

Picturing Isabella
Large Print Labels

Isabella Stewart Gardner and photography came of age at the same time. By 1840, the year of Isabella's birth, photography had been introduced to a broader public. By the late 1800s, it was a staple of American visual culture. Notable people were photographed again and again. But as Isabella's fame grew, she hid from the camera.

Through a lifetime of photographs, we can trace Isabella's changing and complicated relationship to image, fame, and legacy. She deliberately cultivated a public persona that was both dramatic and enigmatic. She curated images of herself as carefully as the galleries of this Museum, which would become her most enduring legacy.

Today, photography continues to be a crucial tool for creative people inventing personas, whether in galleries or online. **Persona: Photography and the Re-Imagined Self**, an exhibition in the Hostetter Gallery of the New Wing, presents photographs by contemporary artists who create personas that question and challenge identity. On the Anne H. Fitzpatrick Façade, Jamie Diamond's

Monstra Te Esse Matrem (show yourself to be a mother) confronts the persona of motherhood. Throughout the Gardner this spring, we invite you to find power in all the ways you might be yourself.

Early Photographs

The most personal photographs of Isabella were taken when she was a teenager, a newlywed, and a young mother. A tiny album includes images of Isabella and her husband, Jack, around the time of their marriage, while an intimate shot shows her nuzzling her only child, Jackie, who died just a few months later.

These early photographs of Isabella reflect the formal studio portraiture common at the time. She posed and presented herself like any other upper-class woman in Boston. But by the time Isabella matured into her 40s, she evolved toward a practice of more conscious self-image making.

[First Label Rail]



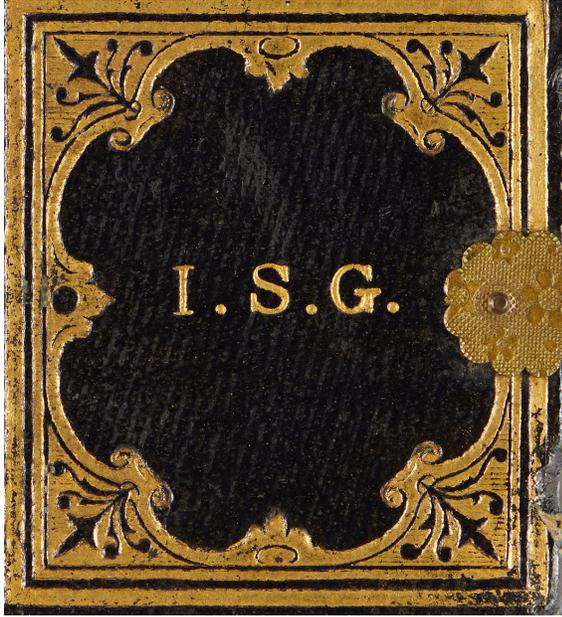
1. Unidentified photographer
Isabella Stewart Gardner
about 1858
Salted paper print with watercolor and crayon additions



2. John Adams Whipple (American, 1822-91)
Isabella Stewart Gardner and John L. Gardner III
1864
Albumen print on card
Purchased by the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, 1986



3. Unidentified photographer
Isabella Stewart Gardner
about 1860
Albumen print on card
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. John Lowell Gardner, 1995



4. J.E. Tilton and Company (American, 1859-74)

Portrait Album of Gem Photographs

about 1860

Leather album stamped in gold containing tintypes

Purchased by the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, 1986



5. Unidentified photographer

John L. Gardner Jr., Isabella Stewart Gardner, and Benjamin W. Crowninshield

1861

Albumen print on card
Gift of Sargent Bradlee, 1964

[Second Label Rail]



1. James Notman
(American, 1849-1932)
**Isabella Stewart
Gardner Dancing**
28 June 1891
Hand-colored albumen
print on card



2. Unidentified
photographer
**Isabella Stewart
Gardner and John L.
Gardner Jr. in Norway**
23 June-17 August 1867
Albumen print on card



3. John Thomson (British,
1837-1921)
**Isabella Stewart
Gardner**
1888
Platinum print on paper
with autograph in ink



4. Unidentified
photographer
**Isabella Stewart
Gardner and John
L. Gardner Jr. at
Luncheon, Seville**
19 April 1888
Albumen print

More candid photographs from the later decades of the 1800s document Isabella and Jack's travels, starting with their first international trip, to Norway in 1867. Other photographs show Isabella as a society leader, with a large social circle at home and abroad. In contrast to the intimate portraiture of her youth, these photographs reflect her expanding world and emerging public persona.

[Third Label Rail]



Thomas E. Marr
(Canadian-American,
1849-1910)
**John Singer Sargent's
"Isabella Stewart
Gardner,"**
after 1888
Gelatin silver print on
board with autograph in
ink on paper

In 1888, Isabella commissioned John Singer Sargent to paint her portrait, now on view in the Gothic Room on the third floor. The bold, revealing portrayal both attracted praise and provoked scandal. Isabella commissioned a photograph of the portrait and signed copies to distribute to select friends, like a personal and absurdly oversized trading card. Some recipients even hung this portrait in their homes. Years before she opened her Museum, she was already interested in shaping her image and legacy in her community.

