Photographers have often considered the platinum process to be one of the most beautiful printing techniques, and the viewers of photography have often considered Irving Penn to be one of the greatest photographers. Penn gained recognition as one of the great fashion and portrait photographers in the pages of *Vanity Fair*. During the past ten years he has been experimenting with the platinum process and has succeeded in printing many of his best photographs by this process. Through a gift from Mrs. Leigh B. Block, the museum has acquired ten of these spectacular prints.

The platinum process as used by Penn includes the use of platinum, palladium, and iridium metals in the formation of the final image. Penn first coats a paper with a ferric (iron) salt, lays a large copy negative on the prepared paper, exposes this combination to a strong xenon light, and develops. The resulting photographic image in ferric and ferrous salts becomes visible through development, actually a kind of toning with platinum or palladium metal. The print is fixed in hydrochloric acid and washed. Sometimes additional coatings and exposures are required.

The prints, which average about 15 x 20 inches, retain the surface characteristics of the paper upon which they were printed, but the image retains those delicacies of tone that were present in the negative. The platinum process first became popular in the 1880s, but died as a commercial process in the 1920s because of the high cost of platinum. Recently, it has been revived as a printing technique, but only by those photographers willing to make their own photographic papers.

Four of the platinum prints by Penn are presently on view in Gallery 106 in an exhibition of recent acquisitions made for the collection of photography during 1976 and 1977.

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