

Biographer probes photographer's tragic life

"Diane Arbus, A Biography," Patricia Bosworth, Alfred A. Knopf, \$17.95

By Chuck Moss
special writer

Every form correctly seen is beautiful. If any one statement could sum up the work of photographer Diane Arbus, this is it.

Arbus relentlessly captured the freaks, the outcasts, the lonely and the grotesque in our society. Her most famous pictures, "Jewish Giant with His Parents," the nudist series, the shots of wealthy children, all find a common humanity in the strangest and loneliest of forms.

Yet the life of this artist was a maelstrom of contradiction, insecurity, sexual politics, and finally a deep despair that ended in her 1971 suicide. Now Patricia Bosworth probes this strange and fertile life in "Diane Arbus, A Biography."

"I DON'T PRETEND to have the answers. Diane was extremely contradictory. She would make a statement one minute, then totally contradict herself the next, and be completely unceremonious. She deliberately threw up smokecreens and enjoyed creating an air of mystery around her," said Bosworth, an experienced and professional journalist who candidly admits this was a difficult subject.

It took her 5 1/2 years to pierce the smokecreens surrounding Arbus. What emerges is a fascinating and harrowing portrait of an obsessive personality, compelled to pursue and portray the "dark world," the forbidden around her.

BORN INTO a wealthy Jewish merchant family (they owned the Rouse's Fifth Avenue store in New York), Arbus grew up insulated from the harsh world of the Depression. This separation from life affected her profoundly.

"She thought the world she grew up in wasn't the real world. Nothing was real to her until she experienced it," Bosworth said, "Arbus constantly felt what she called 'the pain of being immune.'"

At 14 she fell in love with Allan Arbus and married him at 18. The two opened a studio and became high-fashion photographers during the 1950s, a golden age for commercial photography. Ironically, author Bosworth once posed for the Arbuses during a stint as a model.

THIS BOOK is fascinating, yet disturbing as it explores the roots of this sad and seductive person. Refused permission by the Arbus estate to use any of Diane's pictures, Bosworth nonetheless paints a vivid and wide canvas of not only the lives but the times surrounding the artist.

By the late 1950s both Arbus and her husband yearned for other creative outlets. She finally quit the studio to take classes and work on creative images.

Her teacher, Lisette Model, advised her, "If you don't photograph what you are compelled to photograph, then you'll never photograph." Arbus replied, "What I want to photograph is evil."

DRIVEN BY a compulsion to seek the dark, strange world forbidden by her parents, Arbus dove into the lives

of freaks and the inhabitants of the delirium.

"She was constantly frightened, and needed to overcome that fear daily," Bosworth said.

"Those places carried real danger. In researching the book, I approached 42nd Street and the other places very carefully, very timidly. I found some of the same people she had photographed. I came away with a great appreciation for her courage."

Arbus' photos expanded the range of the permissible in the growing discipline of photojournalism. Her confrontational, controversial images evoked intense reactions. When exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art, curators had to come in every morning to wipe off spit from the Arbus pictures.

But as her fame grew, so did her loneliness and despair.

Isolated from childhood to live dependent on a man, she was desperate and lost when her husband divorced her and moved to California for an acting career.

Her growing fame brought unwelcome pressures and money became a constant worry to the woman who had grown up wealthy.

"Depression was congenial to her family," Bosworth said. "Her mother and father suffered, and Diane was allergic to anti-psychotic drugs."

A bout with hepatitis left her sick and weak and, depressed and desperate, she took her own life.

"DIANE ARBUS was one of the significant creative personalities of the '60s. I was fascinated both by her as a person and the world of photography in those years. In some way I can understand her. She was an obsessive person and I am too," said Bosworth. "But I don't want to get into analyzing or judgments. Tell the story. Just tell the story."

"She showed the freakishness in the normal and normality in the freaks."

The tragedy lay in her inability to see these qualities in herself. The story of Diane Arbus is well told.

In this book, intense and strange, Arbus nonetheless found that human quality transcending society's idea of "normal."

Bolen wins scholarship

The Kappa Alpha Theta sorority awarded the Virginia Martin McCune Memorial Scholarship of \$1,100 to Patricia Bolen of Farmington Hills at their recent convention at the Opryland Hotel in Nashville, Tenn.

Bolen is a member of the Beta Pi chapter of Kappa Alpha Theta at Michigan State University.

She was chosen by the chapter to represent one of five girls from their district to compete for a scholarship in the national awards. Having won in the district, she became eligible to represent one of 18 nominees over the United States and Canada selected for scholarships.

She received the McCune award at the convention in Nashville where all her expenses were paid by her chapter. The recipient for the McCune Scholarship was judged on having fraterally loyalty, being scholastically an earnest student, and being morally of highest character.

Bolen is an upcoming senior at Michigan State where she is a member of the Golden Key National Honor Society and the Mortar Board honoring scholarship, leadership, and service.

For two years, Bolen has worked at the Wharton Center of Performing Arts and now serves on the MSU Student Foundation.

As a junior she was employed at the university holding the title as the head student intern adviser in the communications department and has continued this position during the summer along with a position as an academic adviser in the orientation of new students.

As a member of the Beta Pi chapter of Kappa Alpha Theta, Bolen is vice president and director of pledge education. She hopes to graduate in June of 1985 with a degree in communication. She is a 1981 graduate of North Farmington High School.



Patricia Bolen

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