

BRUCE SILVERSTEIN

"We are the subject"
MODEL • ARBUS • SOLOMON

July 12 - September 8, 2018
Reception: July 12, 6-8 pm

Bruce Silverstein Gallery is pleased to present *"We are the subject"*, an exhibition featuring the work of Lisette Model, Diane Arbus and Rosalind Fox Solomon. Harnessing the photographic medium, each of these legendary artists have sought tirelessly to investigate their place in the world, making countless inquiries into their own existences. Although they have each emerged from a distinct time and place, they are consistent in their dogged exploration of the human condition. Perhaps even more evident when presented alongside one another, their work shares a concern with extending the boundaries of the self, seeking their own humanity.

Having each been the subject of solo exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, the strength of their individual voices is well acknowledged within the photographic canon. For the first time since 1977, when these three groundbreaking artists were first exhibited together at Galerie Zabriskie, Paris, viewers will have the opportunity to experience these powerful voices speaking together once again, surrounded and confronted by over 40 original works.

What unites these three female powerhouses in photography is not their subject matter, nor a shared vision or approach, but rather it is a passionate desire to explore their personal identities through interaction with others. In her efficacious lessons as teacher, Lisette Model declared a photographer's subject matter to be both inherently subjective and impartial, reinforcing the dominant role of the self:

"We are the subject, the object is the world around us."
– Lisette Model¹

Viewed almost as self-reflections, the nearly 40 photographs comprising this exhibition represent their makers' defiant attempts to understand the world and their place within it. Both Diane Arbus and Rosalind Fox Solomon were students of Lisette Model, whom after thirty years of teaching had long since been considered a legend as an instructor of photography. Her effectiveness as an educator married an intuitive understanding of her students with a decisive capacity to evaluate the strength of an image. She believed that although a person can ascertain vision, ultimately true success as an artist depends on one's willingness "in making contact with himself." – Lisette Model²

This notion was clearly taken to heart by many of her students, not least of all by Arbus and Solomon, whom both shed traditional domestic roles to immerse themselves wholeheartedly into photographing the corners of the world around them. All three of these intrepid women transcended the stereotypical roles prescribed

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to them by society, and found independence and self-expression through arts education and photographic practice. Working tirelessly as image-makers, each was able to reinvent themselves – Model from expatriate to dynamic teacher, Arbus from studio assistant to chronicler of the urban milieu, and Solomon who diverted from a constrained marriage into a humanitarian world traveler. As their identities evolved, each artist's individual narrative has played a distinct role in the history of photography.

The fearlessness underpinning the enigmatic images forming this exhibition is palpable, and has reverberated as tremendous influence on countless artists whom have followed. While the life of Diane Arbus was tragically short, her photographs have undoubtedly had a lasting impact on the medium. She began studying with Model around 1957, and according to her husband Allan, Model provided the “release” that awakened Arbus’ natural talent with the medium.³ Though the differences in the work of teacher and student far outweigh the similarities, the two artists shared a similar perspective: “Their respective visions were, in essence, of a recovery and a discovery of the world for themselves. They were each attracted to the risks that people took, and to the conquest of their own fears.” – Ann Thomas⁴

Rosalind Fox Solomon has been photographing for over fifty years. She had raised a family in Chattanooga, Tennessee where she found herself immersed in the massive social changes of the sixties. She promoted diversity through international exchange and the civil rights movement, holding a position as a part-time equal employment consultant for the Agency for International Development. Her college major was political science. She had never dreamed of being an artist. She began photographing during a trip to Japan, and four years later at age 42 began her studies with Model.

Solomon immediately realized that photography could provide her with an avenue of expression. During intermittent trips to New York City from 1972—1976, she met privately with Model, who critiqued her photographs and encouraged her, having recognized a deep perception within her eager pupil. Photography took Rosalind deeper in life and became her passion. Her practice is distilled into what is essential: kinship between people. She travels the world investigating what it means to know and be known by others, and if that is truly possible. In honoring this experience, Solomon creates images that bear witness and relay truth – qualities shared and imbued within the pictures by her fellow trailblazers constituting this vigorous presentation.

Footnotes

1 – Lisette Model, *teaching notebook #15*, p. 91; Ann Thomas, Lisette Model, National Gallery of Canada, 1990, p. 47

2 – Lisette Model, *Pictures as Art*, p. 21; Thomas, p. 125

3 – Thomas, p. 146

4 – Thomas, p. 147