

Frank Sinatra Revealed: Murray Garrett's photos celebrate singer's centennial

By Sandra Barrera , Los Angeles Daily News

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Murray Garrett is reflected in a framed photo he took of Frank Sinatra. The coming observance of Frank Sinatra's 100th birthday has special meaning to Garrett, one of the most prominent photographers during Hollywood's "Golden Era." Garrett, now 89, lives in Sherman Oaks. An exhibition of Garrett's exclusive pictures of Sinatra will be displayed at the Robert Berman Gallery in Santa Monica (Bergamot Station) from December 12 through January 9. Sherman Oaks, CA. 12/3/2015 (photo by John McCoy/Los Angeles News Group)



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through January 9. Sherman Oaks, CA. 12/3/2015 (photo by John McCoy/Los Angeles News Group)

When: 11 a.m.-6 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday through Jan. 9.

Where: Robert Berman Gallery at Bergamot Station Arts Center, 2525 Michigan Ave., Suite B7, Santa Monica.

Admission: Free.

Information: 310-315-1937. www.robertbermangallery.com.

[Murray Garrett](#) remembers the first time he photographed [Frank Sinatra](#).

It was 1941 and the part-time photographer, who was all of 16, arrived at New York City's [Paramount Theatre](#) to get some shots of the teen idol in his dressing room. But to get inside, Garrett recalls having to push his way through a mob of [bobby soxers](#) and persuade unsympathetic officers to let him in — not just once but twice because the crooner wanted his own set of prints.

"He was absolutely smitten with the fact that I made two trips under such monstrous conditions," says

Garrett, 89, at his home in [Sherman Oaks](#) on a recent morning. The photographer sat poring over photos featured in “Frank Sinatra’s 100th Birthday: Vintage Photographs” at the Robert Berman Gallery at Bergamot Station Arts Center through Jan. 9 (with an artist’s reception from 5-8 p.m. Saturday, on what would have been Sinatra’s centennial).

The one-man show includes about 30 images of Sinatra at different points in his life and career. There are shots with second wife [Ava Gardner](#) at the 1951 premiere of “[Show Boat](#),” at a 1953 recording session at Capitol Records, and on stage at his 1965 Budweiser special for NBC.

A Brooklyn native, Garrett got his start working in New York for top photo agency Graphic House Inc. in 1941. Five years later, the firm sent him to Los Angeles to set up a West Coast office.

In no time, Garrett, who formed Garrett-Howard Inc. in the early 1950s, became one of the busiest photographers of Hollywood’s golden era. His subjects included Bob Hope (he served as Hope’s exclusive photographer for 25 years), Elizabeth Taylor, Natalie Wood, Marlon Brando, Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz (his biggest seller), Red Skelton and Marilyn Monroe .

A selection of his Monroe images will be featured in a companion case during the “100th Birthday” exhibition.

“I always thought she was pathetic,” says Garrett, showing off a picture he took of another cameraman photographing Monroe’s backside. “All these guys running around with cameras and pencils and papers and recording devices were all talking about what it must be like to get into bed with her. You could see the fear. She was smiling, and she was terrified.”

Garrett’s complete body of work is housed in the library at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences. Some of it was collected in a pair of art books authored by the photographer, including “[Hollywood Candid: A Photographer Remembers](#)” featuring never-before-seen images of Monroe, Gary Cooper, Cary Grant and others and the glamorous “[Hollywood Moments](#)” of the 1940s, ’50s and ’60s.

“There are photographers and then there is Murray Garrett,” Hope wrote in “Hollywood Candid” in 1999. “He has a magic eye or a secret device in his camera that captures something different, something special that is missed by other photographers.”

Gallery director Alexandra Fierro expressed the same sentiment.

“Even though he was never trained, Murray has this natural eye for capturing light,” she says. “The way he illuminates photographs is really amazing. They look retouched, but this is just how they came out from whatever camera he happened to be using at the time.”

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Alex Litrov, a retired publicist who has known Garrett for 60 years, adds that his friend wasn’t one to betray the confidence of his subjects.

“He never told anybody about the work he did, and that’s why a lot of people hired him,” he says. “They knew he could be trusted.”

The fact that he was a man of his word meant a lot to Sinatra, who regularly sought out Garrett.

When approached about photographing the singer onstage during the Budweiser television special,

Garrett says he worried about getting in the shot.

But Sinatra wasn't worried.

"Ten years I've been going to do Hope specials, and I've watched you," he says the singer told him. "You're not going to screw up."



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