



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

**January 15–April 11, 2026**

**Press Release**

The Hill Art Foundation is pleased to announce ***The Lost Beauty of Humankind: Robert Bergman's Portraits in the Hill Collection***, a landmark exhibition that places the portraits of American photographer Robert Bergman in conversation with select Old Master paintings from the Hill Collection, curated by David Levi Strauss. This exhibition marks the first major presentation of Bergman's work since his celebrated solo exhibitions at the National Gallery of Art and MoMA PS1 in 2009.

The exhibition features large-scale portraits of ordinary people whom Bergman encountered on American streets between 1985 and 1993. The works evoke the painterly richness of Old Master portraiture through their saturated colors, intimate framing, and nuanced attention to each individual's features. Yet beyond these formal qualities, each subject is portrayed with a resonant, spiritual presence, unbound by notions of time or place. By juxtaposing Bergman's photographs with works by artists such as Peter Paul Rubens and Jacopo Bassano, and more contemporary artists like Frank Auerbach and Andy Warhol, *The Lost Beauty of Humankind* emphasizes a shared dignity and humanity through the act of looking.

In his accompanying essay, curator David Levi Strauss writes, "Bergman's portraits are not responding to any fashion or trend in photographic portraiture of their time. Everything in them is dedicated to making a *vera icon*, a true image, on the way to making a true portrait." Strauss argues that since its inception, portraiture has been built upon the question "*Who is worthy of being portrayed?*" Just as Caravaggio included marginalized members of society as models for his religious canvases, and Anthony van Dyck studied unknown individuals from life with the intention to repurpose their likenesses as saints or apostles, Bergman directs an empathetic gaze toward those often unportrayed. Bergman's portraits capture "the grace and the eternal spark in all people," portraying not the ideal, but the sacred and profoundly real beauty found in those often overlooked. "You cannot see them passively," Strauss adds.

"Bob's work forces the viewer to connect with the subject in an intense way that only artists such as Caravaggio, Pontormo, and Rubens have done," says J. Tomilson Hill, President of the Hill Art Foundation. As Hans Belting wrote in his pivotal 1990 text *Likeness and Presence: a History of the Image Before the Era of Art*, the earliest images served as mediators between the human and spiritual realm. Strauss suggests that Bergman's portraits perform a similar function today:

they return us to that moment of recognition, when image and beholder meet in a space of mercy and vulnerability—a space in which we can rediscover the “*lost beauty of humankind*.”

*The Lost Beauty of Humankind* is on view at the Hill Art Foundation from January 15–April 11, 2026.

**David Levi Strauss** is an essayist and cultural critic based in New York. He is the author of *Co-illusion: Dispatches from the End of Communication* (The MIT Press, 2020), *Photography & Belief* (David Zwirner Books, 2020), *Words Not Spent Today Buy Smaller Images Tomorrow* (Aperture, 2014), *From Head to Hand: Art and the Manual* (Oxford University Press, 2010), *Between the Eyes: Essays on Photography and Politics*, with an introduction by John Berger (Aperture 2003, and in a new edition, 2012), and *Between Dog & Wolf: Essays on Art and Politics* (Autonomedia 1999, and a new edition, 2010). *In Case Something Different Happens in the Future: Joseph Beuys and 9/11* was published by Documenta 13, and *To Dare Imagining: Rojava Revolution*, edited by Strauss, Michael Taussig, Peter Lamborn Wilson, and Dilar Dirik, was published by Autonomedia in 2016, and in an Italian edition in 2017. *The Critique of the Image Is the Defense of the Imagination*, edited by Strauss, Taussig, and Wilson, was published by Autonomedia in 2020. He is Chair Emeritus of the graduate program in Art Writing at the School of Visual Arts in New York, which he directed from 2007-2021.