Overview - Annie Leibovitz

Annie Leibovitz

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Born: October 02, 1949 in Waterbury, Connecticut, United States
Other Names: Leibovitz, Anna-Lou; Leibovitz, Ann-Lou
Nationality: American
Occupation: Photographer

Rolling Stone, San Francisco, Calif., photographer, 1970-73, chief photographer, 1973-83; Vanity Fair, New York, N.Y., photographer, 1983--. Has photographed advertising campaigns for various agencies. Work has been exhibited in galleries throughout the United States.


Considered one of America's best living portrait photographers, Annie Leibovitz has captured the image--and the essence--of scores of celebrities. Her subjects range from poet Robert Penn Warren to actor Clint Eastwood. She is known for her work in Rolling Stone, where she portrayed rock stars "in a graphic, posterlike style" that was "tough, flashy, sexual, shocking, exaggerated," Vicki Goldberg observed in New York. Leibovitz's photography "made the magazine's covers a kind of trademark." Leibovitz was also renowned for her portraits in Vanity Fair. She has been the subject of several documentaries and retrospectives throughout her career.

Early Life and Career

Leibovitz was born in Connecticut, one of six children of an Air Force colonel. In 1967 she entered the San Francisco Art Institute to study painting. She also enrolled in a night school photography course. Three years later, in 1970, Leibovitz walked into the office of Rolling Stone magazine and convinced them to give her an assignment. A short time later she persuaded them to let her do a cover shot of John Lennon. By 1973 Leibovitz was named the magazine's chief photographer. Over the next ten years her subjects included Bob Dylan, Robert Redford, Richard Nixon, Bette Midler, and Meryl Streep.

Not infrequently, Leibovitz's portraits have stirred controversy: a nude John Lennon clinging to a fully clothed Yoko One; Debra Winger, topless, with her German shepherd. Other photos are humorous, such as Liberace in front of cardboard limousine and Woody Allen in a pink-tiled bathroom. "I think of myself as having a pretty average viewpoint," Leibovitz told Paul Richard of the Washington Post. "Wrapping Christo or painting the Blues Brothers blue, that's pretty obvious."

Critics disagreed, finding her portraits powerful and revealing. "Most of her pictures are taken with flash, used in such a way that her subject stands out against the background," wrote the New York Times's Andy Grundberg. "Details are clearly delineated, right down to the pores and eyelashes, and colors are rendered simply and stridently."
Richard noted that Leibovitz is "an ace journalist" with "that killer instinct for exactly the right instant." And the *New York Times Book Review* called her work "poignant," observing that "Leibovitz has revitalized the portrait to illuminate the less obvious sides of people we had just started to grow bored with."

Leibovitz left *Rolling Stone* in 1983 and signed with *Vanity Fair*. In 1987 she began shooting a series of advertisements for American Express. This highly successful "Membership" campaign features celebrities who rarely do endorsements. So far, Express cardholders Elmore Leonard, Tom Selleck, Quincy Jones, and Luciano Pavarotti have posed for Leibovitz.

She has also worked for other advertisers, though most of her portraits were for *Vanity Fair*. "I feel like I'm now in a grown up world," Leibovitz told Richard. "I felt like *Rolling Stone* never did want to grow old gracefully. *Vanity Fair* is showing me how to enjoy yourself in the older years and live well."

**Publishes Book**

In 2008 Leibovitz's book *Annie Leibovitz at Work* was published by Random House. In the 240-page book, Leibovitz discusses elements she uses in photography and provides insight into some of her most famous photo shoots, including those with Richard Nixon, John Lennon, Demi Moore, and Barack Obama.

Also in 2008, Leibovitz was faced with criticism for photos she took for *Vanity Fair* of teen actress and singer Miley Cyrus. Many thought the photos of Cyrus--with a nude back, looking over her shoulder while only her arms and a white shimmery fabric covered her body--were too provocative for the fifteen-year-old. Leibovitz apologized for the controversy but defended her Cyrus photographs, saying they are a classic portrait and very beautiful.

**Money Troubles**

Leibovitz experienced financial difficulties in February of 2009, borrowing more than $15 from the company Art Capital Group and putting several of her houses and the rights to all of her photographs up for collateral. The contract was renegotiated later that year after Art Capital Group nearly filed a lawsuit against Leibovitz for not repaying the loan. She regained control over her work and eventually paid off the loan. She continued photographing celebrities for *Vanity Fair* and *Vogue* adding names such as Lady Gaga, Benedict Cumberbatch, Kim Kardashian, and Kanye West to her portrait roster.

**Further Readings**

**Books**

**Periodicals**
- *Los Angeles Times*, November 9, 1983.
• New York Times, October 9, 1983.

Online
• "Lawsuit Against Annie Leibovitz Dropped," CNN,


• “That Old Master? It's at the Pawnshop,” New York Times,

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