

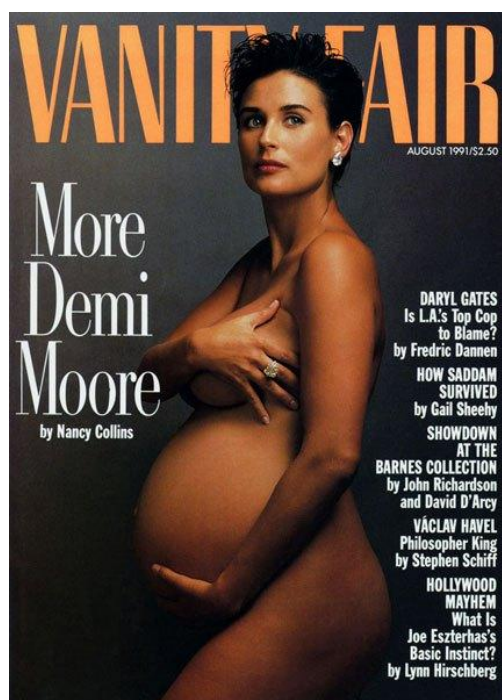
## The Free-Spirited Photography Diva – Annie Leibovitz



**Angelina Jolie**

Whoever says women cannot be creative geniuses needs to have a reality check and must Google ‘Anne Leibovitz’ to learn the immense retaliating power that any lady is endowed with! Born in Waterbury (Connecticut) on October 2, 1949, Leibovitz was the third of six children and was referred to as Anna Lou while she was a little girl.

The name Anne Leibovitz strikes a chord on any photographer’s mind and the images of Demi Moore pregnant on the cover of Vanity Fair, John Lennon clinging to Yoko Ono for dear life and Miles Davis flopped on a bed, pants unzipped, trumpet by his side, one gleaming eye staring out comes flashing in front of the eyes. This marvelous camera-friendly woman acquired the ability of capturing images that were superlative in their honesty. Her pictures range from spontaneously captured reportage to austere abstract portraits have been most profound in displaying the exquisiteness of the subjects which are often enormously visceral in its impact on viewers.



**Pregnant Demi Moore on Vanity Fair Cover**

Born in the house of a lieutenant colonel, she moved frequently with her family because of her father's duty assignments. It was not until she travelled to Japan with her mother that she discovered her interest in capturing photographs. She took her first pictures while being stationed in the Philippines during the Vietnam War. In 1967, Leibovitz entered the San Francisco Art Institute with an intention to study painting but instead, found herself taking night classes in photography (someone has rightly said 'unpredictability' is a woman's asset!).

