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## Annie Leibovitz: Life Through a Lens



een film van Barbara Leibovitz

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## Life Through a Lens – synopsis

Barbara Leibovitz heeft het indrukwekkende leven en werk van haar beroemde zus, Annie Leibovitz, proberen samen te vatten in deze documentaire. De film volgt Leibovitz' leven, waarin zij uitgroeit van een enthousiaste kunstacademie-studente tot een van de meest gerespecteerde en prominente fotografen van vandaag de dag.

De film toont de hoogtepunten uit Leibovitz' carrière en gaat na hoe en waarom ze er voor kiest mensen op deze specifieke, theatrale en niet zelden provocerende manier te fotograferen. De film blikt terug op haar relatie met Susan Sontag en de invloed hiervan op Annie's werk. Beroemdheden als Graydon Carter, Hillary Clinton, Bette Midler, Whoopi Goldberg, Mick Jagger, Yoko Ono en Arnold Schwarzenegger, allemaal door Leibovitz vereeuwigd, komen ook aan het woord.

*Dans ce documentaire, Barbara Leibovitz a essayé de résumer la vie et le travail impressionnants de sa sœur réputée Annie Leibovitz. Le film suit la vie de Leibovitz, pendant laquelle elle se développe d'une étudiante enthousiaste à l'académie d'art à l'une des photographes les plus respectés et de premier plan d'aujourd'hui.*

*Le film montre les apogées dans la carrière de Leibovitz et se demande comment et pourquoi elle choisit de photographier les gens de cette manière spécifique, théâtrale et souvent provocante. Le film considère la relation avec Susan Sontag et son influence sur le travail d'Annie. On laisse également parler des célébrités comme Graydon Carter, Hillary Clinton, Bette Midler, Whoopi Goldberg, Mick Jagger, Yoko Ono et Arnold Schwarzenegger, tous éternisés par Leibovitz.*

Barbara Leibovitz has tried to depict the illustrious life and career of her famous sister Annie Leibovitz in this documentary. The film follows the life of Leibovitz, throughout which she develops from an enthusiastic Art Academy student to one of today's most respected and prolific photographers.

The film shows the highlights of her career and asks how and why she decides to picture people in her specific, theatrical and often provoking way. The documentary looks back on her relationship with Susan Sontag and its influence on Annie's work. Celebrities such as Graydon Carter, Hillary Clinton, Bette Midler, Whoopi Goldberg, Mick Jagger, Yoko Ono and Arnold Schwarzenegger, all photographed by Leibovitz, have their say.

### Life Through a Lens

83 min. / 35 mm / kleur - couleur / Engels gesproken - dialogues en anglais / USA / 2006

Nederlandse theatrale distributie: Cinemien  
Belgische theatrale distributie: ABC Distribution  
Distribution en Belgique : ABC Distribution  
DVD uitbreng : Homescreen  
Sortie sur DVD : Homescreen



## Life Through a Lens – crew

Regie / réalisation:

Productie / production:

Camera / caméra:

Uitvoerend producent / producteur exécutif:

Montage:

Geluid / son:

Muziek / musique:

Barbara Leibovitz

Barbara Leibovitz

Alison Kelly

Paul Hardart, Tom Hardart, Susan Lacy

Kristen Huntley Jed Parker

Mark Mandler, sound Roger Phenix

Gaili Schoen



## Life Through a Lens – Over Annie en Barbara Leibovitz

Annie Leibovitz werd geboren in Waterbury, Connecticut in 1949 als een van de zes kinderen uit het gezin. Leibovitz' vader was luitenant-kolonel in de Amerikaanse luchtmacht en haar moeder was dansinstructrice.

Op de middelbare school raakte de jonge Leibovitz al geïnteresseerd in diverse artistieke activiteiten en begon ze met het schrijven en spelen van muziek. Ze raakte geïnteresseerd in fotografie door een reis naar Japan, waar ze haar ouders opzocht. Terwijl ze verschillende baantjes uitprobeerde, waaronder een aantal maanden werk in een kibboets in Israël, ontwikkelde ze haar fotografietalent.

Toen ze weer terug in Amerika was, kwam ze in contact met *Rolling Stone Magazine*. Van het een kwam het ander en Leibovitz werd huisfotograaf van het blad. Haar innemende portretten van beroemdheden werden al snel een handelsmerk. In 1975 toerde ze met de Rolling Stones mee door Amerika als vaste concertfotograaf. Vandaag de dag geldt Leibovitz als een van de meest gerespecteerde en prominente fotografen.