[First Label Rail]



Boston Post

"The Real Mrs. Jack Gardner"

4 December 1904

Printed ink on newspaper

This 1904 **Boston Post** article is a rare instance of a publisher getting an actual photograph of Isabella. In the photograph, she wears a custom-ordered headdress from Tiffany & Co., with two massive diamonds on the ends of its golden "antennae."

The story brings the reader behind the scenes of Isabella's charitable activities, expanding on the more common coverage of her sensational—and sometimes fictional—exploits as a society celebrity. Most reporting on Isabella, and generally of women of her time, traded in stereotypes—on full display in the adjoining article on this page.

Dodging the Camera

Newspapers could reproduce photographs by 1880, but Gardner became more camera-shy as her prominence grew. With a lack of reliable photography, the press started publishing images of other women to accompany articles about the famed socialite, civic leader, and Museum founder. Isabella collected hundreds of newspaper clippings about herself, tracing a public image often shaped by speculation and sexism.

Isabella occasionally posed for photographs alongside friends or her beloved dogs, but she was often veiled or turned away from the camera. She regularly wore a veil in public by the 1890s, for unknown reasons but possibly to protect her skin. She kept these photographs in her private archive or tucked in the pages of guestbooks, a record of the networks of creative and interesting people she cultivated over a lifetime.

[Second Label Rail]



1. Thomas E. Marr and Son (active Boston, 1910-42)

A. Piatt Andrew, Isabella Stewart Gardner, Okakura Kakuzo, Caroline Sidney Sinkler, and Henry Davis Sleeper on the Terrace at Red Roof, Gloucester, Massachusetts

6 October 1910

Gelatin silver print



2. Unidentified photographer

Isabella Stewart Gardner and John Briggs Potter at Green Hill, Brookline, Massachusetts

1907

Gelatin silver print



3. Unidentified
photographer
**A. Piatt Andrew,
Isabella Stewart
Gardner, and Jack
Mabbet at Red
Roof, Gloucester,
Massachusetts**
26 June 1908
Gelatin silver print



4. Henry Walton Swift
(American, 1849-1924)
**Isabella Stewart
Gardner with Her Dogs,
Kitty Wink and Parry
Boy**
1905
Albumen print



5. A. Piatt Andrew
(American, 1873-1936)
**Isabella Stewart
Gardner at a Party at
Red Roof, Gloucester,
Massachusetts**
17-18 April 1909
Gelatin silver print



6. Sarah Choate Sears
(American, 1858-1935)
**A. Piatt Andrew,
Isabella Stewart
Gardner and Thomas
Jefferson Coolidge
in a Gig at Green
Hill, Brookline,
Massachusetts**

about 1890
Platinum print



7. Unidentified
photographer
**Isabella Stewart
Gardner Sitting on a
Tree Branch**

July 1898
Gelatin silver print



8. Unidentified
photographer
**Isabella Stewart
Gardner and Gaillard
Lapsley in a Gondola**
21 August-1 September
1897

Gelatin silver print



9. Unidentified
photographer
**Isabella Stewart
Gardner with Dogs**
1910-12
Gelatin silver print



10. Unidentified
photographer
**Isabella Stewart
Gardner with Dogs**
14 November 1912
Albumen print



11. Unidentified
photographer
**Isabella Stewart
Gardner and Richard
Fisher in a Pony Cart**
late 1800s
Gelatin silver print



12. Unidentified
photographer
**Andreas Martin
Andersen's "Isabella
Stewart Gardner"**
about 1900
Gelatin silver print



13. Unidentified
photographer
**Isabella Stewart
Gardner with Her Dog,
Kitty Wink**
about 1895-1905
Gelatin silver print

Of the small group of photographs that do exist of Isabella in her period of peak fame, most are snapshots of her with her dogs or socializing with her vibrant and close-knit groups of artistic friends. She also displayed her friendship networks in the cases of letters, photos, and other ephemera throughout the Museum, including the adjacent Blue and Yellow Rooms.

Look for a photograph of a painting in this group: it documents Andreas Martin Andersen's portrait of Isabella with her signature veil, lounging in her garden. Isabella displayed this photograph in the Long Gallery on the third floor.

