

**#31 July/August 2018 *Cameraderie*  
Irving Penn (1917-2009)  
Part II: Small Trades Portraits**



This is the second of five articles on Irving Penn. The previous (#30, Month 2018) was about his portrait work. This article covers his “Small Trades” portraits.

Just as reminder, this is the Irving Penn Foundation website:

<https://www.irvingpenn.org/artwork/>

I encourage you to look at all the images there, in the eight categories: Portraits, Small Trades, Still Life, Fashion, Beauty, Nudes, Travel, and Documentary. All are worth studying, and I am discussing the first five, in five articles. This website also has an excellent biography and chronology of Penn’s life and work.

Here is the link to the Wikipedia article on Penn:

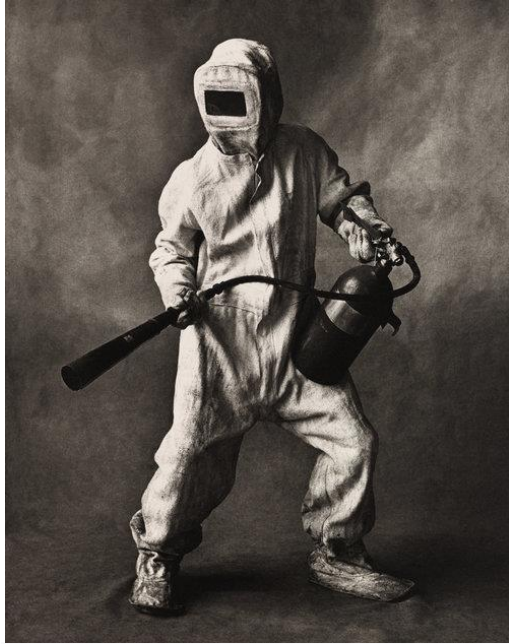
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irving\\_Penn](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irving_Penn)

About portrait sittings for small trade workers, from the Irving Penn Foundation website:

In general, the Parisians doubted that we were doing exactly what we said we were doing. They felt there was something fishy going on, but they came to the studio more or less as directed—for the fee involved. But the Londoners were quite different from the French. It seemed to them the most logical thing in the world to be recorded in their work clothes. They arrived at the studio, always on time, and presented themselves to the camera with a seriousness and pride that was quite endearing. Of the three, the Americans as a group were the least predictable. In spite of our cautions, a few arrived for their sittings having shed their work clothes, shaved, even wearing dark Sunday suits, sure this was their first step on the way to Hollywood.

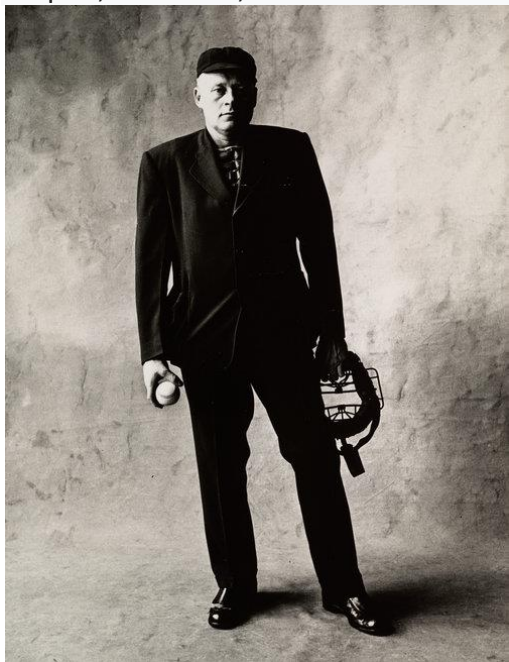
There are 16 images on the Irving Penn Foundation website in the Small Trades category, and I have never been so in love with a set of images as this set. I beg you to go look at them all and appreciate their originality, sensitivity, and sheer portraiture skill. Here are three pairs, with my comments, and it is a personal torment that I can’t bring more into this article.

Steel Mill Fire Fighter, New York, 1951    *Pompier*, Paris, 1950 [Fireman]

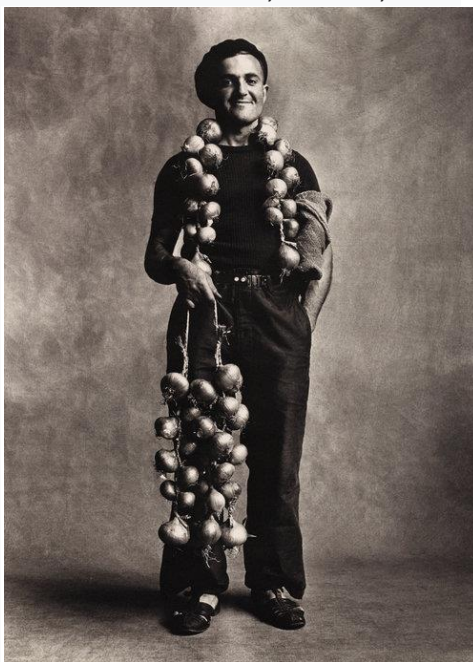


The Steel Mill Fire Fighter is one of three images in the set that does not show the face, but just look at that stance! Look at the arms. Look at the legs. All action. I wonder if it was posed or natural. Did Penn just say “stand as if you were actually fighting a fire?” Compare that to the cousin Fireman, stable and composed, almost comically (but seriously) toting in equipment that he would not actually carry to the job quite like that.

Umpire, New York, 1951



Breton Onion Seller, London, 1950



The Umpire, a person of final authority on the field, stands like Rodin’s great *Balzac* statue. These two images especially show the strongly controlled lighting used for this entire set. The Umpire’s face is lit somewhat like Picasso’s portrait face in the previous article, and similar to

Picasso, he is dressed in black. The cheerful Onion Seller is also carefully lit, but gets a little light on his dark side.

*Télégraphiste*, Paris, 1950  
[Telegraph Messenger]



*Rempailleurs*, Paris, 1950  
[Chair Caners]



I am particularly fond of the Chair Caners, actually plying their craft in this shot, not just holding their equipment.