

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PHOTOGRAPHER OF FIRST EVEREST ASCENT EXHIBITS LIFEWORK

One of the twentieth century's pre-eminent photographers, **Alfred Gregory FBIPP Hon FRPS** - a climbing member of the 1953 team and who reached 8,500m in support of the Hillary and Tenzing's ascent of **Mount Everest** - will feature in a **Kodak** sponsored retrospective of his life's work at **Lab X Gallery** in St. Kilda, Melbourne, **opening on Thursday July 14 at 7.00pm.**

Born in Lancashire in the UK in 1913 and now residing near Melbourne the sprightly 92 year old, known to his friends as 'Greg' has hand selected the most iconic prints from a personal archive (which numbers in the tens of thousands) for a limited edition reprinting on the revolutionary new **Endura** professional paper by **Kodak**.

This paper with a colour range to last over 200 years and an emulsion set which reproduces softer flesh-tones and greater highlight and shadow detail, has breathed an entirely different life into some of history's most memorable moments. What Gregory calls the icon shot of the expedition 'Hillary and Tenzing approaching the highest camp' is seen in an entirely new light. All archival distance dissolves and suddenly the viewer feels the real emotion of ordinary men with an extraordinary passion for mountain climbing, pushed to the history making conclusion of the last great terrestrial adventure.

"I remember I came up, sat down, held my breath because it's such slow film [Kodachrome 10 ASA] and snap," says Gregory, holding an imaginary camera to his eye. "I got it and I didn't take another, forgetting that the film might get dirty or be destroyed. Today they would shoot a whole roll off for the one shot," he laughs, suggesting that a ready supply of film might have produced from him more careless, less spontaneous images. "I only took one picture of everything in those days. I didn't think you did it any other way."

It must be remembered that the climax of such 'decisive moments' as they were termed by legendary French photographer Henri Cartier Bresson (who later looked up the great Everest photographer in his hometown of Blackpool) happens in a split second when choice of correct exposure, lens, depth of field, lighting and arrangement of forms within the frame must coalesce with the shutter release. There are no second takes on history.

Gregory's sparing approach to the documentation of man's first ascent of Everest was equally born of the extreme demands that the location made of the photographer who, shooting for the world's most famous daily, *The Times* - "they bought the world rights to the story for the princely sum of 20,000 pounds" - had to carry expedition equipment, his camera and film "totalling about 55 lbs" up to 8,500m through life-taking terrain.

Gregory tells how he was put in charge of stills photography. "One day we were just sitting around, like this," recalls the mountaineer/photographer whose inclusion in the Everest team was secured by the experience gained on a previous Himalayan expedition in 1952 led by Eric Shipton. John Hunt (the 1953 Everest team leader) said, "Now let's see, does anybody know a bit about photography, yes, you do Greg, you take photos, right? You're in charge of photography." It happened just like that. I went to Everest an amateur photographer".

He understates one of photojournalism's finest moments, echoing the humility of Alfred Eisenstadt who, responsible for some of the 20th century's most enduring images, once said of

himself that he “always behaved like an amateur with little equipment.”

Gregory shared Eisenstatd’s lack of formal training, gift for unobtrusiveness, sharply calibrated eye and innate ability to compose objects within a frame, though Hunt, at the time, could never have known this. But with serendipitous luck, when he held the camera to his eye he could elicit from both mountains and men their innermost secrets.

His later series of **Blackpool** images (selected highlights also on show at Lab X) celebrates the UK seaside destination in all its 1960’s nostalgic, beehive and teddy-boy grit. The melancholy group of riderless donkeys at season’s end, the chatty deck-chair beauties, one with sun-kissed décolletage, setting their rolled hair on the sun-drenched promenade, the boardwalk touts flogging their self-published opinions tell that a defining artist was most surely at work. And yet in spite of his childhood aspirations to become one, he is embarrassed at the suggestion he did.

Gregory went on to climb more mountains, leading expeditions to the unexplored Rolwaling range (west of Solu Khumbu in the Himalayas, where 19 peaks were climbed and a plane table survey made), to Ama Dablam, to Disteghil Sar in the Karakoram and to the Cordillera Blanca in Peru. He continued to visually document the world’s most inaccessible places and peoples, taking pictures that would either be syndicated to the leading publications of the day or, for 20 years, used for Kodak sponsored lectures.

The post-ascent establishment of a travel agency in hometown Blackpool seemed like a sound means of financing an unquenchable wanderlust, and it was. Later, together with his wife Sue, Gregory ran a highly successful business for a quarter of a century, earning a reputation for photographic tours to places that were off the tourist map. Indeed, he was promoting eco-tourism decades before the phrase had been coined and for many years was able to shoot remote cultures on the brink of extinction or facing change brought about by the recent growth of mass tourism

Wherever Gregory was his camera caught the surreal in everyday situations and the everyday in surreal situations. One can only imagine that without his indomitable courage and singular focus one of history’s most defining moments would be nothing more than an archival record. Whether looking through the smoke thick air of a Blackpool pub, or the oxygen thin air of the Everest peak, through his eye we see humanity, all fragile bones and iron will, forever in search of self.

ALFRED GREGORY - A RETROSPECTIVE is sponsored by Kodak Australia in conjunction with LAB X, will be exhibited in the LAB X Gallery at 40 Pakington St. St. Kilda, Victoria from Thursday July 14 to Thursday August 11 2005.

Alfred Gregory will be present at the opening

Meet the artist on Sunday the 24th of July 2pm - 4pm

**Gallery Hours are Monday – Friday 7.30am – 9.00pm & Sunday 1.00pm – 7.00pm.
Admission free. All media inquiries to: David Hooker Telephone: 0437073398**