

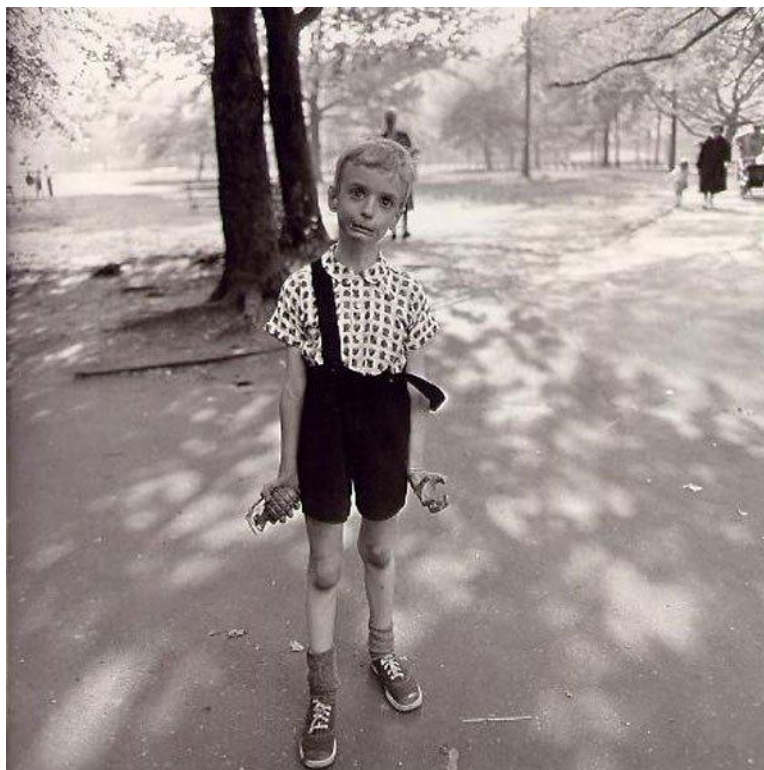
# Diane Arbus

*“I really believe there are things nobody would see if I didn’t photograph them.”*



**Teenage Couple on Hudson Street**

A revolutionary modern photographer, Diane Arbus is a name which has patented the style of black-and-white square photography. Born in New York on March 14, 1923, this writer-cum-photographer became one of the most distinguishing photographers of the 20th century.



**Child with a Toy Hand Grenade in Central Park, New York City**

Diane Nemerov (before marriage) was drawn to art at a young age and created interesting drawings and paintings during her high school. At the early age of 18, she married her childhood sweetheart Allan Arbus (an American actor who encouraged her artistic talent). Allan Arbus being a photographer himself persuaded Diane to learn and practice photography. Together they executed a commercial photography business called “Diane & Allan Arbus,” in which Diane was the art director and her husband worked as a photographer. Together they contributed to renowned magazines such as Glamour, Seventeen, Vogue, Harper’s Bazaar and many more. It is said that they both hated fashion world and yet managed to contribute over 200 pages of fashion editorial in Glamour and over 80 pages in Vogue. Their first daughter Doon went on to become a writer and their second daughter Amy grew up to become a photographer. The couple separated in 1958 and were later divorced in 1969.



