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***RICHARD AVEDON: LARGER THAN LIFE EXHIBITION OPENS IN OCTOBER AT THE GRAND RAPIDS ART MUSEUM WITH PREVIEW GUEST SPEAKER NIGEL BARKER***

*Fall Membership Drive Launches with Noted Fashion Photographer and Judge from "America's Next Top Model" Discussing the Influence of Richard Avedon in his Work*

**GRAND RAPIDS, Mich., August 1, 2008** – The Grand Rapids Art Museum (GRAM), a new leading cultural destination, presents the work of Richard Avedon in an exclusive exhibition by one of the most important American photographers of the modern era. *Richard Avedon: Larger Than Life* traces the artist's dynamic career from the postwar years of the late 1940s in Europe to the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Avedon set new precedents in fashion and portrait photography with his innovative approach to the medium. He also established a reputation as one of the greatest camera portraitists of our time.

*Richard Avedon: Larger Than Life* is organized by the Grand Rapids Art Museum and the Center for Creative Photography for an exclusive presentation at the Grand Rapids Art Museum from October 3, 2008 through January 4, 2009. The exhibition includes over 80 photographs drawn from the collection of the Center for Creative Photography in Tucson, Arizona, which houses the Richard Avedon Archive.

The exhibition coincides with the annual Fall Membership Drive, where special events are planned to highlight the many benefits of membership and encourage community support of the Art Museum and its programs. During the Membership Drive, Friday Nights in October are Members' Nights. Each museum member can bring two guests free of charge. Thereafter, every first Friday year-round will be a special Members' Night. And returning again this fall is the immensely popular Members Michigan Wine Tour to the Leelanau Peninsula, with a visit to artist Del Michael's studio.

The Membership Drive launches with a Special Guest Speaker attending the Members Exhibition Preview on October 2, 2008:

Nigel Barker, renowned photographer and judge on the hit television show *America's Next Top Model*, is Guest Speaker for the Exhibition Preview, and will begin his discussion at 7:00 pm at the Art Museum. Barker will talk about the influence of Richard Avedon in his work, and will also be available following the lecture to meet museum members and sign autographs.

"Meeting Nigel Barker at the Avedon Exhibition Preview is just one of the many special benefits that Art Museum members will enjoy in the coming year," said Celeste Adams, Museum Director. "We are delighted to welcome Nigel to Grand Rapids. He brings a unique perspective to the innovative photography of Richard Avedon."

Nigel Barker, Guest Speaker, is available for media interviews regarding his appearance at the *Richard Avedon: Larger Than Life* Exhibition Preview at the Grand Rapids Art Museum.

Celeste Adams, Museum Director, is available for media interviews regarding the exhibition *Richard Avedon: Larger Than Life* and Fall Membership Drive information.

### **About Richard Avedon**

After World War II, Avedon began taking photographs of street performers in Italy while doing freelance fashion photography for *Harper's Bazaar*, where he subsequently served as chief photographer until 1966. During his years at *Harper's*, Avedon created a new kind of fashion photography that transformed models from posed mannequins into actresses. He set his models in the city streets, bistros, and urban landmarks of Paris. In the studio, he required them to move and leap like dancers. The 1957 film *Funny Face*, starring Audrey Hepburn, cast Fred Astaire as fashion photographer, Dick Avery, a character based on Avedon, who consulted on the film and designed the opening titles.

In 1966 Avedon left *Harper's* for *Vogue* and shifted his focus to portraiture, which he had begun in the late 1950s. Through the rest of his life, Avedon created powerfully engaging and unsparring portraits of actors, artists, writers, politicians, and intellectuals. His portraits are distinguished by their minimalist style. Posed in front of a sheer white background, the subject looks squarely into the camera. Avedon considered portrait photography a collaborative process. He admired his subjects and captured them in revealing moments as they paused in conversation with him.