Barbara Leibovitz is Annie's 11 jaar jongere zusje. Ze maakt documentaires voor National Geographic en Discovery Channel.

*Annie Leibovitz est née en 1949 à Waterbury, Connecticut, faisant partie d'une famille de 6 enfants. Le père de Leibovitz était lieutenant-colonel dans la force aérienne américaine et sa mère était professeur de danse.*

*A l'école secondaire, la jeune Leibovitz s'intéressait déjà à de diverses activités artistiques et elle commençait à écrire et à jouer de la musique. Elle commençait à s'intéresser à la photographie pendant un voyage au Japon, où elle visitait ses parents. En essayant plusieurs emplois, parmi lesquels quelques mois de travail dans un kibboutz en Israël, elle développait son talent de photographe.*

*A son retour en Amérique, elle est entrée en contact avec Rolling Stone Magazine. Leibovitz est devenue la photographe fixe du magazine. Ses portraits engageants de célébrités sont devenus rapidement une marque commerciale. En 1975, elle a fait un tour aux États-Unis avec les Rolling Stones en tant que photographe de concert fixe. Aujourd'hui, Leibovitz passe pour l'une des photographes les plus respectés et éminents.*

*Barbara Leibovitz est la petite soeur d'Annie (elle a 11 ans de moins qu'Annie). Elle fait des documentaires pour National Geographic et Discovery Channel.*



## Life Through a Lens – About the documentary

It's 1972, the year of Watergate, *The Godfather* and *Exile on Main Street*. A grainy, shaky Super 8 film comes into focus and we see a young Anna-lou Leibovitz peering into a Nikon as her family scrambles into place on a suburban Maryland lawn. Although Leibovitz is Rolling Stone's chief photographer, this event - her first turn as the official family photographer - is as important to her as any arena concert or movie shoot.

Flash forward 34 years to 2006. This time, the now-famous photographer is on the other side of the lens. And this time, her younger sister Barbara is pointing the camera, documenting the life and times of Annie Leibovitz for AMERICAN MASTERS.

"I wasn't one of those photographers that started when I was 12 and always wanted to be a photographer," says Leibovitz, who now ranks alongside Richard Avedon, Margaret Bourke-White and Irving Penn. "It really was a much slower awareness. It all came from the same place of wanting to do art, wanting to do - something - to express yourself."

The 90-minute film is the finale of the 20th anniversary season of AMERICAN MASTERS, a five-time winner of the Emmy Award for Outstanding Primetime Non-Fiction Series and a recent recipient of its seventh Peabody Award. Annie Leibovitz is directed by Barbara Leibovitz and is a co-production of Thirteen/WNET New York, Adirondack Pictures and Ranoah Productions Inc.

"Through the decades, Annie Leibovitz has chronicled our cultural history. Her museum-quality portraits transcend celebrity photography," says Susan Lacy, creator and executive producer of AMERICAN MASTERS. "We go behind the scenes and on location with an artist who is as famous as her subjects, where we see first-hand the incredible passion she brings to every assignment. And we're privileged to see a more personal dimension of Annie Leibovitz -the sister, the daughter and the mother of three."

Given unrestricted access, director Barbara Leibovitz spent a year documenting Annie Leibovitz at home and at work. "As her sister, I feel a serious responsibility not only to tell her story - but to tell it honestly," says Barbara Leibovitz, a writer, director and producer of award-winning documentaries. "It was a challenge, but I learned more about my sister than I ever imagined."

Barbara and Annie Leibovitz spent years talking about collaborating on a film, but waited until both felt the time was right. In December 2004, Annie Leibovitz's long-time partner, writer and critic Susan Sontag, died of cancer. Six weeks later, her father died. As part of the grieving process, Leibovitz pored through and cried over decades of photographs. Last summer, when she began selecting images for her latest book, her sister began filming the creative process.

During numerous interviews - in the Manhattan studio, at home in upstate New York, rushing to airports, coming off exhaustive shoots - Leibovitz opens up about her artistic influences and work ethic as well as her frustrations. She also talks about the emotional impact of Sontag's death and her struggle to maintain balance between career and motherhood.

