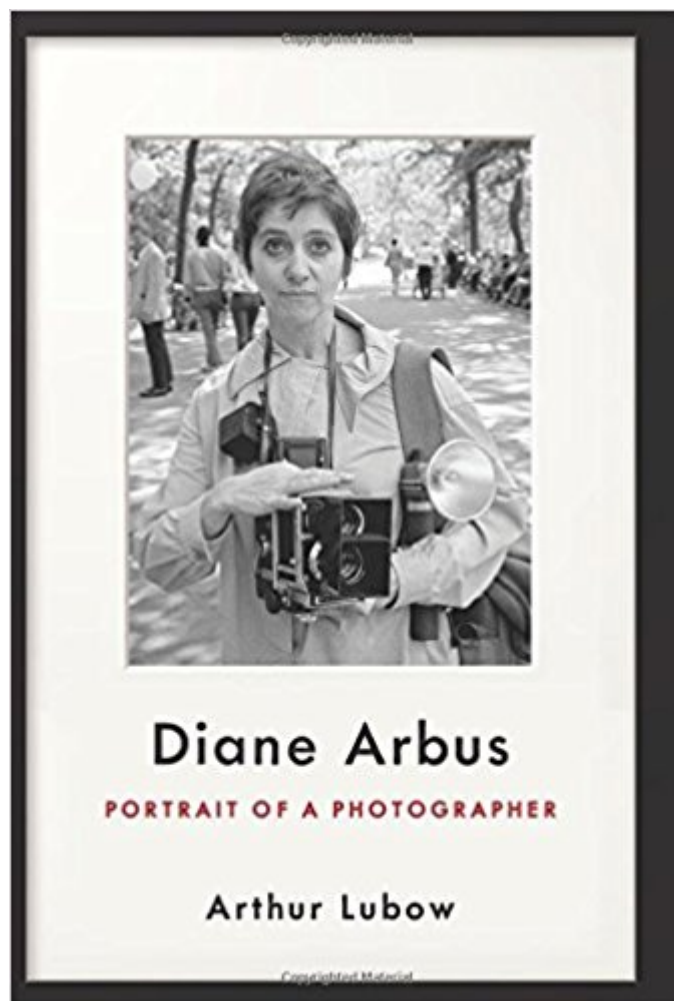


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# Diane Arbus: Portrait Of A Photographer



## Synopsis

The definitive biography of the beguiling Diane Arbus, one of the most influential and important photographers of the twentieth century, a brilliant and absorbing exposition that links the extraordinary arc of her life to her iconic photographs. *Diane Arbus: Portrait of a Photographer* brings into focus with vividness and immediacy one of the great American artists of the twentieth century. Arbus comes startlingly to life on these pages, a strong-minded child of disconcerting originality who grew into a formidable photographer of unflinching courage. Arbus forged an intimacy with her subjects that has inspired generations of artists. Arresting, unsettling, and poignant, her photographs stick in our minds. Why did these people fascinate her? And what was it about her that captivated them? It is impossible to understand the transfixing power of Arbus's photographs without exploring her life. Lubow draws on exclusive interviews with Arbus's friends, lovers, and colleagues; on previously unknown letters; and on his own profound critical insights into photography to explore Arbus's unique perspective and to reveal important aspects of her life that were previously unknown or unsubstantiated. He deftly traces Arbus's development from a wealthy, sexually precocious free spirit into first, a successful New York fashion photographer and then, a singular artist who coaxed secrets from her subjects. Lubow reveals that Arbus's profound need not only to see her subjects but to be seen by them drove her to forge unusually close bonds with these people, helping her discover the fantasies, pain, and heroism within each of them, and leading her to create a new kind of photographic portraiture charged with an unnerving complicity between the subject and the viewer. *Diane Arbus: Portrait of a Photographer* brushes aside the clichés that have long surrounded Arbus and her work. It is a magnificently absorbing biography of this unique, hugely influential artist.

