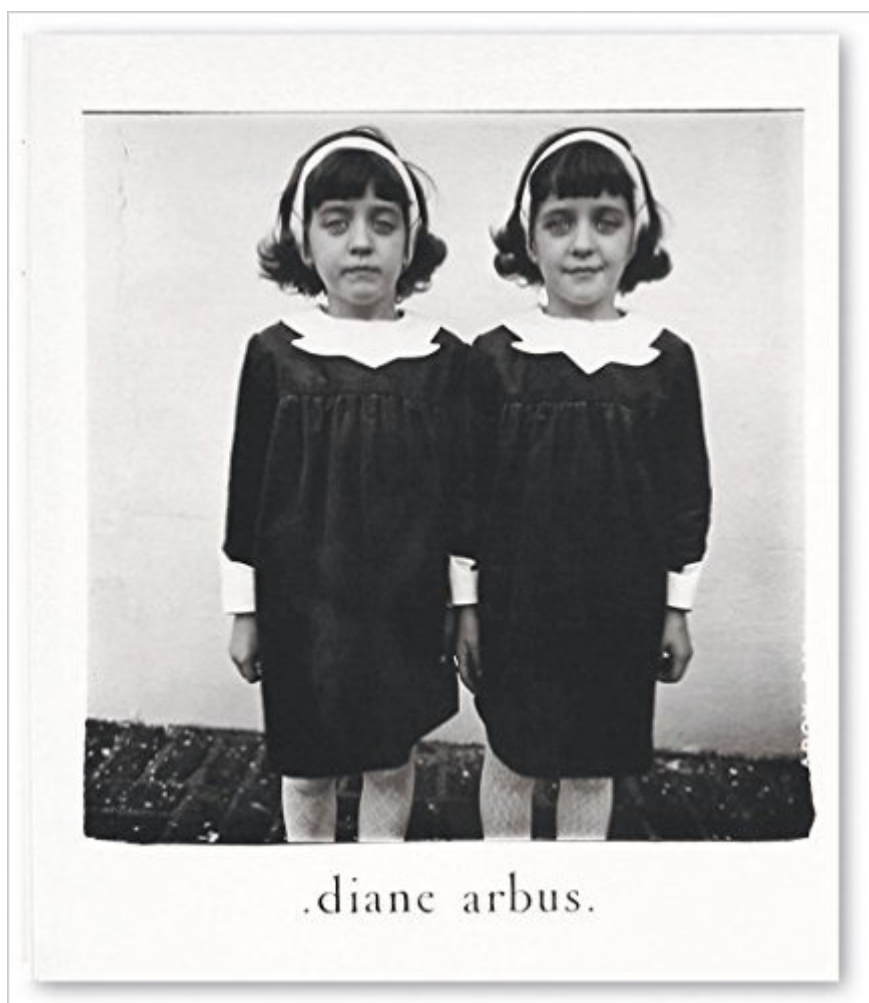


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Diane Arbus: An Aperture Monograph: Fortieth-Anniversary Edition



Synopsis

When Diane Arbus died in 1971 at the age of 48, she was already a significant influence—“even something of a legend”—for serious photographers, although only a relatively small number of her most important pictures were widely known at the time. The publication of *Diane Arbus: An Aperture Monograph* in 1972—along with the posthumous retrospective at The Museum of Modern Art—offered the general public its first encounter with the breadth and power of her achievements. The response was unprecedented. The monograph, composed of 80 photographs, was edited and designed by the painter Marvin Israel, Diane Arbus’ friend and colleague, and by her daughter Doon Arbus. Their goal in producing the book was to remain as faithful as possible to the standards by which Arbus judged her own work and to the ways in which she hoped it would be seen. Universally acknowledged as a photobook classic, *Diane Arbus: An Aperture Monograph* is a timeless masterpiece with editions in five languages, and remains the foundation of her international reputation. A quarter of a century has done nothing to diminish the riveting impact of these pictures or the controversy they inspire. Arbus’ photographs penetrate the psyche with all the force of a personal encounter and, in doing so, transform the way we see the world and the people in it.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This collection of 81 black and white photographs by Diane Arbus was edited and designed by her daughter, Doon and friend Marvin Israel and published in 1972 after her suicide the previous year.

The photographs are preceded by text of tape recordings of classes that the photographer gave the year she died, as well as excerpts from interviews and some of her own writings on photography. The text illuminates Arbus' concerns about her art and her subjects. Although she did do studies of objects, such as Disneyland, a hotel lobby, and a Xmas tree, Arbus was more interested in people, in particular the kind of people she had never seen before. Coming from a wealthy Park Avenue background, existing in an unreal environment, cocooned from adversity, Arbus felt her immunity painful, which explains her attraction to marginalised groups. One can compare Arbus' studies to those of Robert Mapplethorpe. Mapplethorpe moved from harsh presentations of marginalised gay men's sexuality to soft focus celebrity portraiture. Arbus moved in the opposite direction, from glamour fashion photography with her then husband Alan, to her reality marginalised portraiture. Arbus' experience with fashion provides her composition and while her camera can scrutinise, her photos never patronise. Perhaps this is due to the complicity apparent from the subjects. These people want to be photographed, and Arbus presents them with dignity. But what makes them compelling is the what Arbus described as the gap between intention and effect, what you want people to know about you and what you can't help people knowing about you. Sometimes, often the thing we see is sadness, but we can't laugh at these people because they are so unguarded. Arbus' photos aren't posed.

Quite literally, this book made me want to be a photographer. I remember seeing this book at my aunt and uncle's house when I was quite young (maybe 5 or 6). Flipping its pages as an adult is quite an experience, but as a child I was equal parts totally enthralled, disturbed, confused and yet completely smitten. I remember becoming quite familiar with the book's many characters, and always looked at this book when I visited their house. When I started experimenting in photography in my mid-teens, I became re-aquainted with it from visiting bookstores and libraries, and through art history courses. Her images I think speak more about who she is than who her subjects are, but in a way that is brutally revealing. On the surface, these photographs represent a cross-section of fringe society, with all of its inherent complexity and grit. Cross dressers, midgets, nudists, drug addicts, "dancers" and the like. But they become quite revealing about her psyche during the period she was creating this amazing body of work. She approaches each subject not at a distance, but with the sensitivity and affection of someone who really cares and is invested in these relationships. She lived with a few of these people, hung out with many others...it was the kind of company she preferred, even after being raised in a very wealthy Jewish family who owned a department store. The images are confrontational, sensational, unnerving, and a little disturbing. And some have

really become icons of modern photography (the boy holding the grenade, the triplets on their bed, and many more). But what really affected me the most was the excerpts collected posthumously in the beginning of the book, in which Arbus describes her method and some of the mantras of her craft.

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