Avedon's subjects were often larger than life personalities. His photographs of President Gerald Ford, Rose Kennedy, The Beatles, and Louis Armstrong are portraits that document the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The famous and familiar people that he photographed were distinctly un-glamorized, yet their images are monumental in presence. His subjects also included sitters such as the Napalm victims he photographed on his 1971 visit to Vietnam. Avedon's series *In the American West*, 1979–84, included drifters, miners, field hands, and working people from the western United States. However anonymous these subjects were, they have the same psychological presence and dignity as Avedon's portraits of the powerful and celebrated.

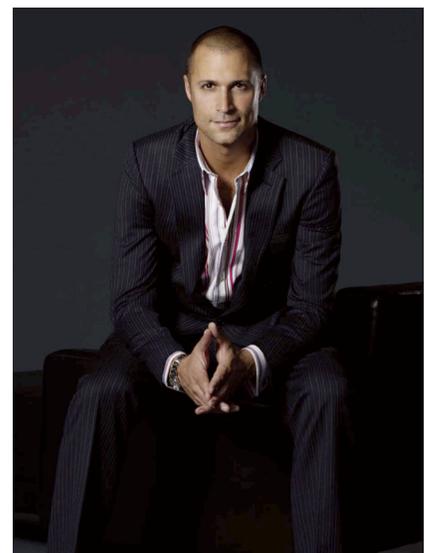
Richard Avedon died suddenly in 2004 from a brain hemorrhage while shooting in San Antonio, Texas, for *The New Yorker* magazine. His project was titled *On Democracy*, befitting an American photographer who defined the stylish optimism of postwar modernism and immortalized the forthright faces of people who, in their time, were larger than life.

### **About Nigel Barker**

For the past two decades Nigel Barker has been taking the world of fashion by storm. He began his career as a model working for top designers and photographers and collaborating with the industry's elite. As his love for fashion grew, so did his desire to create beautiful images as a photographer.

In 1996, Nigel opened his photo studio in Manhattan's hip Meat Packing District. His photography career took off, with his work appearing in such publications as *GQ*, *Interview*, *Paper*, *Lucky*, *Seventeen*, *(t)here*, *Cover*, *Zink!*, *Razor Red* and *People*. Nigel raises the bar with every project by leading with an infectious enthusiasm and ceaseless dedication for capturing the essence of his subjects. This success has led him to create advertising campaigns for brands such as Beefeater Gin, Sean John, Leviev Jewelry, Pierre Cardin, Pamella Roland, Nicole Miller, OP, Ted Baker, Land's End, Lexus and Frederick's of Hollywood.

Coming full circle, Nigel has once again stepped in front of the lens, as a judge and photographer in the hit television show, "*America's Next Top Model*." With 10 seasons under his belt, Nigel has redefined the photography industry



by giving it new meaning to the millions around the world who tune in each week to see and hear his take on beauty and fashion.

Nigel's ever expanding presence in the industry has resulted in new projects, such as the creation of his own show, "*The Shot*," which airs on VH1. He is always exploring new ways to express his love for photography by directing and producing commercials, films, and documentaries for various clients from the fashion and entertainment industry as well as real-life, human interest stories.

Nigel's celebrity has enabled him to bring new dimensions to all his projects, including his work with several charities. Nigel is partnered with the *Make-A-Wish Foundation* and has shot groundbreaking ad campaigns for the foundation and regularly grants wishes. He also shoots and promotes charitable projects for *Edeyo*, *Do Something* and *The Humane Society of the United States*.

Nigel Barker lives in New York City with his wife, Cristen, and their son Jack.

### **About the Grand Rapids Art Museum**

The mission of the Grand Rapids Art Museum (GRAM) is to provide a gathering place where people of all ages and backgrounds can enrich their lives through interaction with works of art in a thought-provoking and creative way. Established in the heart of downtown Grand Rapids, the new art museum is internationally known for its distinguished design and LEED Gold certified status. Established in 1910 as the Grand Rapids Art Association, GRAM has grown to include more than 5,000 works of art, including American and European 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century painting and sculpture and over 3,000 works on paper. Embracing the city's legacy as a leading center of design and manufacturing, GRAM has a growing collection in the area of design and modern craft.

Photo credit: Marcus Brooks

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