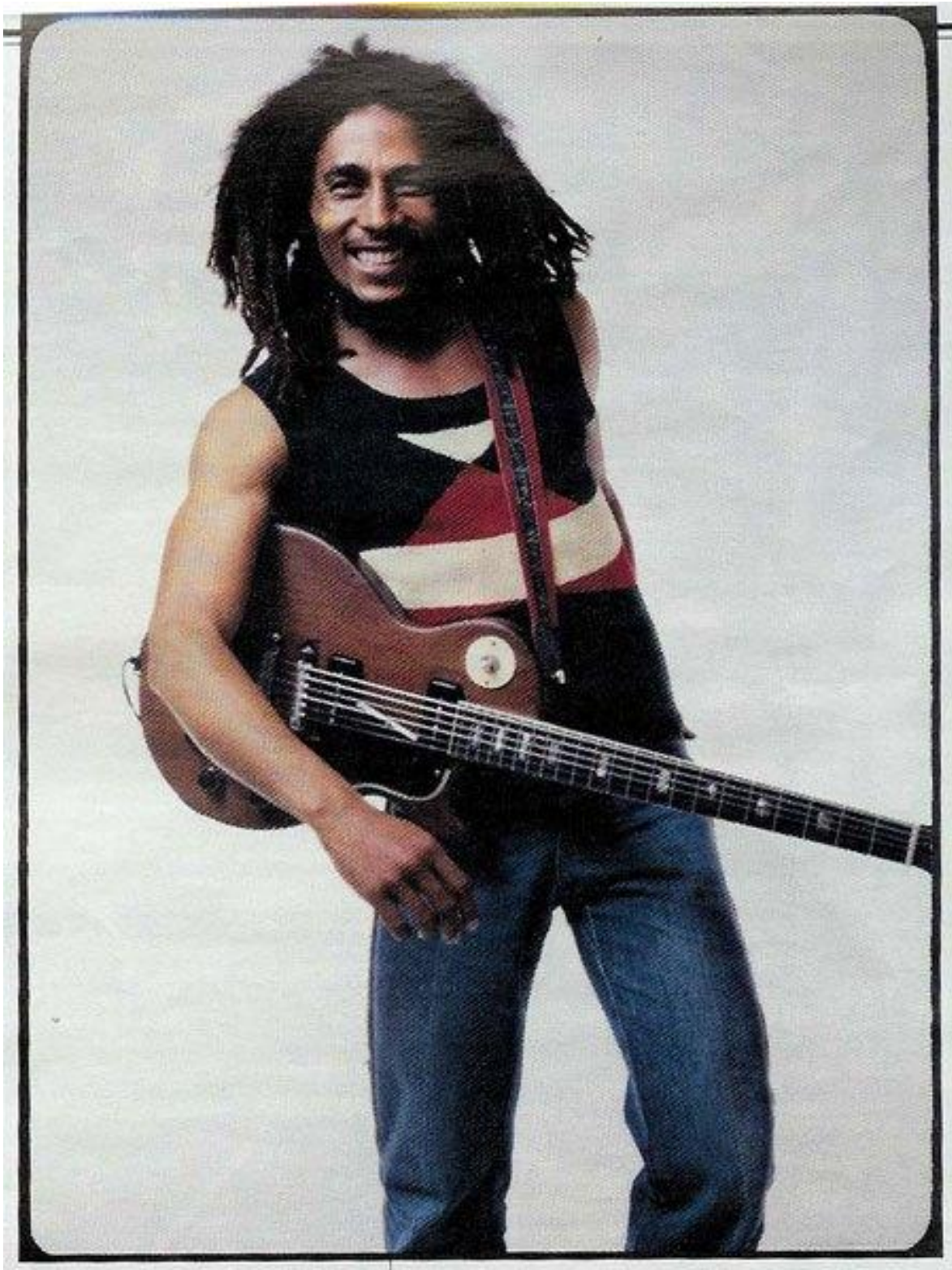
Being the ambitious diva that she was, she lived on a kibbutz in Israel and participated in an archaeological dig at the site of King Solomon's temple in 1969. In 1970, she submitted photographs of this experience to Robert Kingsbury, the former art director of *Rolling Stone*, who hired her to take a portrait of John Lennon. She received a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from the San Francisco Art Institute in 1971 and subsequently continued her studies with photographer Ralph Gibson.



**Meryl Streep**

She dominated the look and feel of *Rolling Stone* for ten years before joining hands with *Vanity Fair*. She continued to be a contributing photographer for *Vanity Fair* magazine from 1983 until she founded the Annie Leibovitz Studio in New York City in early 1990s. She transcended the traditional borders that separated commercial and artistic photography. Her photographs, be it in the glossy magazines or leather-bound books or white-walled galleries or gigantic advertising billboards, are regarded as luminous and enticing.





