

S P O T L I G H T

AMY
ARBUS

Everyone knew that I was a photographer long before I did," says Amy Arbus ingeniously. "I speak visually. I stare at things a lot. Everything is couched in visual terms." As the daughter of photographer Diane Arbus and actor Allan Arbus, she was raised in New York City in the highly charged world of art and theater. At the age of 14, high praise for an image she had taken resulted only in self-doubt. "I didn't feel that I had made the picture. I felt like it happened to me, and I didn't like that feeling." She wasn't to take another photograph for seven years.

When she was 17, her mother committed suicide, leaving Amy without the images that anchored her life. "To me," she says, "my mother was not only making great images, she was also documenting our times. When that was gone, it was a little bit like having my interior monologue gone. There was no diary anymore...and not only was she gone, I no longer felt validated...it was almost like I didn't exist, which was a very scary thing for a 17-year-old girl." Arbus was in school in Boston studying piano and flute when an accident broke her two front teeth and she couldn't practice—an

immense relief—so she began waitressing and attending at school.

One day, when she was 21, she went to the park to photograph with a friend and had an epiphany. "I looked through the lens, and I was so sure that I saw the world in a different way than most people. I was photographing a baby with a bonnet on her head, and she looked like an old man. I thought I had some sort of corner on the nature of seeing things that other people didn't see."

It was a language of expression both familiar and new. Like her mother, Arbus chose portraiture as a means of making contact with the world—capturing the drama of persona, the confrontation of self with other. She worked as an assistant for two years, then landed a job with the *Village Voice*, producing the serial photo essay *On the Street*. She captured the hip downtown scene of Manhattan in the 1980s. The series, which ran for eleven years, was everything Arbus—part portraiture, part street theater.

In 1992, she took a master class with Richard Avedon. "He was a profound influence on me, although I can't think of anyone whose work mine is less like." Entering class as a traditionalist, she turned her camera inward, creating self-portraits that were "very personal, very raw. I really let loose. Avedon gave me the responsibility and courage to create something new."

Arbus has produced two books, *The Inconvenience of Being Born*, a series of portraits of infants, and *No Place Like Home*, a book of interiors. She also teaches at the

International Center of Photography. She has held eight one-woman shows, and her work is found in many collections, including the Museum of Modern Art, but she shies away from fame. "To be famous would make my job much harder—to be naked with the nudists, to be streetwalking with the prostitutes—it would be that much harder to get in. I feel more comfortable being anonymous, I feel safer."

Arbus's recent work, she notes, has become more dramatic. "It's not so direct. There's a lot of implied melodrama...I'm very interested in the theater and I like heightened reality. I had to be sort of hard edged and forceful before—kind of obsessed with intensity. Now I'm interested in those middle tones. And there are more people involved. I'm a people person," she declares. "That's why I'm concentrating on portraits. I'm interested in capturing something human." —Shawn O'Sullivan

■ PRINT INFORMATION

All prints are 16x20-inch [other sizes available on request] gelatin silver prints. Editions are limited to 75 of each image. Prices start at \$1,750 for vintage prints, and \$1,500 for modern prints. Please contact the gallery for further information on specific images and prints.

■ CONTACT INFORMATION

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