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Richard Avedon, the Eye of Fashion, Dies at 81

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In 1962 Eugene Ostroff, a curator at the Smithsonian Institution, offered Mr. Avedon his first museum exhibition. He seized the offer as a chance to experiment with presenting his pictures outside the pages of a book or magazine, insisting on an installation in which his prints overlapped and filled every inch of space on the walls.

By the 1970's Mr. Avedon was becoming increasingly conscious of the recognition of photography in the art world, and of his own place in the artistic traditions of the medium. He served as the editor of the book "Diary of a Century: Photographs by Jacques-Henri Lartigue" (1970), helping to bring greater acclaim to a photographer who has since been recognized as one of the most original camera artists of the last century. In 1974 his searing portrait series of his terminally ill father was exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and in 1975 a large exhibition of his portraits was presented at the Marlborough Gallery. The two shows catapulted his work into the center of the growing discussion about photography's power as a contemporary art form.

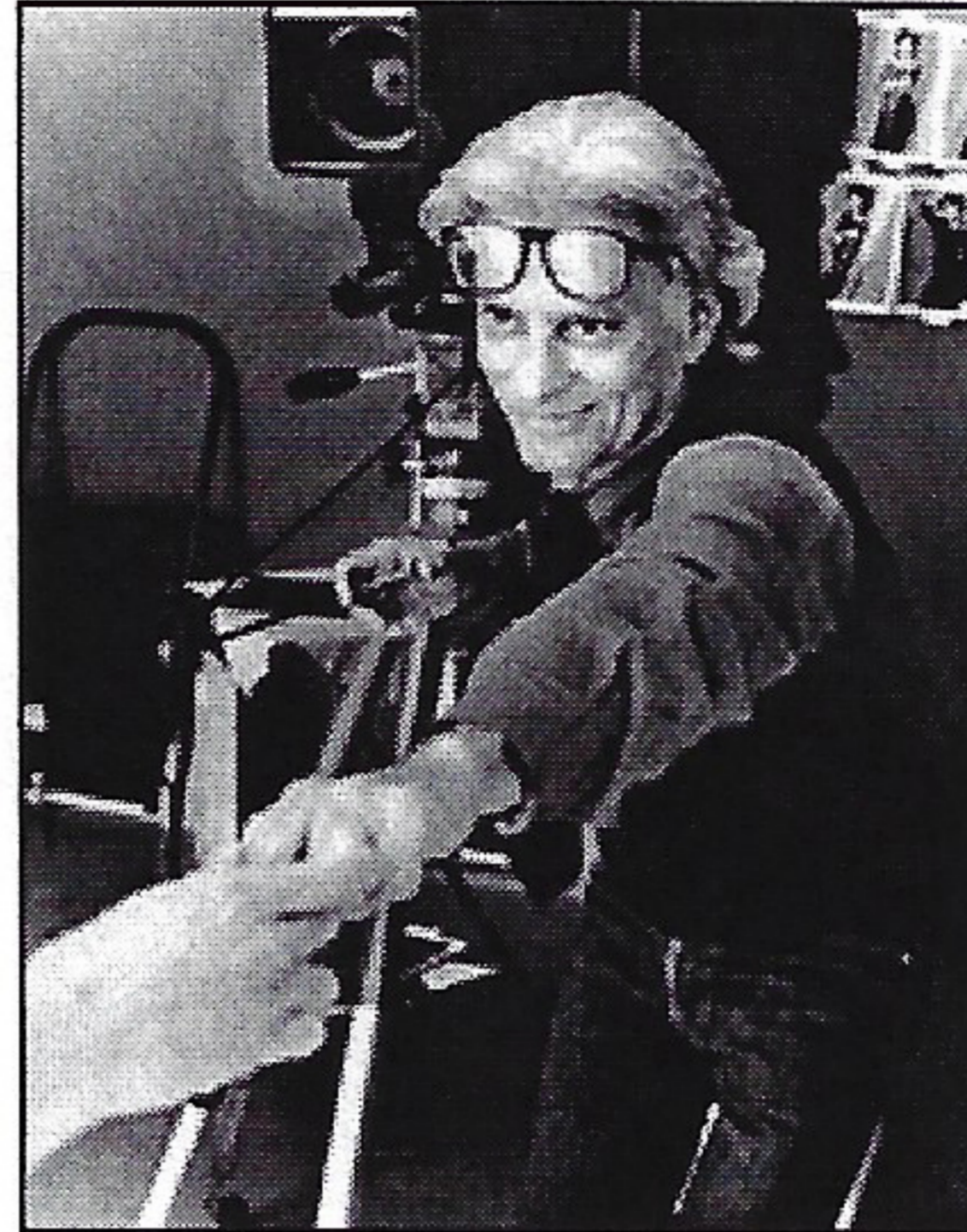
Larger-Than-Life Prints

Two years later a retrospective exhibition of his fashion and portrait photography, "Richard Avedon: Photographs 1947-1977," was organized at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and subsequently traveled to museums in Dallas, Atlanta and Tokyo. In 1980 another retrospective was organized by the University Art Museum in Berkeley. Both exhibitions featured larger-than-life, finely detailed black-and-white prints with the black edges of the negatives included as part of the picture.

Mr. Avedon was capable of being profound and succinct in both pictures and words. His definition of a portrait is a model of concision: "A photographic portrait is a picture of someone who knows he's being photographed, and what he does with this knowledge is as much a part of the photograph as what he's wearing or how he looks."

In 1982 Mr. Avedon produced a playfully inventive series of advertisements for Christian Dior, based on the idea of film stills. Featuring a stock cast of models and actors, the color photographs purported to show scenes from the life of a fictional "Dior family," whose members managed to wear elegant fashions even when wrestling on a couch.

