present the first exhibition in Europe of Peter Hujar's legendary *Portraits in Life and Death*. Comprising the complete set of 41 photographs reproduced in the 1976 book, *Portraits in Life and Death*—the only publication Hujar produced during his lifetime, for which his friend, the critic Susan Sontag, penned the introduction—the exhibition will be curated by Grace Deveney, David C. and Sarajeana Ruttenberg Associate Curator of Photography and Media at the Art Institute of Chicago.

Hujar is renowned for photographing his subjects with penetrating sensitivity and psychological depth. Deeply embedded within the avant-garde milieu of artists, musicians, writers, and performers in downtown New York during the 1970s and early '80s, Hujar's unflinching portraits captured his subjects with astonishing intimacy and vulnerability. Often compared to contemporaries Diane Arbus and Robert Mapplethorpe, Hujar's work is distinguished by its poetic sensibility and profoundly empathetic gaze.

Hujar remained a largely underground figure during his lifetime, but since his death from AIDS-related complications in 1987 at the age of fifty-three, his complex body of work has received widespread acclaim. In 2017, he was the focus of a major retrospective at The Morgan Library in New York, which travelled to Fundación MAPFRE, Madrid, and the Jeu de Paume, Paris, in 2019.

*Peter Hujar: Portraits in Life and Death* will comprise two distinct types of images which are featured together in the 1976 monograph. The first consists of portraits of famous cultural figures on the New York scene, which Hujar photographed between 1974 and 1975 specifically for the book. These include the critic Susan Sontag, the dramaturg Robert Wilson, the writer Fran Lebowitz, the filmmaker John Waters, and the artist Paul Thek, among others. These images are juxtaposed with an earlier body of work, consisting of photographs of the mummified bodies found inside the Catacombe dei Cappuccini in Palermo, Italy, which were taken by Hujar during a trip there with Paul Thek in 1963.

In her introduction to *Portraits in Life and Death*, Sontag writes: "Photography ... converts the whole world into a cemetery. Photographers, connoisseurs of beauty, are also—wittingly or unwittingly—the recording-angels of death ... [In] this selection of Peter Hujar's work, fleshed and moist-eyed friends and acquaintances stand, sit, slouch, mostly lie—and are made to appear to meditate on their own mortality. Do meditate, whether they ... acknowledge it or not. We no longer study the art of dying, ... but all eyes, at rest, contain that knowledge. The body knows. And the camera shows, inexorably. The Palermo photographs—which precede these portraits in time—complete them, comment upon them. Peter Hujar knows that portraits in life are always, also, portraits in death."

The Estate of Peter Hujar is jointly represented by Pace Gallery in New York and Fraenkel Gallery in San Francisco, together with Mai 36 Galerie in Zürich and Maureen Paley in London.

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### **About Peter Hujar**

Peter Hujar (b. 1934, Trenton, New Jersey) died of AIDS related complications in 1987, leaving behind a complex and profound body of photographs. Hujar was a leading figure in the group of artists, musicians, writers, and performers at the forefront of the cultural scene in downtown New York in the 1970s and early 80s, and was enormously admired for his completely uncompromising attitude towards work and life. He was a consummate technician, and his portraits of people, animals, and landscapes, with their exquisite black-and-white tonalities, were extremely influential. Highly emotional yet stripped of excess, Hujar's photographs are always beautiful, although rarely in a conventional way.

Hujar's photographs have been exhibited throughout Europe and the United States, including The Art Institute of Chicago; Fotomuseum Winterthur, Switzerland; Kunsthalle Basel, Switzerland; P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, New York; and the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam for a retrospective in 1994. Exhibited and organized by the Morgan Library & Museum in New York and Fundación MAPFRE in Madrid starting in 2017, the exhibition *Speed of Life* made its final stop at the Jeu de Paume in Paris, France in 2019. His work remains in the permanent collections of The Art Institute of Chicago, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, the National Gallery of Canada, Ontario, the Tate, London, and the Reina Sofía, Madrid.

### **About The Peter Hujar Foundation**

The Peter Hujar Foundation exists to promote and expand the artistic legacy of Peter Hujar (1934-1987) while serving the artistic ideals that guided his career. The Foundation supports` exhibitions, publications, and special projects across the globe, as well as research through a comprehensive online archive. Through charitable donations, The Foundation seeks to support mid-late career artists/photographers in need.