

# STILL LIFE

HER ON-SCREEN APPEARANCES HAVE EARNED HER WIDESPREAD RECOGNITION (AND AN OSCAR), BUT DIANE KEATON IS EQUALLY COMFORTABLE BEHIND THE LENS

by sue hostetler

**I**n person, Diane Keaton is as gorgeous, quirky and self-deprecating as the characters she plays on-screen. The Academy Award winner (*Annie Hall*) and nominee (*Reds*, *Marvin's Room*, *Something's Gotta Give*) is intensely funny and human, with a vulnerability that immediately pulls you in. But what many of her fans might not know is that beyond comedic and dramatic acting — *Mad Money*, her most recent film, was released this year — she has a rich, fulfilling personal life and a longtime passion: photography. Keaton made headlines in the New York art world this past May in Manhattan, at the 24th Annual Infinity Awards of the International Center of Photography (ICP). She received the special Trustees Award, which recognizes her dedication to the field of photography, including her commitment to rescuing important archives of work. As a contribution to the ICP's permanent collection, Keaton also donated images taken by the late Bill Wood, a commercial photographer from Fort Worth, Texas. Over the past 25 years, she purchased 20,000 negatives of Wood's archived work and co-curated a show at the ICP with a good friend of hers, photo essayist and book packager Marvin Heiferman. The two of them wrote essays for *Bill Wood's Business*, the photography book that accompanied the exhibition.

Keaton herself is an accomplished photographer. In 1980 she published *Reservations*, which featured her own black-and-white photographs of hotel lobbies and banquet halls. In *The New York Review of Books*, writer Larry McMurtry admired her images, describing them as “haunting.” And as a personality, she has earned the admiration of her peers. Former *Friends* actor Lisa Kudrow, who starred with Keaton in *Hanging Up* (2000), calls her “fascinating — someone who loves everything she does.” For Keaton, *everything* encompasses a lot. At age 62, she has directed several major films and television series and written seven books on home design and photography. As a board member of the prestigious Los Angeles Conservancy, she is a dedicated preservationist of California architecture. And she has a new endeavour in progress: creating a line of home accessories.

I caught up with the ever-busy single mother of two — daughter Dexter, 12, and son Duke, 7 — before she arrived in New York, and then again once she was in town to accept her ICP award. At both the gala and the exhibition opening, Keaton looked glamorous — one evening in a chic starched button-down white shirt and voluminous black and white polka-dot skirt, her impossibly tiny waist cinched with a wide black leather belt; the next night in a black mid-calf coat dress paired with black leggings to the ankle and sky-high Louboutin heels.

As we chatted, one thing becomes crystal-clear to me. Diane Keaton is of that rare breed of women who, as time goes by, look perennially young, have a distinct sense of style and are always fascinating.



DIANE KEATON, PHOTOGRAPHED BY RON GALELLA, AT THE 1976 ACADEMY AWARDS

**Sue Hostetler: How did you first become interested in photography?**

Diane Keaton: I've always loved photography. I didn't have any kind of artistic background or education in it, but my mother was very visual and there was always this keen appreciation of photography. My mother entered a collage of mine in a county fair to be judged by real artists and I won third place! Our whole family was so excited. We weren't visually inclined — we were naive and we had no craft — but then my mother took up photography in her 30s. [Eventually] I bought a camera and we all learned how to do the darkroom stuff. We were homegrown. But now, my brother, Randy Hall — he's two years younger than I am — he's a real artist, a collage artist. His work is astonishing.

**SH: How did you originally meet your collaborator, Marvin Heiferman?**

DK: Way back in the late '70s, I would always go to [Manhattan gallery] Castelli Graphics, which Marvin ran, and we became friendly. And then I was doing this book of hotel lobbies called *Reservations* — this was after *Annie Hall* — and he gave it a little show. Eventually we did a book together, *Still Life* [a collection of the publicity photographs created by Hollywood studios in the mid-20th century].

**SH: Do you respond more to photography than to, say, sculpture or some other art form?**

DK: I think photography was something I could appreciate as an audience, and also it was easy. As I said, my family has no craft. When I did *Reservations*, I did all of the printing of my photographs myself — and they were lousy!

**SH: Do you think that still photography is a more accessible or relevant medium to most people in the world than, let's say, film?**

DK: It's the most accessible medium of all and it hasn't diminished. It's a huge business. Even though we have moving images, nothing will replace the still.

**SH: Do you have an all-time favourite photographer or photographer?**

DK: I don't. I'm very Catholic, you know — I like everything! I have a very large visual library at home. I like Robert Adams a lot. He reminds me of growing up in California, in the West. There is something very haunting and poetic about his work. He's responsible to nature and very emotional.

**SH: Why are you so interested in vernacular photography [everyday-life images by amateur photographers]? Why donate your Bill Wood collection to a museum?**

DK: Back in the late '70s, there was a book by Larry Sultan and Mike Mandel called *Evidence*, and there was also *Wisconsin Death Trip* by Michael Lesy. Both were compilations of old photographs and I appreciated them. I remember thinking that I would like to be part of this group of urban archeologists, digging up the past visually through photography. As for the donation to the ICP, I [used to] go there when it was on 94th Street. I was in analysis then, and on my way I would pass by that beautiful mansion. So I would always go in. And I loved the bookstore. I used to go to the shows and buy their books. I finally finished printing the contact sheets [of Wood's work] last year. It was a slow process — I was moving around a lot and I adopted my kids — but I printed some photographs as unusual Christmas gifts and then wondered if anybody would bite. I called Marvin to come take a look and he found them unique. He presented them to the ICP and they said yes. I was thrilled!

**SH: What makes Wood's work so compelling to you as a photographer and a collector?**

DK: It's just an utterly fascinating document about mid-century America. Wood has shot everything that could be shot. Not just studio work specifically or something for newspapers, but middle-class people and their version of themselves and what they thought was valuable about Fort Worth.

**SH: How did it feel to receive the prestigious ICP Trustees Award, to be included with respected geniuses in photography?**

DK: I probably don't really deserve it. But maybe what it will do is stimulate me even more to find — and save — more images that could disappear, to make other people realize how exciting photography is as an art form.

**SH: The great photographer Robert Frank recently gave an interview in Vanity Fair where he talked about all that he has sacrificed in his lifetime for his art. Should your art be worth dying for?**

DK: I can't believe you asked me that! I can understand dying to save your children, but being alive is surely more important than the value of your art. I guess sometimes when you're a great artist, you sacrifice and you can't stop yourself, but that's certainly not true of me. □



DIANE KEATON TURNED HER OBSESSION WITH HOTEL LOBBIES INTO A BOOK, *RESERVATIONS*, PUBLISHED BY KNOPF IN 1980. MIAMI BEACH (TOP) AND NEW YORK'S PENN TERMINAL HOTEL AND THE WALDORF-ASTORIA