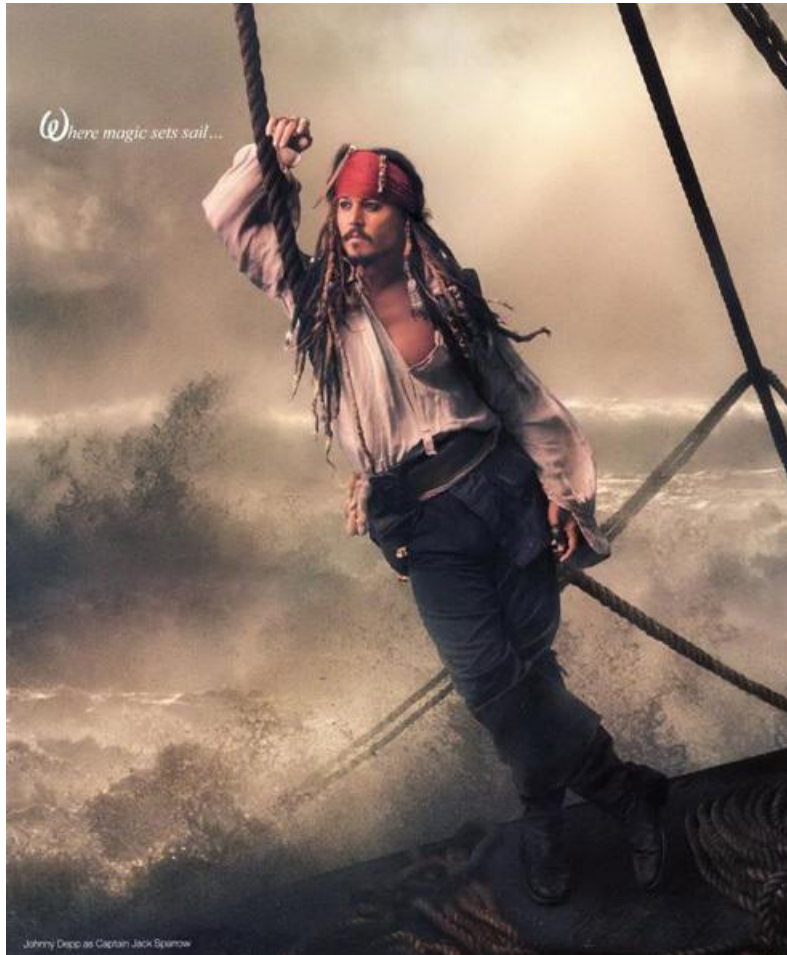
**Bob Marley**

While she continued to scale and grow in her professional career, she experienced personal turmoil that shook her from all sides leaving her with unavoidable financial & emotional hardships. The mother of three, Leibovitz fought to sail through the trauma of her father and longtime companion Susan Sontag's death. Soon after their death, she published a large and dubious book, "A Photographer's Life: 1990-2005," which was regarded as an unholy mix of celebrity portraits and snapshots from her private life, including nude pictures of herself and Sontag, pictures of her family members dying and being born, of the hotels she stayed in and the real estate she owned, of herself pregnant at the age of fifty-one and, most famously, of Sontag laid out on her deathbed in a crinkly black dress. The book displayed grave, unsettling and gloomy emotions! She was financially strapped soon after this release and borrowed millions of dollars against her photographs and real estate assets, leading to bankruptcy.



### Leonardo di Caprio

While many people lose their faith and hope in such circumstances, Leibovitz decided to transform her misfortune into fortune and show the world that 'we all fall into that unpleasant unwanted pit but what matters is how you behave after falling in the pit'. This versatile woman journeyed this mishap only to come shining bright to rule the world of photography yet again. During a gallery talk at the Smithsonian, Leibovitz said, "But bankruptcy is not death. People do come back from it. I'm back."



### Johnny Depp in Disney Campaign



“Pilgrimage” symbolized Leibovitz’s return in the world of name and fame. It was her first project that was not connected to any assignment and her first shot with only a digital camera, which did not show a living soul. Following her passion and paying homage to her (dead) heroes, she started at Niagara Falls, worked her way through New England (home of the Transcendentalists); England (home of the Bloomsbury group); the American West (home of the American sublime); and Washington, D.C. (home of the Lincoln memorial). She took pictures of objects she was drawn to such as Emily Dickinson’s white dress, Virginia Woolf’s writing desk, Annie Oakley’s tiny heart-shaped target pierced by a bullet hole, Sigmund Freud’s Couch and a cast of the veiny hands of Daniel Chester French, sculptor of the Lincoln in the Lincoln Memorial.



**Sigmund Freud’s couch**

Pursuing and continuing to love what she does, Anne mentioned on Voguepedia “I’m more interested in being good than being famous.” This one-in-a-million woman never hesitated to breach the worlds of art, fashion, photography, music and literature to bring out the best in these several art forms. Like portrait photographer Arnold Newman, Leibovitz has contrived in her work to emphasize some aspect of each subject’s public persona. Using the whole of the subject’s body typically captured amidst physical action, she achieves her effects without evident artificiality and with panache that makes her work exclusive and different from that of other portrait artists.