Showing the photographer in action, Barbara Leibovitz documents numerous photo shoots, including those of Mikhail Baryshnikov, Robert Hughes, Melania Trump, Robert Downey Jr. and Keira Knightley for Vogue, and Vanity Fair's "green issue" with Julia Roberts, George Clooney and Robert Kennedy Jr. The camera also shadows Leibovitz at the Palace of Versailles in France, where she shot Kirsten Dunst for a Vogue cover on Sofia Coppola's new film, *Marie Antoinette*.

Film shoots always follow days of intense preparation and research, which Barbara Leibovitz tracks in cinema-verite style. Interviews with stylists, art directors and editors such as Vogue's Anna Wintour and Vanity Fair's Graydon Carter reveal Leibovitz as a force of nature, by turns tough, demanding and formidable, a perfectionist who's logged millions of miles on assignment for the best-known magazines in the world.

"When Annie started at Rolling Stone, we had the time, the access, and most importantly, she had the love of the subject and the desire to do it," says Rolling Stone editor Jann Wenner, who began working with

Leibovitz in 1970 after she walked into the magazine's San Francisco offices with her portfolio. "She was with people who are close to her heart and who shared the same values, and came out of the same milieu. And stood for the same things. She achieves a level of understanding and depth for these people that has only been repeated, really, in her personal photography...these were the people close to her heart."

In the film, Leibovitz displays a limitless capacity to stretch herself artistically through constant reinvention, proving exactly why she is one of only two living photographers whose work the National Portrait Gallery has chosen to exhibit. Her iconic photographs of celebrity faces and bodies - painted, nude, covered in mud and even white-face - are stories in themselves, revelations of the cultural zeitgeist. Most are instantly recognizable: a shirtless Arnold Schwarzenegger atop a white stallion, Pete Townshend and his bloody hand, sweat-soaked Rolling Stones, Whoopi Goldberg in a tub of milk, a naked John Lennon with a fully-clothed Yoko.

By now, the story of the last Lennon photo is part of the Lennon lore. It was taken hours before the musician - the subject of one of Leibovitz' early Rolling Stone covers - was shot and killed outside his home in New York City. In the film, Ono says, "She was one of us. She captured the spirit of us."

The long friendships Leibovitz forged with numerous subjects led to incredibly intimate photographs. As a personal favor, she took Demi Moore's wedding photos and first photographed her nude when she was pregnant with her first child. None of the photos were ever published. The famous Vanity Fair cover shot came three years later. Her photographs of women - from Meryl Streep and Lauren Hutton to Ann Richards and Hillary Clinton - are as much about female strength and individuality as they are about beauty and fame.

While she's known worldwide for these celebrity photographs, Leibovitz moves just as easily from war zones and Olympic stadiums to rock arenas and ballet rehearsals. As versatile as she is curious, she's covered both the O.J. Simpson trial and the World Cup.

Leibovitz, who was born in Connecticut, began taking photos in the late 1960s on a kibbutz in Israel and as a student at the San Francisco Art Institute. Before that, she hop scotched around the country from one military base to another with her parents and five siblings. Her father, Sam Leibovitz, was in the Air Force, which he rejoined at age 38 during economic hard times. Her mother, Marilyn, a dancer, graduated college at 19 and, at 20, was married and a mother. As her children grew, she put on dance shows at military bases, always taking pictures and shooting home movies, some of which are seen in Annie Leibovitz. Her interview in the film provides texture to those early family years.

Ultimately, Annie Leibovitz is a portrait of a contemporary working photographer, ever looking to the future.

## Life Through a Lens – Interview with Annie Leibovitz

### My time with Susan

From the outside, it looked like an odd relationship - Annie Leibovitz, celebrity photographer, and Susan Sontag, writer and intellect. Yet they were a couple for 15 years, travelling the world and sharing their lives. Now Leibovitz has put together her images of Sontag in a book to tell their story. Interview by Emma Brockes

Over the course of their 15-year friendship, Susan Sontag would often complain to Annie Leibovitz that, despite being one of the most famous photographers in the world, she never took any pictures whenever they went out together. It's a complaint that Leibovitz has had cause to look back on, lately, as a grim kind of irony: during the last weeks of Sontag's life, Leibovitz forced herself to take photographs and now, nearly two years after her friend's death, she has published them in a book. There will be some who think she should not have done.

