

# Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

## ANNIE LEIBOVITZ: The Early Years, 1970 – 1983 / Photographs at Hauser & Wirth

Allon Schoener · Wednesday, February 20th, 2019

*Annie Leibovitz: The Early Years, 1970-1983: Archive Project No. 1*, on view at the Hauser & Wirth galleries in the Los Angeles Arts District, is a massive (covering 24 walls), personally curated and designed presentation of hundreds of Leibovitz's photographs of this particular time period. It was presented previously in 2017 at the LUMA FOUNDATION—in Arles, France and testifies to Leibovitz's stature as a major artist.

Annie Leibovitz has established a reputation as a grandiose photographer/icon of lavish colorful celebrity photography. Her photo essays and elaborately staged composites appearing in *Vanity Fair* stand in stark contrast to the informal, spontaneous black and white photographs that constitute this exhibition of her work from 1970-1983. At that time, she was a photo journalist on the staff of the nascent, then *avant garde*, publication *Rolling Stone*.



Annie Leibovitz at her new exhibition

Although most photographers are seen as observers and interpreters of their subjects, Leibovitz performed a different role. She describes it: "At the time, I thought that the way to get the best work was to become a chameleon. To become so much a part of what is going on that no one would notice that you were there."

Unquestionably, when looking at many of her photographs, one feels a sense of engagement and attachment to the subjects being presented. Her photographs are not casual observations, but deep personal analyses of her subjects. However, they are neither posed nor staged. Always snapshot fresh.

For me personally, this exhibition is a nostalgia trip on several levels. In the early 1970's, I was an avid *Rolling Stone* reader, so I had been exposed to Leibovitz's sympathetic portrayals of musicians and their audiences. Her photographs provided a sensitive embrace of the youth subculture that was defining this country at that moment. She managed to emulate Cartier-Bresson's "decisive moment" by providing a virtual insider's penetration into the lives of her subjects.

It could also be said that this exhibition's informal mode of presentation—so characteristic of the 60s and 70s—enhances the intimacy of her reportage. Having been involved in the New York art scene at that time, I am going to take the liberty of making a comparison with another 60s-70s

phenomenon. Although I doubt that there is any direct connection between the two, *zeitgeist* offers the opportunity to draw parallels. In the 1970's EXIT ART, an informal loft exhibition space located in SoHo (then a vibrant creative community, not the tourist mecca that it has become), on Broadway between Houston and Prince streets, had an on-going series of seminal exhibitions that presented raw documents and xerox copies of significant art issues supplemented with posters, press releases and photographs evoking the spirit of the subject of the exhibition. Informal presentation was the EXIT ART aesthetic. As I walked through the Hauser & Wirth galleries, I kept saying to myself, "This is like EXIT ART."



The Annie Leibovitz show is not a traditional photographic exhibition in which images are generated by the most advanced photo reproduction equipment. For his exhibition at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Richard Avedon leased equipment at one of New York's premier photo labs, brought in his own technicians and proceeded to print his exhibition and achieve a level of technical perfection manifested in everything that he did. By contrast the images for this Annie Leibovitz's exhibition were generated by an Epsom digital printer. They are affixed to the walls with push pins and string.

For those of us who lived during these cataclysmic days, this exhibition is a field day for 60s memories. We find that virtually every significant counter culture leader—politicians and musicians is here: Eldridge Cleaver, Allen Ginsberg, Country Joe MacDonald, Grace Slick, Paul Kantner, Jan Wenner, Pete Seeger, Louis Armstrong, Van Morrison, Moondog, Odetta, Tammy Wynette, Rod Stewart, Barbra Streisand, Andy Warhol and his entourage, Ike and Tina Turner, Jerry Garcia, Joan Baez, Ravi Shankar, Leonard Cohen, Marvin Gaye, Nina Simone, Jane Fonda, Dennis Hopper, Jack Nicholson, Warren Beaty, and Hunter S. Thompson.

One of the most intimate and touching photographs in the exhibition is of John Lennon and Yoko Ono in a bathtub. Not satisfied with this image, a second shoot was planned after John and Yoko went out to dinner. Unfortunately, there was no second shoot. On their return to The Dakota, John was murdered at the gate by a deranged man.

This entry was posted on Wednesday, February 20th, 2019 at 4:43 pm and is filed under [Photography](#). You can follow any responses to this entry through the [Comments \(RSS\)](#) feed. You can skip to the end and leave a response. Pinging is currently not allowed.