While continuing to maintain a hectic pace of picture-taking at an age when many would have sought retirement, Mr. Avedon also spent his last years reflecting on his considerable archive of photographs and attempting to organize the pictures in a way that would summarize his



Patrick Demarchelier/Reuters

Richard Avedon's fashion and portrait photographs helped define America's image of style, beauty and culture for the last half-century.

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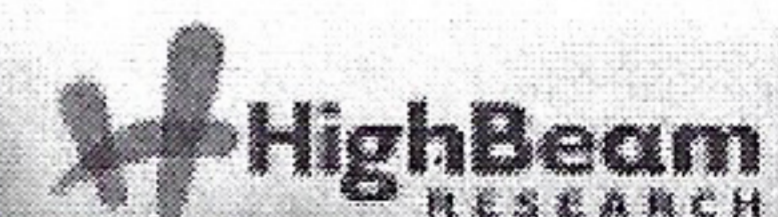
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own life. His long-awaited "Autobiography," published in 1993, turned out to be not the expected verbal explanation of his career, but a visual narrative that mixed old and new pictures, fashion and portraiture, family snapshots and reportage. It included pictures of his father, mother and stepmother; his sister, Louise; his first wife, Dorcas Norwell, a former model from whom he was divorced; his second wife, Evelyn, from whom he was also divorced; their son, John, and his children.

In addition to his son, he is survived by four grandchildren.

Mr. Avedon's photographs are in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Minneapolis Art Museum, the National Museum of American History, the Smithsonian Institution, the Amon Carter Museum of Art and many other museums in the United States and abroad.

"A portrait is not a likeness," Richard Avedon said at the time of "In the American West. "The moment an emotion or fact is transformed into a photograph it is no longer a fact but an opinion. There is no such thing as inaccuracy in a photograph. All photographs are accurate. None of them is the truth."


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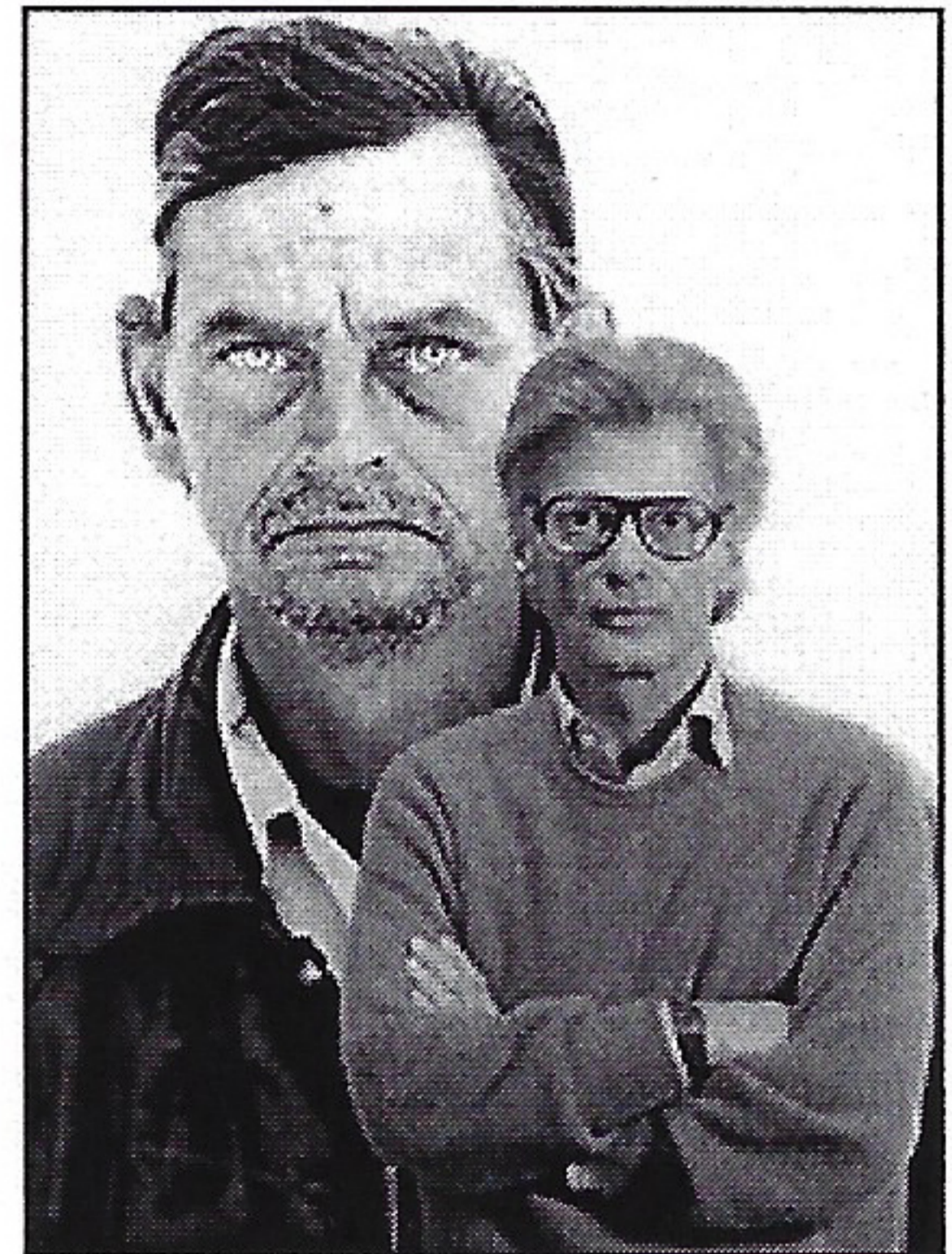
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Jack Manning/The New York Times
Mr. Avedon with a photograph
from his book "In The American
West."