

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO

111 South Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60603
t 312.443.3626 f 312.443.0193 www.artinstituteofchicago.org

ART
INSTITUTE
CHICAGO

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 6, 2009

MEDIA CONTACT:

Erin Hogan
(312) 443 3664
ehogan@artic.edu

Chai Lee
(312) 443 3625
clee4@artic.edu

THE ART INSTITUTE CELEBRATES THE LIFE AND WORK OF

MASTER PHOTOGRAPHER YOUSUF KARSH

**Regarding Heroes Highlights 100 Iconic Portraits of the
20th Century's Most Illustrious Faces**

The Art Institute of Chicago has organized an exhibition that focuses on **Yousuf Karsh**—the man responsible for some of the 20th century's most famous photographic portraits of celebrities and public figures. ***Yousuf Karsh: Regarding Heroes***—on view **January 22–April 26, 2009**—highlights the remarkable depth, skill, and poignancy with which Karsh captured such luminaries as Winston Churchill, Audrey Hepburn, Ernest Hemingway, Georgia O'Keeffe, Albert Einstein, Christian Dior, and Marian Anderson. To mark the centenary of his birth, this retrospective displays Karsh's best portrait subjects in the prints he himself preferred. The 100 photographs in the exhibition are drawn from a set of more than 200 master prints given to the Art Institute as a promised gift by his widow, Estrellita Karsh.



Yousuf Karsh arrived in Canada as a teenage refugee, escaping the genocide in Turkish Armenia. He was trained by his uncle—and later by John Garo in Boston—as a professional portrait photographer. At first this meant pleasing his sitters, rather than the editors and publishers who, with their staff photographers, kept an eye on fashion and celebrity. In 1941, after nine years as a

struggling young photographer in Ottawa, Karsh captured the unforgettable image of Winston Churchill that became known as “the roaring lion.” His name and his career were made almost instantly. Despite his success, Karsh still lived in a period of uncertainty, especially concerning the fate of European democracies and indeed the future of Western civilization. It was in that period that Karsh captured, like no other photographer, the faces of the people who defined the age. It is this notion of heroism and its stylistic rendition that the exhibition *Regarding Heroes* examines and illuminates.

Yousuf Karsh’s lifelong ambition was to search for a form within a face, one that could become a symbol for a life that was meaningful and generally virtuous. “I speak with some experience when I say that I have rarely left the company of accomplished men and women without feeling that they had in them real sincerity, integrity—yes, and sometimes vanity of course—and always a sense of high purpose.” In his 60-year career, Karsh seldom wavered from this goal, even when fame and fortune came his way. Neither did he discard his trademark variations in lighting style that he perfected in the late 1940s while other fashions came and went. Unchanging, too, was his genius at capturing the revealing and ephemeral psychological expressions, those fleeting disclosures of character and purpose for which his famous sitters trusted him.

Karsh was the preferred photographer of kings, queens, princes, presidents, prime ministers, generals, and other political figures because he rendered them with an unbiased and unflinching regard for their dignity. Karsh and the musicians, artists, writers, scientists, actors, and intellectuals he photographed shared a parallel ambition: to create works of art of lasting value. In making what now seem singular, monumental statements honoring those he considered his contemporary heroes, he stood alone in his field, so much so that it could be argued he was the last of his kind.

Yousuf Karsh: Regarding Heroes is organized by the Art Institute of Chicago. The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue, written by exhibition curator David Travis, former Curator of Photography at the Art Institute of Chicago, and issued by Boston publisher David R. Godine. The 192-page book traces Karsh’s artistic development and reassesses his place in the history of photography. It will be available in January 2009 and can be purchased at the Art Institute’s Museum Shop.

IMAGE CREDIT: Yousuf Karsh. *Sir Winston Churchill*, 1941. Estrellita Karsh, promised gift to the Art Institute of Chicago. © Estate of Yousuf Karsh.

###

MUSEUM HOURS

10:30 a.m.-5:00 p.m. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday

10:30 a.m.-8:00 p.m. Thursday

10:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. Saturday, Sunday

TARGET FREE EVENINGS THURSDAY AFTER 5:00 p.m.

Free all day, every day in February.

Closed Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day and New Year's Day.

Please check <http://www.artinstituteofchicago.org> before your visit.

Admission: Adults, \$12.00; Children 12 and over, students, and seniors, \$7.00; Children under 12 free; members always free. Target Free Evenings are free to all, except for certain special exhibitions that may require full or extra admission fee. City of Chicago residents with Chicago Public Library cards can borrow a "Check Us Out" card from any library branch for free general admission to the nine members of Museums in the Park, including the Art Institute of Chicago. Members can always have free, unlimited access to the museum, including ticketed exhibitions. Join today at www.artic.edu/aic/joinnow.

To reach the Art Institute on the World Wide Web, contact us at <http://www.artinstituteofchicago.org>

The Art Institute of Chicago is a museum in Chicago's Grant Park, located across from Millennium Park.