A Photographer's Life: 1990-2005 is Leibovitz's photographic account of the years during which the two women knew each other, and the pictures are both personal, of her parents, siblings and children, and professional -of Demi Moore, Arnold Schwarzenegger and the other Hollywood stars Leibovitz shot for the cover of Vanity Fair - as well as landscapes, war reportage and portraits of the unfamous. Interspersed are pictures of Sontag and herself as they travelled around the world together, at their flat in Paris and their homes in New York, where they lived in apartments directly opposite each other. In public at least, they never referred to themselves as a couple. "Words like 'companion' and 'partner' were not in our vocabulary," Leibovitz says. "We were two people who helped each other through our lives. The closest word is still 'friend'."

We are in Leibovitz's office in New York and she exudes a kinetic energy that takes her to the window and back several times; her hair's kind of crazy and there's a heft to her that for some reason makes me think she's the sort of person who, if her bag were snatched in the street, would sprint after the thief and snatch it right back. She is not long returned from her most recent, hugely publicised shoot of Tom Cruise, Katie Holmes and their baby at their ranch in Colorado. (Leibovitz wanted the whole family, including the in-laws, to be included in the photographs, but "Tom wanted it to be about the baby... It was his call and I wanted him to be happy.") An article in the New York Times suggested the whole thing was in bad taste and not up to Leibovitz's high standard, to which she snappishly responds, "You know, they are baby pictures. That is what they are."

From the outside it looked like an odd match: Leibovitz's movie-star razzle and Sontag's literary seriousness. But Leibovitz says that although Sontag loved a nine-hour German documentary as much as the next intellectual, it was she who would drag Leibovitz to see cheesy films starring Keanu Reeves, rather than the other way round. Some of the most moving photographs in the book show a different side to Sontag, a side "where you see her vulnerability. Everyone thinks she was so strong, and she was, but she was also very vulnerable. When I walked into the apartment where I first met her, she had these little collections of rocks and shells." There is a photograph of the round, smooth pebbles from Sontag's collection that appears in the book just after pictures of her death. "They become symbolic, of course, because..." Leibovitz's voice dies. "For obvious reasons."

The two met at a photo shoot in 1988, when Leibovitz took publicity pictures for Sontag's book, *Aids And Its Metaphors*. Leibovitz was 39, Sontag 55. "She was just the person I wanted to meet, at the right time," Leibovitz says, which is to say someone who by virtue of her own extraordinary qualities would encourage Leibovitz to be the best that she could be. They admired each other's ambition. They made each other laugh. "It was this wonderful moment."

Leibovitz grew up one of six children. Her father was in the air force, her mother was a housewife and teacher, and if she talks loudly and is impatient then it is partly, she says, due to this large and noisy family

background. After school, she enrolled as an art student at the San Francisco Art Institute and signed up for a module in photography. Leibovitz wasn't yet 20 when she sent some examples of her work to Rolling Stone and was hired on the spot by the art director. She would work at the magazine for the next 13 years, going on the road with the biggest bands, exploiting her youth and talent for unobtrusiveness to get the best access. By the early 1980s she was ready to move on and Vanity Fair had the polish, and the budget, to win her.

The move to Vanity Fair brought with it new frustrations. Leibovitz was used to working alone. Now she had whole studios of people at her disposal and she found it cumbersome. Although her working manner is mild and thoughtful, she has been known to yell at people, for example when a studio assistant fails to read her mind. A friend once told her she had anger issues and Leibovitz concedes that this may well have been the case, once, but that she has definitely improved; having children, she says, has forced patience on her.

Within weeks of Sontag's death, Leibovitz's father died of lung cancer and there are photographs of him in the book, too, which bear a weird resemblance to those of Sontag in her last days, as if to prove a point about the democracy of death. The book, she says, "came out of grief". But it came out of life, also; Leibovitz gave birth to her daughter Sarah in 2001, with Sontag at her hospital bedside. After Sontag's death in December 2004, she had twins Susan and Samuelle - her father's name was Samuel - with the aid of a surrogate mother. The book is therefore "about life and the life cycle". It has a moral force to it.

In the early days of their relationship, Sontag was ambivalent about Leibovitz's desire to have children. "I think she wanted me to herself. I think she didn't think I was serious enough. 'Let's talk about it when you're serious about it,' she would say. And I made a decision myself to have children and then she was very supportive. But it took me making my own decision. She loved Sarah. She just loved Sarah."