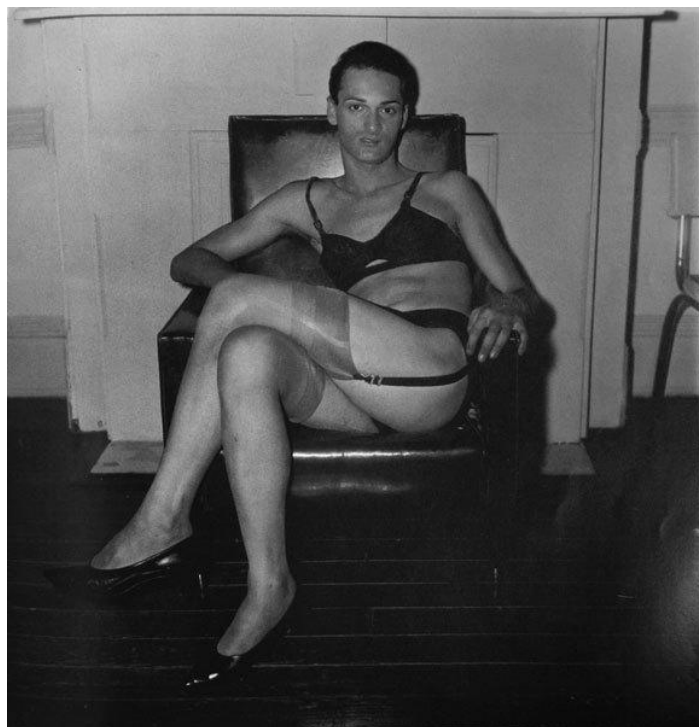
**Triplets in their Bedroom**

In the late 1950s, Diane Arbus went ahead to focus on her own photography. To strengthen this artistic genre, she connected with photographer Lisette Model to study more about photography. Although Diane had studied photography with Berenice Abbott earlier, her learning phase with Lisette Model gave rise to some of Arbus’s most well-known methods and style which is remembered and treasured even today. In 1959, she began photographing on assignment for magazines such as Esquire, Harper’s Bazaar and The Sunday Times Magazine. This artistic youth switched from a 35 mm Nikon camera which produced grainy rectangular images to a twin-lens reflex Rolleiflex camera which produced more detailed square images. This announced the beginning of a ‘never-seen-before’ genre of photography.



**Identical Twins**

Known for her uncanny portraits and off-beat subjects, Diane Arbus began to experiment on her ability to discover the normality in the abnormality (as per society). She set off on the streets of New York, visiting sleazy hotels, public parks, morgue and other various locales where she could capture the subjects in such a way that their normality is their abnormality is seized for a lifetime in that image. She began photographing deviant and marginal people such as dwarfs, nudists, circus performers, giants, transgender people and so on whose normality seems unsightly or bizarre as per societal terms/rules.



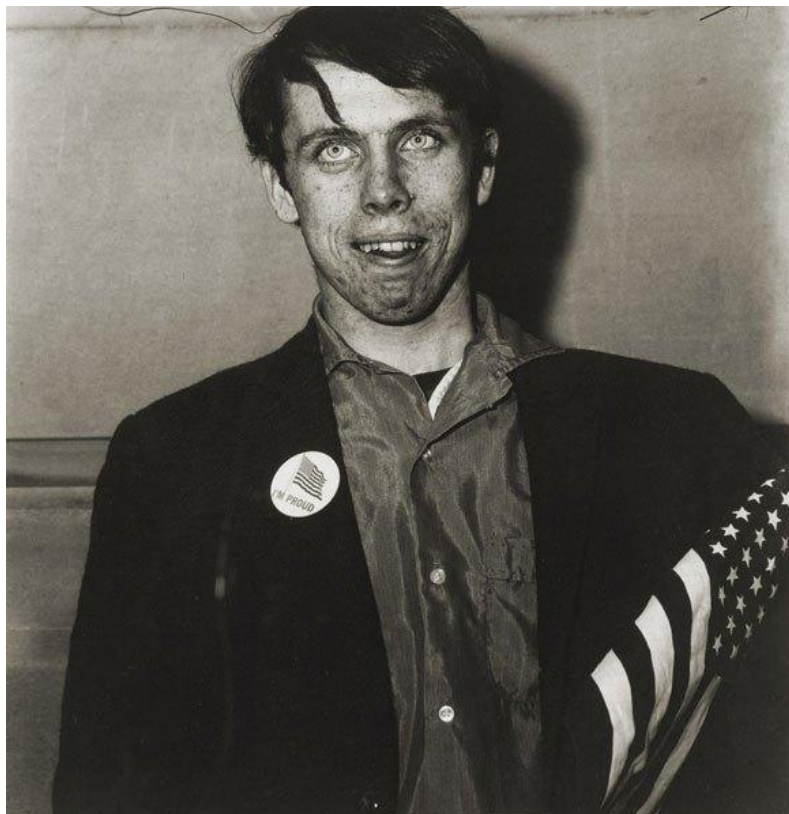
**Transvestite**

Since then, the phrase ‘photographer of freaks’ has been used repeatedly to describe her. Diane Arbus soon became the most unique photographer who was now capable of turning the whole genre of photography upside down.



