

The Museum of Modern Art

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NO. 116C

Press Preview: November 6, 1972
10:00am - 4:00pm

For Release: November 7, 1972

DIANE ARBUS PHOTOGRAPHS ON VIEW AT THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

"If I were just curious, it would be very hard to say to someone, 'I want to come your house and have you talk to me and tell me the story of your life.' I mean people are going to say, 'You're crazy.' Plus they're going to keep mighty guarded. But the camera is a kind of license. A lot of people, they want to be paid that much attention and that's a reasonable kind of attention to be paid.... There are always two things that happen. One is recognition and the other is that it's totally peculiar. But there's some sense in which I always identify with them."*

These words were spoken some time ago by Diane Arbus whose first retrospective exhibition of photographs will be on view at The Museum of Modern Art from November 7, 1972 through January 21, 1973. John Szarkowski, Director of the Museum's Department of Photography, selected and installed 125 prints made in the last 10 years, including some not developed until after the artist's death in the summer of 1971. Following the New York showing, the exhibition will travel to the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; the Baltimore Museum of Art; the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; and the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa.

"Diane Arbus's pictures challenge the basic assumptions on which most documentary photography has been thought to rest, for they deal with private rather

* "Diana Arbus": An Aperture Monograph, edited and designed by Doon Arbus and Marvin Israel published November 7. 184 pages, 80 photographs. 9 1/4 x 11". The clothbound edition is distributed by Aperture at \$15. A paperbound Special Edition for The Museum of Modern Art is available only through the Museum at \$9.50. The book is introduced by 18 pages of Diane Arbus's own views of the art of photography, edited from tapes by her daughter, Doon.

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than social realities, with psychological rather than historical facts, with the prototypical and mythic rather than the topical and temporal. Her photographs record the outward signs of inner mysteries," John Szarkowski writes in the exhibition wall label.

"Often, though less often than is thought, the nominal subject matter of her pictures was exotic. Among her best portraits are many of transvestites, nudists, other ideological specialists, freaks, and the mentally retarded. The meaning of these pictures has been missed by those who have not seen that in them (as in those that she made of the rest of us) her true subject was no less than the unique interior lives of those she photographed. Her most frequent subject was in fact children, perhaps because their individuality is purer, less skillfully concealed, closer to the surface."

A Russian midget, a Mexican dwarf, a Jewish giant, a hermaphrodite with a dog in a carnival trailer are among the portraits of the freaks in the show. "Freaks was a thing I photographed a lot," Diane Arbus said on one occasion. "It was one of the first things I photographed and it had a terrific kind of excitement for me.... They made me feel a mixture of shame and awe. There's a quality of legend about freaks. Like a person in a fairy tale who stops you and demands that you answer a riddle. Most people go through life dreading they'll have a traumatic experience. Freaks were born with their trauma. They've passed their test in life. They're aristocrats...."

The nudist colony where Diane Arbus photographed in 1968 was in New Jersey. Several pictures from there are on view including one of a retired man and his wife in their living room with framed photographs of each other, nude, on top of the TV set. "I had always wanted to go but I sort of didn't dare tell anybody," Diane Arbus said. "The director met me at the bus station because I didn't have a car so I got in his car and I was very nervous. He said,

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'I hope you realize you've come to a nudist camp.' Well, I hope I realized I had. So we were in total agreement there. And then he gave me this speech saying, 'You'll find the moral tone here is higher than that of the outside world.' His rationale for this had to do with the fact that the human body is really not as beautiful as it's cracked up to be and when you look at it, the mystery is taken away.... They seem to wear more clothes than other people. I mean the men wear shoes and socks when they go down to the lake and they have their cigarettes tucked into their socks. And the women wear earrings, hats, bracelets, watches, high heels. Sometimes you'll see someone with nothing on but a bandaid...."

Children, as Mr. Szarkowski says, were her most frequent subjects and the exhibition includes pictures of babies (Loser at a diaper Derby, N.J.), a flower girl at a Connecticut wedding, identical twins, a child crying, triplets, a child with a toy hand grenade in Central Park, a girl jumping rope, the Junior Interstate Ballroom Dance Champions, children with adults on the street and in parks, children alone.

In 1967 her photographs were included in a show representing the work of three photographers (Arbus, Friedlander, Winograd) directed by John Szarkowski entitled "New Documents." In July 1972 Diane Arbus was the first American photographer to have work exhibited at the Venice Biennale.

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