

Slim Aarons

THE GOOD LIFE

November 29, 2023 - February 10, 2024

Opening Reception: November 29, 2023 6-8 pm

The photographs of Slim Aarons are so closely associated with “the good life” that Aarons’ name is now shorthand itself for luxury, privilege, and style.

In the introduction to his 2003 book *Once Upon a Time*, Aarons said “I believe in fairy tales. For six decades I have concentrated on photographing attractive people who were doing attractive things in attractive places.” Ironically, the beginning of Aarons’ life was anything but a fairy tale, and his sunny and escapist images were a rejection of the terrors of war and familial heartbreak that he was all too familiar with. As a precursor to social media’s promotion of the perennial perfect moment, Aarons’ photographs are aspirational yet nostalgic.

This is Aarons’ fourth solo exhibition at Staley-Wise after his first-ever exhibition at the gallery in 2003, only 3 years before his death. Several of the photographs in this exhibition were recently discovered in his archive and have never been seen before.

This exhibition coincides with the publication of *Slim Aarons: The Essential Collection* (Abrams, 2023), the first book to consider the entirety of his life and career – from World War II through the 1990’s. It was written by Shawn Waldron with contributions by Lesley Blume, Laura Hawk, Nick Foulkes, and Maria Cooper Janis.

Slim Aarons was born in New York in 1916 to parents whose family name was anglicized to Aarons from Aronowitz when his father immigrated from Lithuania. Aarons’ mother was committed to a psychiatric hospital when he was a child and Aarons and his brother lived for several years in an orphanage. He was later raised with his brother on his grandmother’s farm in New Hampshire. Aarons joined the Army at the age of twenty-three and served as a photographer within the Eighth Army Division while working for *Yank* magazine. During World War II, Aarons was able to form friendships with notables including Frank Capra and Henri Cartier-Bresson and these connections helped him begin his photography career after he was discharged.

Aarons began photographing Hollywood for publications including *LIFE*, *Look*, and *Holiday*, relishing in a world of opulence far from the war he left behind. With the advent of air-travel in the 1960’s, magazines such as *Town & Country* and *Travel + Leisure* commissioned Aarons to photograph resorts around the world. Aarons continued to gain access to the world’s most elite and exclusive playgrounds and their lucky inhabitants.

In 1974, Slim Aarons’ book *A Wonderful Time: An Intimate Portrait of The Good Life* was published. The book became and remains a cult favorite in the fashion and design world. Several additional books of his work were published after his death in 2006, including most recently *Slim Aarons: The Essential Collection* (Abrams, 2023).



Lake Tahoe Trip: Young women canoeing at Zephyr Cove on the Nevada side of Lake Tahoe, USA, 1959 © Getty Images



Skiing Waiters, Stowe, Vermont, 1962 © Getty Images

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