

Howard Greenberg and Astrid Ullens Receive the First Gruber Award

The DGPh honours two defining figures of the international photographic art market – award ceremony to take place during Paris Photo Week in November

Cologne, 4 August 2026 – The German Photographic Society (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Photographie – DGPh) is presenting the inaugural Gruber Award to New York-based gallerist, photography expert and collector Howard Greenberg and Belgian collector, philanthropist and founder of A Foundation Astrid Ullens de Schooten Whettnall. An independent international jury selected them as the first recipients of the new distinction.

The Gruber Award was initiated by Thomas Gerwers, Chairman of the DGPh Art, Market & Law Section. Developed to mark the Section's 25th anniversary, it is the first award in the DGPh's 75-year history to focus specifically on the photographic art market and the individuals who shape it.

The award recognises gallerists, collectors, patrons and other mediators who create visibility for photography, foster artistic careers, preserve works and connect artistic production with the market, institutions and the wider public. It commemorates Renate and L. Fritz Gruber, who together assembled one of the most important photographic collections of their time. L. Fritz Gruber was among the founders of the DGPh in 1951 and, as a collector, cultural mediator and co-initiator of photokina, embodied the relationship between photography, the market and the public sphere.

International Jury

The decision was taken by an independent jury chaired by photography expert, appraiser and curator Simone Klein. The other jury members were Sven Eisenhut-Hug, founder and director of photo basel; collection adviser and curator Birgit Filzmaier; curator and art-market expert Gérard Goodrow-Jaber; Jutta Müller, M.A., Managing Director of the Friends of Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen e.V.; and internationally active exhibition and collection expert Sinem Yoruk. Simone Klein and Thomas Gerwers jointly moderated the jury meeting.

The evaluation considered the candidates' long-term impact on the photographic art market, their expertise and connoisseurship, support for photographers, public engagement, institutional contributions, international relevance and the duration and sustainability of their commitment.

"The Gruber Award is one of only a small number of awards worldwide that explicitly honour the individuals behind the photographic art market. In its consistent linking of collecting,

gallery practice, patronage and cultural mediation, it has, to the best of my knowledge, no direct equivalent,” says jury chair Simone Klein.

Two Complementary Positions

By selecting Howard Greenberg and Astrid Ullens, the jury deliberately chose two recipients representing different yet complementary areas: the international gallery and photographic art market on the one hand, and committed, publicly engaged collecting on the other.

The inaugural presentation also defines the profile of the Gruber Award for the years ahead. Its criteria extend beyond commercial success or institutional position to encompass cultural responsibility, long-term commitment, international relevance and a sustainable contribution to the development of photography as an art form.

“With Howard Greenberg and Astrid Ullens, we are honouring two individuals who exemplify the purpose of the Gruber Award in different ways,” says Thomas Gerwers. “Over decades, both have not only collected, mediated and preserved major photographic works. They have created structures, supported artists and opened photography to new audiences. Their selection for the inaugural award makes clear the standard this prize is intended to set.”

Howard Greenberg: A Pioneer of the International Photographic Art Market

Howard Greenberg, born in 1948, is regarded as one of the world's leading photography dealers and a recognised authority on 19th- and 20th-century photography. For more than four decades, he has played a pivotal role in establishing photography as a major force in the international fine-art market. His work has helped shape museum collections, private collections and scholarship around the medium. American Photo recognised his influence by naming him one of the 25 most important people in photography.

Greenberg began his career as a photojournalist. In 1977, he founded the Center for Photography at Woodstock, which became one of the leading non-profit photography institutions in the United States. In 1981, he founded the Howard Greenberg Gallery in New York, now internationally regarded as one of the foremost galleries devoted to classic and modern photography.

The gallery's programme spans the history of the medium and includes work by Alfred Stieglitz, Edward Weston, Walker Evans, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Bruce Davidson, Joel Meyerowitz, Edward Burtynsky, Frank Gohlke and Vivian Maier. It also represents the estates of Edward Steichen, Arnold Newman, Roman Vishniac, Martin Munkácsi and Berenice Abbott. Through acclaimed exhibitions, books and catalogues, the gallery has introduced historically significant and contemporary photographers to new generations of collectors and institutions.

The jury recognises Greenberg as one of the foundational figures in the creation and international development of a professional market for photography. His career began during a pioneering period in which permanent structures for trading and collecting photographic art were being established in the United States. These included the Association of International Photography Art Dealers (AIPAD), whose Fine Art Photography Exposition was among the earliest dedicated photography art fairs.

Alongside his work as a gallerist, curator, adviser and advocate for the medium, Greenberg assembled an important photography collection of his own. It brought together European

Geschäftsführender Vorstand:

Ruediger Glatz (Vorsitzender)
Michael Kaune (stellvertretender Vorsitzender)
Rainer Schlautmann – Stephan J. Schulz
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Deutsche Gesellschaft für Photographie e. V.

Rheingasse 8-12, 50676 Köln
T: 0221 - 9 23 20 69
F: 0221 - 9 23 20 70
E: dgph@dgph.de, www.dgph.de

modernism, humanist photography, American documentary photography, photojournalism and New York street photography.

In 2018, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, acquired the Howard Greenberg Collection. Comprising 447 photographs by 191 artists, the acquisition brought work by numerous photographers who had not previously been represented in the museum's collection. Greenberg's personal collection has also been the subject of major museum exhibitions in Europe and the United States.