Leibovitz was 51 when Sarah was born. She never intended to wait that long, she says, but the time flew by and she was always absorbed in her work. Her own parents supported her decision to have a baby and, because she lived in New York, she was insulated from a certain amount of the disapproval directed at mothers of her age. It's still taboo, though, and I wonder if she feels it.

"Oh, I've given up feeling... I mean, I've broken so many of those things, although I feel very conventional in some ways." She imagines that one day her children will rage at her for their unconventional beginnings and she hopes, if they do, it will be helpful for them to have each other. Second time round, she says, "I felt a little stupid that I didn't consider it might be twins, because with in vitro [fertilisation], multiple birth is very common. I remember my mother rang me up and said, how are you going to cope and I said, I'm not going to. I mean, it's going to be terrible for the first five years. But there's a picture in the book of Sarah and Susan, and that says it all. She's just holding that baby and she's so proud."

Leibovitz was by Sontag's bedside when she was receiving treatment for cancer. The hardest photos in the book relate to these times, and before deciding to publish them, Leibovitz consulted a small circle of Sontag's friends. There was controversy within the group, but in the end they supported a decision to publish. Leibovitz wanted to show what illness looks like and what courage looks like, too. "She didn't want to die. She put up... She wanted to live. She wanted to write more books. That last year of her life, she fought this fight, it was unbelievable. And she was so brave. It was amazing. It was too much. There's this question: how can you publish these pictures? Well, you could never publish them while she was alive. But she's dead. And that's the bottom line." She pauses. "Susan loved the good fight. And there's no doubt in my mind - and I do this as if she was standing behind me - that she would be championing this work."

Leibovitz's great regret is that she wasn't there when Sontag died. By that stage, late 2004, she was shuttling between Sontag's bedside and that of her desperately ill father in Florida. The day she left her, Sontag was looking rough, but she was undergoing last-minute chemotherapy and Leibovitz had seen her that sick before. "And so I kissed her goodbye and I said I love you and she said I love you." Hours later, as she walked through the door in Florida with Sarah, anxious to settle the little girl down, she got a call from David, Sontag's son, saying that it didn't look good and she should come straight back. "I said, 'Do you think I can take the first flight in the morning?' And he said, 'Yes, yes, I think that'd be fine. We have time.' I was in the airport waiting [the next morning] and they called me to say she had died. And they kept her there for me. But she was gone." Leibovitz told the undertaker, "I don't want any make-up on her. I don't want any of that

crap." She took a photograph of Sontag lying on the gurney, bruises from an IV still vivid on her arms.

It wasn't until some time afterwards that she started looking through photographs. Leibovitz wanted to put together a memorial book to give to friends and family, and started finding images she didn't know she had. The meaning of a photograph changes when the person in it dies, and so it was that she started to see shapes forming and a line coming together. The opening photograph in the book is of Sontag standing in a canyon in Jordan, a tiny figure surrounded by darkness, looking out towards the light. "I was using her for scale, but it became a symbolic picture of Susan and her love of travel and civilisation and nature and art." If, as Sontag complained, Leibovitz skimmed on taking photographs during the normal run of things, it was because "the more you know about someone, the harder it is to take. It has to do with knowing how they imagine they see themselves. And I think that when you love them, you don't want to disappoint them."

Leibovitz sold the New York apartment that overlooked Sontag's and is selling their apartment in Paris. But she is as in demand as ever and the work goes on. "The moment I put this book together, I felt such a sense of strength and something from Susan, something Susan gave me from her death. And she is still giving me things. It's funny because - although in the end she wanted her diaries published - Susan always said she felt that art really had to rise above the personal." Leibovitz disagrees.

Bron: The Guardian



## Life Through a Lens – tentoonstelling / exposition Annie Leibovitz

Op 17 juni begint de tentoonstelling 'Annie Leibovitz: A photographer's life' in Parijs. Daar zullen haar foto's te bewonderen zijn in het Maison Européenne de la Photographie tot 14 september. Daarna verhuist de collectie naar de National Portrait Gallery in Londen waar ze te zien zal zijn van 16 oktober tot 25 januari.

Le 17 juin commence l'exposition 'Annie Leibovitz: A photographer's life' à Paris. Vous pouvez y aller regarder ses photos à la Maison Européenne de la Photographie, jusqu'au 14 septembre. Après, l'exposition sera déplacée vers la National Portrait Gallery à Londres, où elle restera du 16 octobre au 25 janvier.

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