[Third Label Rail]



1. Unidentified publisher
"The Rivalry Over the Building of Italian Palaces"
16 December 1902
Printed ink on newspaper



2. Boston Globe
"Mrs. John L. Gardner"
1 April 1894
Printed ink on newspaper

This 1902 article on the construction of Isabella's "Italian Palace" features the portrait of an unknown woman in her place. Years earlier, in 1894, the **Boston Globe** claimed to publish the "first ever picture" of Isabella, a "careful and successful reproduction" of a photograph. Yet the sparse line drawing included in the article shows the back of her

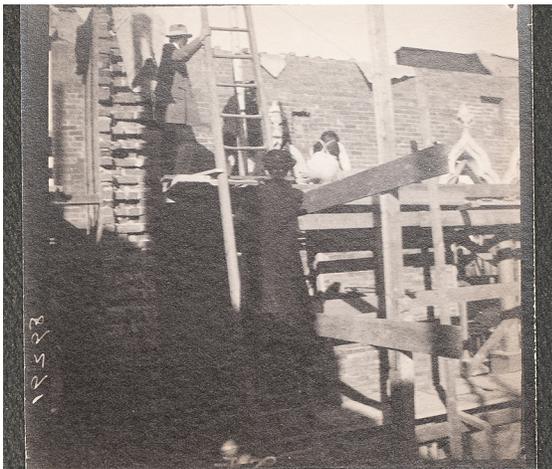
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coat and a sliver of a generic face—hardly the journalistic coup they advertised. The article itself, with its language and focus on Isabella's appearance, typifies much of the sexist press coverage of her in the era.

[First Label Rail]



1. Thomas E. Marr
(Canadian-American,
1849-1910)
**Isabella Stewart
Gardner in the
Conservatory at
Green Hill, Brookline,
Massachusetts**
1900
Gelatin silver print



2. Unidentified
photographer
**Isabella Stewart
Gardner Museum
During Construction:
Isabella Stewart
Gardner on a Ladder**
1900
Gelatin silver print



3. Unidentified
photographer
**Isabella Stewart
Gardner in Sitting
Room at Beach Hill**
1884
Albumen print

Isabella's Museum, homes, and gardens were expressions of her persona, and she exerted exacting control over their creation and development. In these three photographs, we see her in some of those spaces—the Museum as it was being constructed; her conservatory at Green Hill, the Brookline estate where she maintained extensive gardens and greenhouses; and Beach Hill, one of her many homes where she displayed art. In each image she is central but facing away from the camera—her creative role is critical, but she lets the spaces, not her image, speak for her. As you explore the galleries of her Museum, consider them a portrait of Isabella, an embodiment of her perspective and what she found meaningful.

Selectively Posing

Very occasionally, Gardner agreed to pose for formal photographs later in life. But she did so on her terms. She worked with photographers she trusted and in environments she could control. The resulting photographs have a stiff formality unlike her snapshots with friends and dogs. Their self-conscious staging helps us understand how Isabella wished to be perceived and understood.

Why did Gardner engage privately with photography but resist its distribution? Possibly because, despite her famed boldness, she felt hesitant about the public display of photography or an insecurity about her appearance. Whatever the motive, this camera-shy behavior guaranteed that her Museum—and not her personal image—anchored her legacy.

[Second Label Rail]



1. Adolf de Meyer
(French, 1868-1946,
active in the United
States)

**Isabella Stewart
Gardner wearing a Veil**
1906

Platinum print

Purchased by the Isabella
Stewart Gardner Museum,
1980



2. Sarah Choate Sears
(American, 1858-1935)

**Isabella Stewart
Gardner's Ex-Libris**

late 1800s - early 1900s
Platinum print on paper



3. Otto Rosenheim
(German, 1871-1955)

**Isabella Stewart
Gardner**

1906

Gelatin silver print



4. Adolf de Meyer
(French, 1868-1946,
active in the United
States)

**Isabella Stewart
Gardner**

1906

Platinum print

Purchased by the Isabella
Stewart Gardner Museum,
1980

When Isabella agreed to be photographed, she worked with artists and collaborators she knew and trusted. Together they presented an image of Isabella created deliberately through poses and props.

Two of these portraits were taken by Adolf de Meyer, who would go on to become **Vogue's** first official fashion photographer.

In Otto Rosenheim's portrait, Isabella posed with a large book, signaling her desire to be recognized as a scholar. Sarah Choate Sears, a painter, photographer, and friend, photographed two hands, possibly Isabella's, resting on a book. Its title, **Ex Libris**, refers to a decorative label that shows ownership of a book, suggesting Isabella may have connected this mysterious photo to her pride in her extensive library.

[Third Label Rail]



1. Unidentified publisher
"Mrs. 'Jack' Gardner Loyal
to Proteges"
July 1924
Printed ink on newspaper



2. Arthur E. Marr
(American, 1877-1954)
**Isabella Stewart
Gardner's Funeral**
21 July 1924
Gelatin silver print

Isabella left a series of elaborate instructions for her funeral and other memorial activities, down to the type and arrangement of flowers on her casket. Despite her best efforts, Isabella could not control her image after her death. While her funeral was carried out to the letter by her friends and staff, the press substantially altered one of the nearby de
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Meyer portraits in her obituary, rendering her almost unrecognizable.