

Diane Arbus Untitled

November 2–December 15, 2018

537 West 20th Street, New York

Opening reception: Friday, November 2, 6–8 PM

Press preview: Friday, November 2, 5 PM



Untitled (49) 1970-71 © The Estate of Diane Arbus

It is a little agonous, a thousand misses but when it all of a sudden works I recognize it is what I wanted without precisely knowing I wanted anything. I am like someone who gets excellent glasses because of a slight defect in eyesight and puts Vaseline on them to make it more like he normally sees. —Diane Arbus¹

Inaugurating their collaboration as co-representatives of The Estate of Diane Arbus, David Zwirner and Fraenkel Gallery are pleased to announce the first complete presentation of Diane Arbus's *Untitled* series. The sixty-six images were made at residences for people with developmental disabilities, places Arbus repeatedly returned to for picnics, for dances, and at Halloween between 1969 and 1971, the last years of her life. On view at David Zwirner's 537 West 20th Street location, the presentation will include several images that have never before been exhibited.

The *Untitled* photographs—direct, enigmatic portraits of the residents of these facilities—are a radical departure from the bold, confrontational images upon which Arbus's formidable reputation largely stands. The experience of photographing and the resulting work were a revelation for Arbus: "FINALLY what I've been searching for,"² she wrote at the time. Arbus made many of the images outdoors, in natural light, both with and without a flash. The results are strangely lyrical, even tender, documenting a world possessed of its own rituals and codes of conduct that remain somehow mesmerizingly familiar.

Critic Hilton Als has noted of the series: "The singularity of Arbus's vision is the over-all theme of 'Untitled' ... These photographs ... can't be confined by critical categorization, because they are

¹ Diane Arbus in a letter to Allan Arbus, circa 1969, quoted in Sandra S. Phillips, "The Question of Belief," in *Diane Arbus Revelations* (New York: Random House, 2003), pp. 64, 66.

² Diane Arbus in a letter to Allan Arbus, dated November 28, 1969, included in Elisabeth Sussman and Doon Arbus, "A Chronology," in *Diane Arbus Revelations*, p. 203.

David Zwirner

purely ecstatic; they are the pictures Arbus had been waiting all her life to take. It's as if the most remarkable images she produced in the early sixties ... were faint talismans leading Arbus to this final study, in which her justly renowned control cannot compete with the unconscious power of her subjects."³ The *Untitled* images resonate with an innocence that belies the mastery at the root of their creation.

In 1969, as her project began to take shape, Arbus wrote her husband, Allan: "It's the first time I've encountered a subject where the multiplicity is the thing. I mean I am not just looking for the BEST picture of them. I want to do lots."⁴ Though Arbus had contemplated making a book of these photographs, the majority of them remained unknown until 1995, more than twenty years after her death, when Aperture published *Diane Arbus: Untitled*. Since then, a number of these photographs have been featured in exhibitions and publications of Arbus's work, including the celebrated 2003 retrospective *Diane Arbus Revelations*. Until now, the sixty-six works have never been presented in their entirety.

Diane Arbus (1923–1971) is one of the most original and influential photographers of the twentieth century. She studied photography with Berenice Abbott, Alexey Brodovitch, and Lisette Model and had her first published photographs appear in *Esquire* in 1960. In 1963 and 1966, she was awarded John Simon Guggenheim Fellowships and was one of three photographers whose work was the focus of *New Documents*, John Szarkowski's landmark exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, in 1967. Arbus's depictions of couples, children, female impersonators, nudists, New York City pedestrians, suburban families, circus performers, and celebrities, among others, span the breadth of the postwar American social sphere and constitute a diverse and singularly compelling portrait of humanity.

A year after her death, Arbus's work was selected for inclusion in the 1972 Venice Biennale, the first time any photographer had been so honored. The Museum of Modern Art hosted a major retrospective that traveled throughout the United States and Canada from 1972 to 1975. A larger full-scale retrospective, *Diane Arbus Revelations*, was organized by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in 2003 and traveled to museums in the United States and Europe through 2006. A major European retrospective of Arbus's work opened at the Jeu de Paume, Paris, in 2011 and traveled to Winterthur, Berlin, and Amsterdam through 2013. In 2016, The Met Breuer, New York, hosted *diane arbus: in the beginning*, a landmark exhibition of Arbus's work focusing on never-before-seen early photographs from the first seven years of her career, from 1956 to 1962; the show is scheduled to open at its fourth venue, the Hayward Gallery, London, in February 2019. Currently on view through January 27, 2019, at the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington, DC, is *Diane Arbus: A box of ten photographs*, an exhibition tracing the history of the portfolio that established the foundation for Arbus's posthumous career, ushering in photography's acceptance to the realm of "serious" art.

³Hilton Als, "Unmasked: A Different Kind of Collection from Diane Arbus," *The New Yorker* (November 27, 1995), pp. 95–96.

⁴Diane Arbus in a letter to Allan Arbus, circa 1969, quoted in Phillips, "The Question of Belief," p. 64.

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In 2007, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, acquired the artist's complete archive from The Estate of Diane Arbus. The collection comprises hundreds of early and unique photographs by Arbus, negatives and contact prints of 7,500 rolls of film, glassine print sleeves annotated by the artist, as well as her photography collection, library, and personal papers including appointment books, notebooks, correspondence, writings, and ephemera.

Eight publications examine the artist's work: *Diane Arbus* (Aperture, 1972); *Diane Arbus: Magazine Work* (Aperture, 1984); *Diane Arbus: Untitled* (Aperture, 1995); *Diane Arbus Revelations* (Random House, 2003); *Diane Arbus: A Chronology* (Aperture, 2011); *Silent Dialogues: Diane Arbus & Howard Nemerov* (Fraenkel Gallery, 2015); *diane arbus: in the beginning* (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2016); and *Diane Arbus: A box of ten photographs* (Aperture, 2018).

Arbus's photographs can be found in the collections of numerous institutions around the world, including the Art Gallery of Ontario; Art Institute of Chicago; Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Fotomuseum Winterthur; J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC; National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Tate Gallery, London; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

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