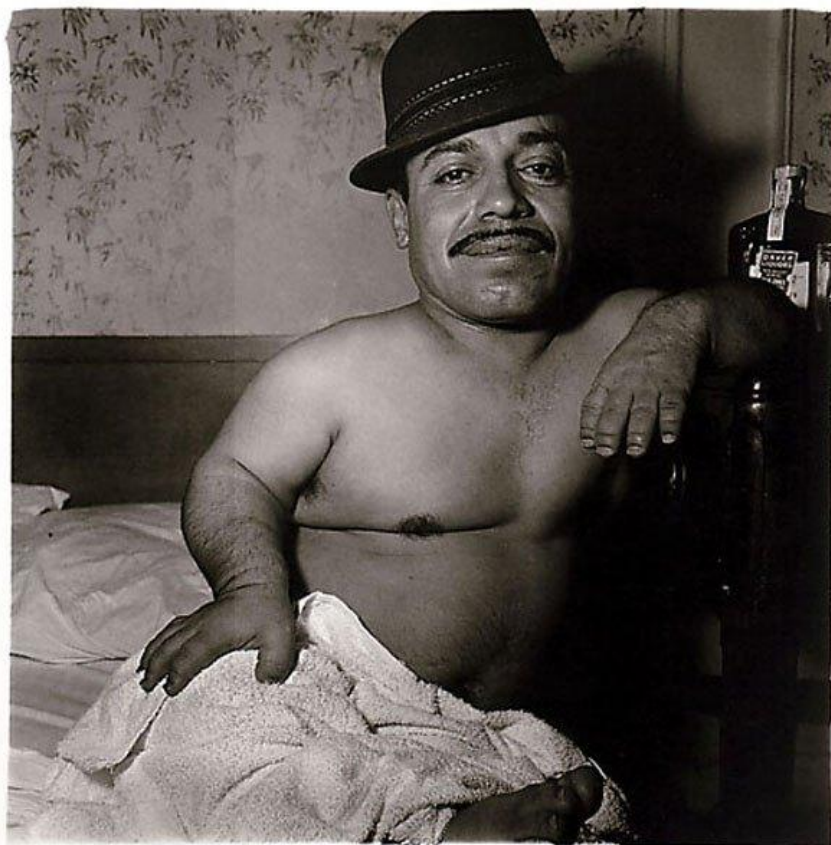
**Giant Jew with his Family**

The most fascinating part of her work was her ability to relate to people! This famous photographer developed a magnetic way of connecting and bonding with her subjects. Her images convey the sense of comfort which the subject(s) experience and this enables Diane to bring out that aspect of subject’s being which Diane says nobody would see if she didn’t photograph them.

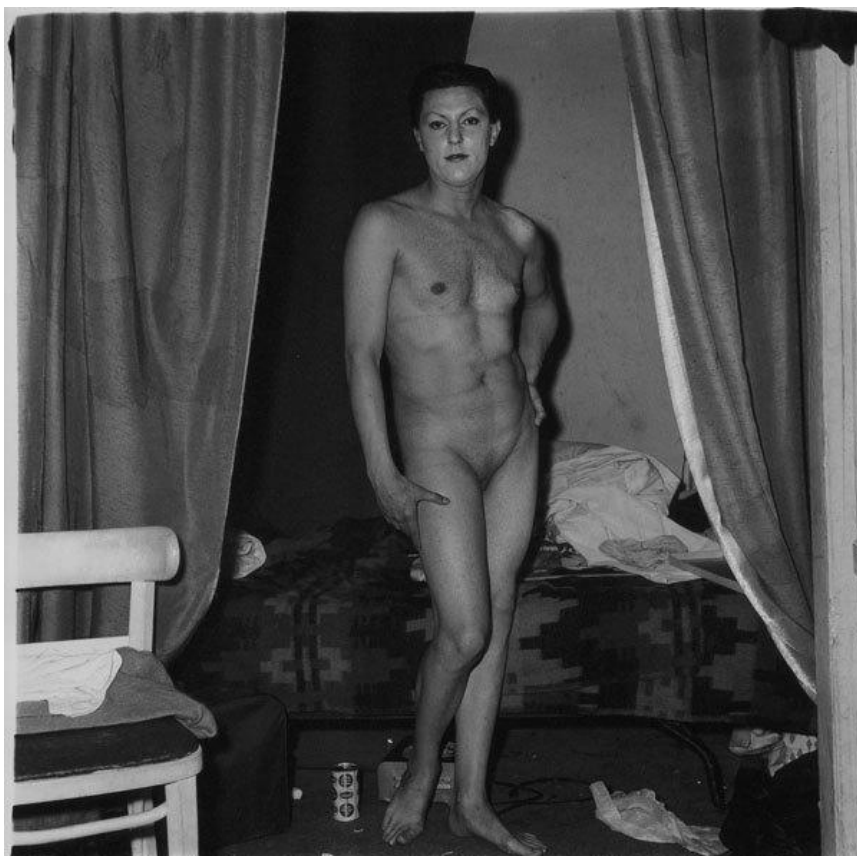


**Patriotic Young Man with a Flag**

The raw, unusual images of the people Diane saw while living in New York created a unique and interesting portrayal of the city. Mexican Dwarf in his hotel room (New York), Identical Twins (portraiture of intense little adults), child with toy Hand Grenade in Central Park, a naked man being a woman and so on are a part of her wackiest photography collection. Her work has drawn more of criticisms than accolades.



