



The Lost Beauty of Humankind: Robert Bergman's Portraits in the Hill Collection

January 15–April 11, 2026

Introduction by J. Tomilson Hill

The first time I saw a Robert Bergman photograph, it stopped me in my tracks. My early foray into collecting was through Old Master paintings, and I felt immediately that the emotional impact, careful composition, and rich hues in Bergman's work made it as compelling as a Renaissance portrait. Stepping into Bergman's orbit placed me in good company; despite his somewhat "under-the-radar" status in the art world, key cultural visionaries have long recognized his importance. This list includes the eminent art historian Meyer Schapiro, Nobel laureate in literature Toni Morrison, and Samuel Sachs, longtime director of the Frick Collection in New York, who connected me with Bergman following the 2014 Frick exhibition *Renaissance and Baroque Bronzes from the Hill Collection*. If you have not yet had the privilege of experiencing Bergman's work, I am excited to make the introduction.

The Lost Beauty of Humankind: Robert Bergman's Portraits in the Hill Collection is the first major exhibition of Bergman's work since his back-to-back solo shows at the National Gallery of Art and MoMA PS1 in 2009. Ours is an exhibition I have been considering for a long time. It places Bergman's work in conversation with his spiritual contemporaries: artists spanning centuries who are all deeply engaged with the act of seeing and the politics of portraiture.

Like the Old Master painters who sparked my love of art, Bergman understands the emancipatory power of seeing and being seen. Many of the portraits assembled here are from his series *A Kind of Rapture*, the culmination of a long road trip across the United States in the 1980s where he met and photographed individuals from all walks of life. The sitters are presented without any identifying information, but Bergman frames them with evident care for each individual. The show's curator, David Levi Strauss, deftly identifies Bergman's touch in the accompanying text: "The people portrayed in Bergman's photographs are not ideal forms, but real ones—individuals depicted in all their contradictions and infinitely variable, unique *humanations*."

In 1998, Toni Morrison published the story "The Fisherwoman," in which she imagines an encounter with one of the women depicted in a Bergman portrait. The protagonist realizes that "I was longing for and missing some aspect of myself, and that there are no strangers. There are only versions of ourselves, many of which we have not embraced, most of which we wish to protect ourselves from." These words ring just as true for any of Bergman's sitters as they do for the members of the crowd in Jacopo Bassano's *The Way to Calvary* (ca. 1542–45), the downcast face of the subject of Anthony van Dyck's *Study of a Bearded Man* (1618), or Andy Warhol's enigmatic gaze in his portrait by Peter Hujar (1975).

When the Hill Art Foundation opened to the public in 2019, one of our guiding frameworks was the concept of a jewel box—a space for intimate contemplation of beautiful and interesting objects. A jewel box is also a place for hidden gems, and Robert Bergman's portraits, as well as his abstract works, can certainly be described as such. And yet they are universal. As you explore *The Lost Beauty of Humankind* and David Levi Strauss's insightful text and curation, I invite you to consider how, by seeing others, we may more clearly see ourselves.