

Skills as a photographer



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Annie Leibovitz was born in Connecticut on the 2nd of October, 1949. She was one of six children born to Sam and Marilyn Leibovitz, a dance instructor. In 1967, Leibovitz registered at the San Francisco Art Institute. She developed a love for photography while on a trip to Japan with her mother in the summer of her sophomore year. That autumn she started classes in photography [1]” I was totally seduced by the wonderment of it all,” she told a writer for Art News. “ To see something that afternoon and have it materialize before your eyes that same day. There was a real immediacy to it. I lived in the darkroom.” A trip to Israel helped her to really develop her skills as a photographer.

While she was still a student at the institute, Rolling Stone magazine gave Leibovitz her first commercial assignment after she approached Jann Wenner, in 1970, the founding editor of Rolling Stone magazine, which he had recently launched. The assignment was to take a picture of the Beatles musician John Lennon. The black and white image of the unkempt rock star was released on the cover of the 1971 issue on January 21st. In 1973 when she was only 23 years old she was given the job of being the magazines main photographer. She held this position for ten years.

In 1974 Rolling Stone began printing the magazine in colour and Leibovitz changed with it. [2]In school, I wasn’t taught anything about lighting, and I was only taught black-and-white,” she told ART news in 1992. “ So I had to learn colour myself.” Using colour Leibovitz created her own signature style, the colours can be described as brilliant perhaps because it printed well. Some of the famous musicians she photographed include Bob Dylan, Bob Marley, and Patti Smith. At first her photographs of celebrities were like

snapshots, where she tried to capture her subject in the moment. But she soon noticed her ability to put people at ease and help them to “let down their guard.” She encouraged her subjects to pose for her doing eccentric or silly things which revealed much more of their personalities than a “straight” portrait ever could. One of Leibovitz’s secrets to her success is researching her subjects before she has the photo shoots with them. She reads or watches their works if possible she spends time observing their daily lives.

However one of the shots that really created her standing as a top photographer is her photo of John Lennon hours before he died. In 1980 Leibovitz was sent to take a photograph of John Lennon and Yoko Ono. Leibovitz had originally planned that the couple would pose together nude. Even though Lennon happily obliged, Ono refused to take off her clothes, much to the disappointment of Leibovitz. She decided to work with Yoko Ono clothed and Lennon naked ““ I was thinking that they had never been embarrassed to take their clothes off, that they could do a nude embrace,” says Leibovitz, who was photographing them for a Rolling Stone cover to mark the release of Double Fantasy, their first album in five years.[3] “ John took his clothes off in a few seconds, but Yoko was very reluctant. She said, ‘ I’ll take my shirt off but not my pants.’ I was kinda disappointed, and I said, ‘ Just leave everything on.’ We took one Polaroid, and the three of us knew it was profound right away..” The final image shows John Lennon nude, curled around a fully dressed Yoko Ono. This shot was used for the cover of the commemorative issue of the Rolling Stone.

Another project which helped push her to the top was her documentation of the 'Rolling Stones' 1975 world tour. The photographs she created while she lived and travelled with the band have been described as being [4]" some of the most eloquent images ever made of the world of Rock and Roll.". This project helped give Leibovitz a big name among the top photographers. However she unfortunately became involved with drugs, being part of the groups entourage and with the burden of her career pushed her towards the usage of cocaine. She has been quoted in Vanity Fair that [5]" I went on that [Rolling Stones] tour to get to the heart of something, to see what it was like." People always talk about the soul of the sitter [in a photograph], but the photographer has a soul, too. And I almost lost it." It took Leibovitz almost five years to get over the tour, which she did and her career continued to take new heights. In one interview Leibovitz talks about the effect being on the Rolling Stone's tour affected her [6] " I've been on many tour buses and at many concerts, but the best photographs I've made of musicians at work were done during that Rolling Stones tour. I probably spent more time on it than on any other subject. For me, the story about the pictures is about almost losing myself, and coming back, and what it means to be deeply involved in a subject. You can get amazing work, but you've got to be careful. The thing that saved me was that I had my camera by my side. It was there to remind me who I was and what I did. It separated me from them."

Over time she became known for her picture of celebrities, some of these photos include Whoopi Goldberg with only her face, arms, and legs peeking out of a bathtub full of milk and the artist Christo wrapped in fabric as if he

was in one of his own pieces of art. Andy Grundberg a well known photography writer and critic has pointed out that Leibovitz “ exaggerates the distinctive characteristic of [the celebrities’] public image in a way that’s funny and deflating.” One of her most controversial photographs was a 1992 Vanity Fair cover. It featured the actress Demy Moore who was nude and pregnant.

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2. [http://www. pbs. org/wnet/americanmasters/episodes/annie-leibovitz/life-through-a-lens/16/](http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/episodes/annie-leibovitz/life-through-a-lens/16/) , 12: 30, 04-12-09
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