His honours include the Lucie Foundation's Photo Gallery of the Year Award, the Aperture Foundation Award for his contribution to fine-art photography and the George Eastman Museum Lifetime Achievement Award. The jury considers this combination of market expertise, connoisseurship, curatorial work, personal collecting and sustained advocacy for artists to constitute an exemplary lifetime achievement.

"I accept the Gruber Award with great gratitude and humility. Its connection to Fritz and Renate Gruber, who played a decisive role in advancing the recognition of photography in the post-war era, makes this distinction particularly meaningful to me. I am also very pleased to receive it alongside Astrid Ullens, whom I value as a friend and as an equally deserving recipient," says Howard Greenberg.

Astrid Ullens: Collecting as Cultural Responsibility

Astrid Ullens de Schooten Whettnall is a Belgian photography collector and philanthropist who has assembled one of Belgium's leading private photography collections over the course of four decades. Her particular interest lies in the social, historical and human dimensions of the photographic image. Her commitment treats photography not simply as an object of collection, but as a medium for critical reflection, cultural dialogue and social engagement.

Built since the 1990s, the collection now comprises approximately 6,000 photographs by around 100 photographers. It focuses particularly on social documentary photography, architecture and photographic narratives of human lives. A defining feature of Ullens's approach is her commitment to acquiring complete series and bodies of work rather than individual images. In this way, she preserves the conceptual coherence of photographic projects and enables a deeper engagement with the artists' intentions.

In 2012, she founded A Foundation in Brussels. The non-profit photography centre is dedicated to documentary and contemporary photography and is located in a former industrial area of the city. It serves as a dynamic public platform combining the presentation of the collection with monographic exhibitions, publications, artist talks and public programmes.

Education and mediation are central to its work. Guided tours, workshops and encounters with artists are offered to adults, young people and, in particular, school classes from the surrounding area. The Foundation seeks not only to present photography, but also to strengthen the ability to read images critically, understand social contexts and engage with the realities of other people's lives.

In 2014, Astrid Ullens de Schooten Whettnall also founded OpenA, an educational and outreach initiative that worked closely with schools and local organizations in Brussels. For over eight years, OpenA gave children from underprivileged neighborhoods access to

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photography and cultural participation through exhibition visits, meetings with photographers, and creative workshops. For Ullens, this commitment is inseparable from collecting: culture shows its fullest meaning where it's shared and opens doors that would otherwise remain closed.

The collection has been presented internationally on several occasions. In 2019, Fondation A showed "Fragments" at Paris Photo in the Grand Palais. In 2024, the exhibition "Quand les images apprennent à parler", curated by Urs Stahel, was presented at the Fondation LUMA during the Rencontres de la Photographie d'Arles. More recently, the Musée de la Photographie in Charleroi presented an extensive selection under the title "Histoires en séries".

The jury honours Astrid Ullens for an approach to collecting that combines private connoisseurship with public responsibility. Her collection is not understood as a closed body of private property, but as a living foundation for exhibitions, publications, education and social exchange. Through Fondation A, she supports photographers, preserves significant bodies of work and makes documentary photography accessible to broad audiences.

"I am deeply honoured to receive the inaugural Gruber Award. I accept it with great gratitude, not only as a personal distinction, but also as a recognition of the many photographers whose work I have had the privilege to collect, support and share over the years. As a woman, I am especially touched by this recognition and by what it represents. I have always believed that photography encourages openness. It invites us to look beyond ourselves, to better understand others and the world we live in. If my collection and the A Foundation have contributed, even in a small way, to making these voices more widely seen and heard, then I am truly grateful." (Astrid Ullens de Schooten Whettnall)

Award Ceremony in Paris

The inaugural Gruber Award ceremony is planned for Friday, 13 November 2026, during Paris Photo Week. The evening is also intended to serve as an exclusive international networking event during Europe's most important photography week.

The ceremony is planned to take place in the presence of both recipients, the jury members, DGPh representatives and selected figures from photography, collecting, galleries, the art market and cultural mediation. Attendance will be limited to a maximum of 60 guests, through personal invitations and a limited allocation of tickets.

"The Gruber Award honours those who shape the photographic art market: those who create visibility for photography, enable artistic careers and preserve works," says Ruediger Glatz, Chairman of the DGPh Executive Board. "I am convinced that the relevance of this market will continue to grow. The more easily images can be produced technically, the more the value of a work will depend on origin, authorship and provenance – and therefore on the structures within the art market that stand behind them. With Howard Greenberg and Astrid Ullens, this award begins at precisely the level of excellence we intend it to represent."

The DGPh Art, Market & Law Section will present the Gruber Award annually in future.

Pressekontakt:

Deutsche Gesellschaft für Photographie e. V. (DGPh)
Thomas Gerwers (thomas.gerwers@dgph.de)

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Rheingasse 8-12, 50676 Köln
T: 0221 - 9 23 20 69
F: 0221 - 9 23 20 70
E: dgph@dgph.de, www.dgph.de

Regina Plaar (regina.plaar@dgph.de) Tel.: +49 (0)221 - 9 23 20 69

Geschäftsführender Vorstand:
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Rainer Schlautmann – Stephan J. Schulz
Frank Schumacher – Ira Stehmann

Amtsgericht Köln, VR 5800

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F: 0221 - 9 23 20 70
E: dgph@dgph.de, www.dgph.de