A CHOICE OF WEAPONS
HONOR AND DIGNITY
The visions of Gordon Parks and Jamel Shabazz
Gordon Parks (1912–2006) was one of the greatest photographers of the twentieth century. He began his career in St. Paul, Minnesota in the late 1930s and went on to document the horrors of poverty and segregation for the Farm Security Administration (FSA), create moving photo-essays for Life magazine on topics ranging from gangs in Harlem to the Civil Rights Movement, and take fashion photographs for Vogue and Glamour. He was the first African American staff photographer at Life, the first African American director at a major Hollywood studio, and the founder and executive director of Essence magazine. A true Renaissance man, Parks was also a noted author, poet, composer, and humanitarian.

As I sought to better understand my journey and higher calling as a photographer, I vigorously researched the life of Gordon Parks as a source of guidance... He was a man who grew up experiencing various hardships and obstacles, but despite his circumstances he was able to overcome them and impact the world with his vision and talent. For me, the camera served as both a compass and time machine and the imagery of Gordon Parks was a roadmap for where I needed to go as an aspiring photographer.

—Jamel Shabazz, 2019
Jamel Shabazz (born 1960) began taking pictures in the 1980s and quickly became one of the most dynamic street photographers in New York. Shabazz uses his camera to capture the dignity and inner beauty of the people he photographs. He has worked with many institutions to inspire young people, teaching them about photography and social responsibility and has been the subject of solo exhibitions throughout the United States, and in Europe, South America, and Asia. Rapper, music producer, and renowned art collector Kasseem "Swizz Beatz" Dean has called Shabazz “the Gordon Parks of this generation.” Shabazz received a Gordon Parks Foundation Award in 2018.

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A Choice of Weapons, Honor and Dignity is curated by Robin Hickman-Winfield, CEO and executive producer of SoulTouch Productions and a great-niece of Gordon Parks. Hickman-Winfield first collaborated with the M in 1998 on the landmark traveling exhibition Half Past Autumn: The Life and Works of Gordon Parks, helping to bring the show to St. Paul. She was a producer and the national community education coordinator for the related Emmy and NAACP Image Award nominated HBO documentary. In 2011, SoulTouch launched “In the Footsteps of Gordon Parks,” a youth development initiative and celebration of the photographer’s legacy.
Thanks to the following Gordon Parks High School Scholars and curatorial advisors who wrote labels for the exhibition: Isaac Barrera, Jalen Baymon, Dominique H., Gao See Lor, Mueshi, Chandela Myhre, Miranda O., Okwan, Amelia Pharmer, Kha’laun Phillips, Thaw T. Po, Evelin Polio, Andrew Shorty, Shantiara Terrell, Jonathan Voelker, and Drake Xiong.

Key components of the communications and marketing strategies for the exhibition were designed by BrandLab interns Elijah Buchanan, Waylon Rembert Jr., and Charvaye Williams.

Throughout the run of A Choice of Weapons, Honor and Dignity, the M will feature a selection of work by Minneapolis-based photographer Den-Zell Gilliard in the Alley Gallery. The photographs on view were selected by the artist and Robin Hickman-Winfield as a response to the exhibition.


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