**Mexican Dwarf in his Hotel Room**



**Man Posing as a Woman**

One of Diane Arbus's most commendable works include the photographs of a young transvestite taken in 1966. The image is bold in nature and captures the confidence and clarity of the subject about his own living identity. The sheer honesty and sense of comfort display the subject's pride in accepting who they are as individuals and yet not being ashamed of it. Every detail and imperfection of his pale skin is captured in totality by Diane Arbus. His look conveys that he is not afraid to hide anything that belongs to him.



**Young Man with Curlers**

he expressions of these men who Diane captured come across as so honest that it almost becomes unpleasant for the viewers to see those pictures and admire them. She succeeded in capturing her subjects in the most intimate form and yet maintains the comfort in their expressions while they pose in front of the camera. None of her subjects seem afraid to display their imperfections and strangeness which they know would be criticized and witnessed by the whole wide world. Diane's images project the subjects in such a way that it seems like each one of them has taken pride in showing the parts of themselves that are not beautiful. This was the magic of Diane Arbus to bring out the grotesque aspect of human life through subjects who took pride unsightly aspect of their life making it a perfecting living experience.



**Russian Midgets in their Living Room**

To further enhance her photography, Arbus soon began using a twin-lens reflex Mamiya camera with flash in addition to the Rolleiflex. Her methods included using softer light, establishing strong personal relationship with her subjects, re-photographing some of the subjects over the years and so on. In her later years, Diane took series of photographs of people with intellectual disability showing a range of their emotions on-camera.



**Untitled**

This legendary photographer's work attracted many criticisms where the biggies in the industry regarded her work as meaningless place of ugliness, horror, misery, lacking in beauty, an emotional tease and so on. It is rightly said 'reality is indeed hard to digest'.



**Puerto Rican Woman with Beauty Mark**

Diane Arbus not only brought the ugly aspects of life in the forefront but also conveyed through her images that ugly and unsightly aspects of human beings (& life) are not always unpleasant. It can be lived with dignity, honesty and pride even if the society opposes and makes a mockery of such a life.



**A Couple in Nudist Colony**

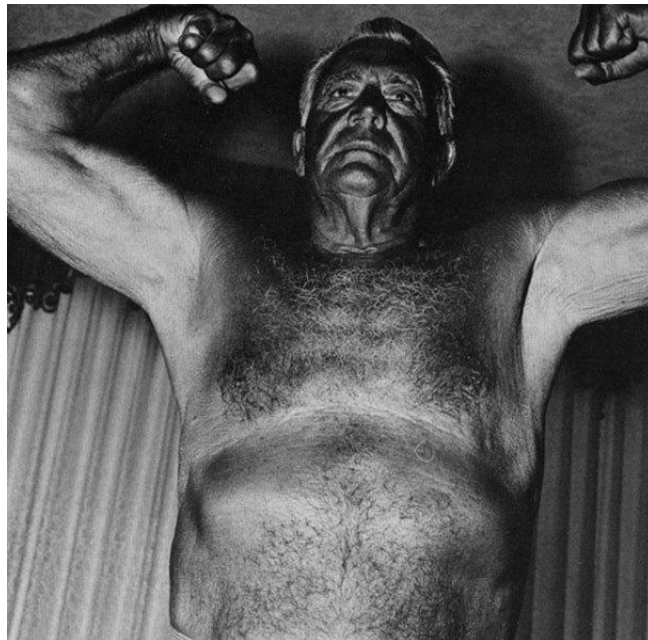


This one-of-its-kind photographer underwent a series of personal challenges and became prone to depression. The career of this revolutionary photographer came to an end when she committed suicide in her New York City apartment on July 26, 1971. Even though she physically left this world, Diane Arbus left a mark of humanity in the form of her works. Her photographic journey continues to remain a subject of deep interest. In 2006, her life was enacted Nicole Kidman (as Arbus) in a film names ‘Fur.’



**Three Ladies**

Diane Arbus’s elder daughter Doon wrote that her mother’s photographs needed protection from “an onslaught of theory and interpretation.” They are, she maintained, “eloquent enough to require no explanations, no set of instructions on how to read them, no bits of biography to prop them up.”



**Charles Atlas**

You can view with some of the selected works of Diane Arbus on her [website](#).

*all images © Diane Arbus*