Collection of Era-Defining Photographs by Philippe Halsman Lands at Heritage Auctions

The acclaimed Life magazine photographer who captured enduring images of Marilyn Monroe, Salvador Dalí, Albert Einstein and other icons of the 20th century stars in [Nov. 7 auction](#)

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DALLAS, Texas (Oct. 17, 2022) — When Philippe Halsman said, "Jump," some of midcentury America's most famous movie stars, athletes, politicians, artists and authors jumped. Some jumped with childlike abandon, arms and legs wide, wild and free; others with more reserve, hands by their sides, their faces unsure. But jump they all did.

During Halsman's portrait sessions throughout the 1950s, the celebrated photographer asked his subjects to jump as a way to capture their true essence — or, more specifically, "their ambition or their lack of it, their self-importance or their insecurity." The results ranged from an [all-smiles Marilyn Monroe](#) and an [equally gleeful Jack Dempsey](#) to an [utterly charming Grace Kelly](#) and an [absolutely surprising Richard Nixon](#).

The Latvia-born photographer who created a record 101 covers for *Life* magazine dubbed this practice "jumpology," which he outlined in *Philippe Halsman's Jump Book*, a 1959 collection that includes more than 200 midair portraits of some of the era's most notable figures. "When you ask a person to jump," he wrote, "his attention is mostly directed toward the act of jumping, and the mask falls, so that the real person appears."

Among the photographer's many illustrious jumpers was Spanish painter Salvador Dalí, whom he met in 1941 when both were recent émigrés in New York City. The two became fast friends and artistic collaborators, melding their imaginations to create some of the 20th century's wildest and most whimsical images. "We were like two accomplices," Halsman once said of Dalí. "Whenever I had an unusual idea, I would ask him to be the hero of my photograph. There was a cross-stimulation going on."

The duo's decades-long relationship resulted in a multitude of striking photographs, from an absurdist series in which Dalí's signature waxed mustache became a subject itself to [1951's *In Voluptas Mors*](#). Derived from a sketch Dalí made of seven nude women curled into the shape of a human skull, the photo — as outstanding as it is outlandish — took more than three hours to perfect, as Dalí and Halsman adjusted and
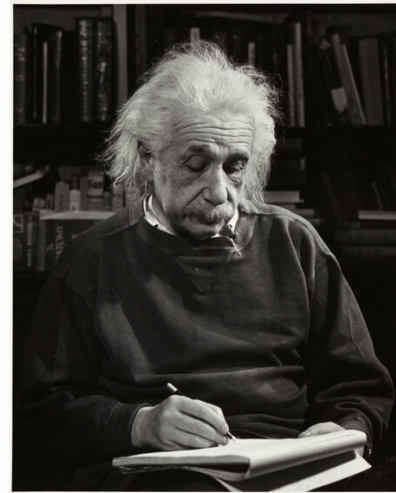
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readjusted the models' arms and legs and applied talcum powder to the soles of their feet to give the appearance of human teeth.

The cleverly macabre image serves as one of the centerpiece offerings in Heritage Auctions' Nov. 7 Philippe Halsman and Icons of the Twentieth Century: The Photography Collection of Frederich Voelker Signature® Auction. The single-owner collection, amassed by Voelker over more than 40 years, includes approximately 150 original Halsman prints, 32 of those featuring the photographer's up-for-anything surrealist sidekick.

In addition to *In Voluptas Mors*, Voelker's collection of Dalí-Halsman prints includes several images from the famed mustache series, as well as imaginative works such as *Sculpture With Light*. Created in 1950, the photograph, which depicts a "grotesque approximation of a human figure," required Dalí to dress in a special suit made of black, light-absorbing felt while holding a white sphere to represent a head and a long white cylinder for an arm. The costume and props combined with two strategically placed spotlights to create another weird and wondrous Dalí-Halsman image inspired by the human body.

"Halsman's 37 years of collaboration with Dalí became a springboard for artistic fantasy, anarchic humor, formal experimentation and fraternal joy," says Heritage Auctions Consignment Specialist Christopher Belport. "And to have a sequence like this by one photographer available at auction is just unprecedented."

But, of course, Dalí was just one of Halsman's celebrity subjects. From darlings of the silver screen such as Sophia Loren, Brigitte Bardot, Sharon Tate and his favorite female subject, Marilyn Monroe, to newsmakers like John and Robert Kennedy, Winston Churchill, Joe Namath, Alfred Einstein, Georgia O'Keeffe and Jean-Paul Sartre, Halsman captured leaders in the worlds of entertainment, sports, science, politics, arts and letters — and did so by creating an incredible level of trust with his subjects.

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"The level of intimacy in Halsman's photographs is unusual," Belport says. "He got Richard Nixon to take his jacket off — and jump! He got Grace Kelly to jump, gleefully, with her dress hem lifted to expose her garters. Halsman later commented, 'When an adult woman jumps with bent knees like a little girl, it is not a mere coincidence. It shows that, at the moment of the jump, she has become again a little girl.'"

After Halsman published the portrait of Kelly midleap, she sent him a telegram, asking that he note "that when she had jumped, she was not yet a princess."

As a kid in the 1950s and '60s, Voelker might not have known who Halsman was, but he certainly was familiar with his work. His mother's subscription to *Life* (and his first job, at 13, selling the magazine door to door) meant Voelker was exposed to Halsman's myriad images of legendary personalities even though he had no idea that the famous faces staring back from the magazine's covers were captured by the acclaimed photographer.

"It seems as if I grew up surrounded by all the people in those Halsman pictures," says Voelker, a lifelong photography fan who went on to a successful sales career on Wall Street. "Going through all the photographs was kind of heartrending, and it brought up a lot of memories. You see the Kennedys, and it brings a tear to your eye, and seeing various people who played important parts in your life elicits a similar emotional response."

Voelker's estimable collection contains more than just the Halsman images, though. Other standouts in the 206-piece assemblage include two works by Irving Penn, three photos by Edward S. Curtis depicting life in the American West in the early 1900s, a 1997 photo by Edward Burtynsky, a 1937 photo by Edward Weston printed later by Cole Weston and a 1955 Brett Weston photo of coastal California that Belport calls "a masterpiece."

Now, because the savvy Colorado-based collector has decided to downsize and head south to Mexico, his decades of diligent collecting can benefit fellow photography enthusiasts, lovers of pop culture, history buffs and, perhaps most of all, admirers of creativity, talent and the willingness to just jump.

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