



# Legend Behind the Lens

The Life and Work of Photographer **ANNIE LEIBOVITZ**  
Shoots into Atlanta this Month

BY LISSA POIROT

**W**HEN FLIPPING THROUGH THE PAGES OF A MAGAZINE and stargazing at glossy photographs of today's celebrities, few ever note the name of the photographer. Typically, they are transfixed more on the celebrity than the talent behind the lens. But there is one American photographer that is nearly as famous as those she photographs, thanks to her candid and fresh approach to capturing celebrity on film. Considered by many as the most famous living portrait photographer, Annie Leibovitz's photographs have become iconic snapshots of our celebrity culture. Remember the intimate moment between one of the world's most famous musicians, naked and curled around his wife? The infamous image of John Lennon and Yoko Ono taken on the day he would die appeared on the cover of *Rolling Stone* magazine in 1980 and made Leibovitz a celebrity in her own right.

Leibovitz's work may be commercial, but every step behind her lens creates a work of art. Think of headline-making shots of a very pregnant Demi Moore posing in the buff on the cover of *Vanity Fair* or a



young blond heartthrob who made his first appearance in the same magazine after stealing scenes from Susan Sarandon and Geena Davis in “Thelma and Louise.” These pieces by Leibovitz grabbed our attention on the small page but a traveling exhibit puts her photography in the spotlight. This month, “Annie Leibovitz: A Photographer’s Life: 1990 – 2005” premieres at the High Museum of Fine Art, the third stop in a worldwide tour.

“This is the only showing of her work in the Southeast. If people don’t know her name – but many do, of course – they at least recognize her work. They are fashion and advertising pieces published in major magazines of popular culture like *Vanity Fair* and *Rolling Stone*. Somehow in a shape or form her images get engrained in people’s consciousness,” said Julian Cox, photography curator and head of the Atlanta exhibit at the High.

Leibovitz’s talent doesn’t stem from a point-and-click approach. Working with Hollywood’s elite as well as political figures like Colin Powell, Bill and Hillary Clinton and President Bush is never simple. The photographer is working with tight schedules and a plethora of assistants sur-

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*Photography Curator at the High Museum of Art*



**A SNAPSHOT OF ANNIE LEIBOVITZ'S LIFE**

One of six children, Leibovitz was born in 1947 in Westport, Conn. Her father was a lieutenant colonel in the United States Air Force and her mother was a modern dance instructor.

In 1969, she lived on a kibbutz in Israel and took part in an archeological dig at King Solomon's temple

In 1973, Leibovitz was named chief photographer of Rolling Stone magazine

In 1975, she served as the concert tour photographer of The Rolling Stone's Tour of the Americas



Since 1983, Leibovitz has worked as a featured portrait photographer for Vanity Fair

In 1990, she founded the Annie Leibovitz Studio in New York

Leibovitz is one of only two living photographers to be showcased at the National Portrait Gallery

rounding both her models and herself. Getting a person, even the leader of the free world, to have a relaxed and candid moment is a delicate balance, and one Leibovitz has managed well by entering each shoot knowing the model's background and current accomplishments, as well as having an idea of the perfect picture before it's even taken. To create a unique portrait of her subjects, she often photographs the entire body in an active situation.

"A Photographer's Life," however, is more than the high-profile celebrity shots found in magazines. This exhibit also provides fans of Leibovitz's work the chance to catch a glimpse at her personal side through images of her family and friends. "What she's trying to do with this exhibit is to demonstrate in a way how both the two sides of her life are integrated. It's the same person who is taking the photographs but a different kind of temperament that is presented in the personal work than is found in the commercial work," Cox said. "In commercial work, she has an entourage of assistants and an actor's time for 20 minutes and she's got to get that shot. It's a different discipline and a different dynamic than when she's on vacation with her family on the beach taking snapshots. I think what she has done with this exhibit is quite brave."



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Fans of Leibovitz will also have the opportunity to meet the artist at the High's pre-opening night fundraising gala on May 11. The \$250 ticket will allow visitors to meet Leibovitz and discuss the images on display, while enjoying cocktails, dinner and music and raising money to make more exhibits like these possible. Throughout the summer, the exhibition of 175 black-and-white and color photographs will give audiences an idea of how much photography has changed over the last 15 years, with Cox himself leading several gallery discussions.

"It's rare for commercial work to be printed and presented in a museum environment. That is why this is a special opportunity to see the evolution of her talent and her trademark skills over the last decade and a half. The exhibition is a lot of fun. It's the sort of exhibit that will leave people feeling quite uplifted," Cox added. "We are very excited Annie Leibovitz's work is coming here and we feel it will be a great event to have in the spring and summer." ❖

*Photography courtesy of the Woodruff Center.  
Photographer: Anne Leibovitz*

**VISIT THE HIGH**

**Annie Leibovitz:**  
*A Photographer's Life, 1990 – 2005*

**High Museum of Fine Art**  
May 12 – Sept. 9  
[www.high.org](http://www.high.org)