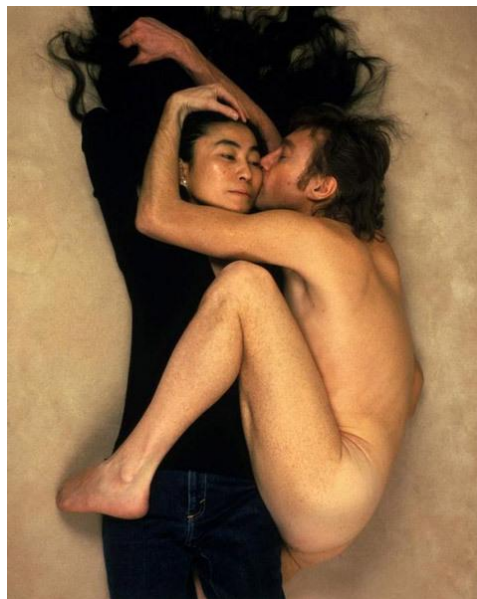


Leibovitz regards her camera as her best companion and confessed in one of the interview, “As a young person, and I know it’s hard to believe that I was shy, but you could take your camera and it would take you to places: it was like having a friend, like having someone to go out with and look at the world. I would do things with a camera I wouldn’t do normally if I was just by myself. I just started walking around and hitchhiking on boats in the Bay Area looking for imagery. To me, it was a very social instrument”.



**Bruce Willis, Ben Affleck and Tobey Maguire**

An artist who was never taught anything about lightings learnt the art of using and experimenting with colours by herself. Justifying the saying ‘Where there is a will, there is a way,’ Anne Leibovitz is best known for her portraits of political figures, musicians and athletes, most of which have been featured regularly in magazines and showcased in the world of fashion and advertisement. Several of her portraits of rock music celebrities have become signature images. A noteworthy example from her works is the (nude) portrait of John Lennon on bed with his fully clothed wife which was the last portrait of Lennon before his death in 1980. Among her other subjects were Bob Dylan, Bob Marley, Patti Smith, Keith Richards, Mick Jagger, Whoopi Goldberg submerged in a bath of milk and so on. Her portraits have timely appeared in renowned magazines such as *The New York Times Magazine*, *Vogue*, *The New Yorker* and also made a positive mark in ad campaigns for American Express, the Gap and the Milk Board.



**John Lennon with Yoko Ono**



Leibovitz was honourably made a Commandeur des Ordre des Arts et des Lettres by the French government and had been designated a living legend by the Library of Congress. Her first museum show - *Photographs: Annie Leibovitz 1970-1990*, took place in 1991 at the National Portrait Gallery in Washington (D.C.) and toured internationally for six years. At this time, she was only the second living portraitist (*the only woman*) to be featured in an exhibition by the institution. Her awards include the American Society of Magazine Photographers (ASMP) Photographer of the Year Award (1984), the ASMP Innovation in Photography Award (1987), the Clio Award and the Campaign of the Decade Award from Advertising Age magazine (1987) and the Infinity Award for applied photography from the International Centre for Photography (1990).



**Tom Cruise, Katie Holmes and Suri Cruise**

Displaying her flashy humor, Anne Leibovitz mocks a photographer's personality saying "Oh! We are all shy. No one knows how to talk. Sometimes we sit in my studio and everywhere is very quiet and no one talks. It drives me crazy... There must be a reason why people who are photographers are not very good at verbal communication. I don't want to believe this, as I think we get lazy. We think because we are photographers we don't have to try to communicate. But I know from my own personal experience that it's hard to watch something to go on and then suddenly to be talking at the same time."



**Scarlett Johansson in Disney Campaign**

Anne Leibovitz is a legendary example for all who aspire and inspire to excel in the field of visual art. She is a prototype and antiphon to all those who regard their personal and professional failures as big giant mountain that cannot be moved. Her life leaves us with a message that being creative also requires being passionate and dedicated to whatever you do in life after all, it is all about living life – be it on camera or off the camera!



**Star Cast of 'The Sopranos'**

*all images © Annie Leibovitz*