

Dennis Hopper: The Photographer

Värmlands Museum

June 4th 2016 – November 6th 2016

Invitation to a press preview, Friday June 3rd at 10 am.

The exhibition *Dennis Hopper: The Photographer* brings together – for the first time in Scandinavia – close to 200 of Dennis Hopper’s black-and-white photographs from the 1960s. These photos depict an America characterized by social and political change. This was the era of the Black Panthers, pop art and hippie culture; a time of freedom, rebellion and resistance. In the center of this turbulence was Hopper – constantly taking pictures. His friends even called him “the Tourist” because he always carried his camera around his neck.

The press preview features Marin Hopper, daughter of Dennis Hopper and co-trustee of The Hopper Art Trust.

Dennis Hopper (1936–2010) is perhaps best known as an actor and film director, featuring in films such as *Apocalypse Now*, *Blue Velvet* and *True Romance*. His breakthrough came in 1969 with the road movie *Easy Rider*, which was also his debut as a director. The film tells the story of the two antiheroes Billy and Wyatt – played by Hopper and Peter Fonda – as they ride their bikes through the US. It became a symbol of the hippie era and went on to break box office records around the world.

The road to success was not straight. Hopper grew up on a farm outside Dodge City, Kansas. He showed an early interest in art, poetry and theater. The first big movie part came in 1955, a supporting role in *Rebel Without a Cause* starring James Dean. Five years his senior, Dean – who tragically died in a car crash shortly after – became sort of a mentor for Hopper. It was also Dean who encouraged Hopper’s new interest in photography:

“I know you’re going to direct someday, so learn to take photographs and don’t crop them, use the still full-frame.”

A few years later Hopper got a camera for his birthday from his wife at the time Brooke Hayward, and he followed Dean’s advice. Since Hopper at this time was blacklisted in Hollywood due to a clash with influential moviemaker Henry Hathaway, photography became his main occupation during this period. Between 1961 and 1967, Hopper took thousands of pictures, and not until he began working on *Easy Rider* did he put the camera aside.

Hopper’s photographic world is populated by bikers, hippies, actors, musicians and artists – but also by anonymous people on the streets that caught the photographer’s eye. The scenery is America in concentrated form: endless highways, gigantic billboards and broad boulevards. The photographs let us see the world through the eyes of Dennis Hopper; we get to meet the people around him and go along on his journeys.

The relaxed and intimate photos of his friends from the Los Angeles art scene show Hopper’s strength as a portrait photographer. In New York, we get to meet Andy Warhol before he became a superstar – incredibly cool behind his black sunglasses. Legendary actor Paul Newman looks straight into the camera with unmistakable presence. Hopper’s 1965 depiction of the historic protest march from Selma to Montgomery, led by Martin Luther King, is an important document that grants Hopper a place among the great American documentary photographers.

No matter what Hopper took pictures of, he did it with curious eyes and an unerring feeling for composition. The exhibition shows Dennis Hopper’s wide range and versatility as a photographer. It’s a unique opportunity for the Swedish audience to see this intimate flow of pictures – taken by one of the true cultural icons of the last decades.

Dennis Hopper: The Photographer is produced in cooperation with The Hopper Art Trust and organized at the venue by Christian Nørgaard.