## Book Information

Hardcover: 752 pages

Publisher: Ecco (June 7, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0062234323

ISBN-13: 978-0062234322

Product Dimensions: 6 x 1.5 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 2.4 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (35 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #26,419 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) [#4 in Books > Arts & Photography](#)

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## Customer Reviews

Perhaps everyone who has ever looked at Dianne Arbus's photos has wondered how she feels about her subjects; does she empathize with them or is she exploiting them? The woman who took the pictures is no less confounding, fascinating, and deeply touching. Lubow's extensive research and in-depth interviews with many people in Arbus's life, his insightful analysis of her work, his evenhanded history of her life, including its many contradictions, and his sensitive attempt to bring her into as coherent a whole as any complex human being can be made into, make this not just a masterful biography of Arbus but a notable exemplar of the biographical art itself. The biography tells us, of course, not just of one life, but many, including Dianne's husband, the photographer and actor, Allan Arbus. And it's an exploration of the time when photography grew beyond Steichen's galleries into a major force in the New York art world. It gives insight into a critical era in fashion photography and the influence of Arbus's good friend Richard Avedon. And it deals sensitively with her suicide, the heartbreaking finale to her life but not to her fame and influence. It helps too that Lubow is a gifted, lucid writer who manages to work so much of his extensive research into the book without ever wearying the reader. Another reviewer here laments that Lubow didn't obtain rights to Arbus's pictures, which we would of course all like to have in our hands as we read the book, but the rights are impossible to obtain. They are kept under extremely guarded control by Arbus's daughters. You can, however, read the biography with books published by the daughters and thus gain immediate and full advantage of Lubow's penetrating analysis.

Once I picked up this book, I couldn't put it down--which, given its length and sweep, is the ultimate compliment. Along with being an eye-opening and sensitive account of the life of one of the most fascinating American (and women) artists of the twentieth century, Lubow's book gave me an enhanced understanding of the art of photography, the challenges faced then and now by women in the field, and the tumult and drama of America in the sixties. A must-read.

Recommend a great biography and I'll read it. After checking out various reviews of Arthur Lubow's Diane Arbus bio I ordered it and sat down to feast upon the photographer's fascinating life and unique photographs. This book has it all: it's insightful about her art, it's

beautifully written, and it's replete with the kind of detail that comes only when an author has fully grasped the complexities of his/her subject. Lubow's descriptions of Arbus's photographs are so good that I didn't miss the inclusion of photographs. (Goggle them if you must.) This book is a page-turner.

Non judgmental and clearly written. I learned a great deal about her professional struggles. Although she worked for magazines like Esquire she remained economically marginal her whole life and had to depend on others, including her ex-husband for support. She is maddeningly self-destructive. I think her suicide was part of the trajectory from the beginning and was essential to her later fame.

It is no hagiography, and I suspect that if it were about anyone else but her, The subject of the book would love it. After all she loved prodding other people to rebel their secrets while keeping hers safely tucked away, There is a lot of insight into her life and those of the people who were immediately around her including legendary art directors, editors, writers, friends, lovers, and fellow photographers (including what I think will be the most honest assesment of Richard Avedon the person and Richard Avedon the photographer that we are likely to see) and is a very telling portrait of what it meant to be part of the worlds of art and publishing in New York City in the 1950s and '60s. Is there a lot of prying into complicated people's even more complicated sex lives? Why yes there is but the tone is neither smarmy or salacious (as in tje awful Bosworth biography), just a reporting of facts. Lubow discusses and analyses many of Ms. Arbus' photographs so it is handy to have ready access to well printed or reproduced versions handy. His insight is keen and is enhanced when speaks to or quotes the people she photographed.

If you're interested in mid 20th century photography and culture you'll find this a good read. I did. Lubow presented a good picture of many photographers working in NYC in the 1950s-70s and their relationships with each other. It is to bad the author was unable to include any of Arbus' s photographs. I suggest obtaining a copy of revelations by Doon Arbus or the MOMA/Aperture book to go along with this book.

Superbly researched biography that opened door after door into photography, art, psychology, and numerous other subjects, done in a highly readable style. Verbal descriptions of Arbus photographs were unerringly accurate and added to enjoyment of the book. The author did not shy from the

uglier aspects of his subject's character including some particularly disturbing actions. Short paragraphs have the quality of snapshots of Arbus. The author achieved the near impossible: verbal description of nonverbal communication and art form.

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