

SLIM AARONS

Over the course of a career lasting half a century, Slim Aarons (1916–2006) portrayed high society, aristocracy, authors, artists, business icons, the celebrated and their milieu. In doing so, he captured a golden age of wealth, privilege, beauty and leisure that occurred alongside—but quite separate from—the cultural and political backdrop of the second half of the Twentieth Century.

Aarons was raised in New York and New Hampshire and began his photography career while in the Army. Before long, he was appointed the official photographer of the United States Military Academy at West Point. When war broke out, he was sent as a combat photographer for *Yank* magazine. He saw action from North Africa to the Middle East to Europe, witnessing the fall of Tobruk and the liberation of Rome, and received a Purple Heart.

After leaving the Army, Aarons became a freelance photojournalist and, through his *Yank* connections, headed for his first civilian tour of duty in Hollywood. Aarons photographed the Hollywood elite—Humphrey Bogart, Lauren Bacall, Tony Curtis and Janet Leigh, to name but a few. When *Life* magazine opened a bureau in Rome, Aarons relocated. It was in the Eternal City, destination of an international array of celebrities and aristocrats, that Aarons began in earnest his lifelong project documenting the Beautiful People.

Aarons worked for the leading magazines of the day, including *Life*, *Holiday*, *Town & Country*, *Vogue*, *Harper's Bazaar* and *Travel & Leisure*, traveling often to attend parties in Beverly Hills or on Park Avenue, spending winters in Gstaad or Palm Beach, and summers on the French or Italian Riviera or around the Caribbean. Aarons was very much at ease and on familiar terms with the world's elite, and he brought to his portraits a freshness and certain élan that they greatly appreciated. As a result, Aarons was welcomed into the exclusive retreats of the world's glitterati, and his imagery attains a degree of intimacy approaching that of family photos.

In recent years, the influence of his work has been increasingly acknowledged, and he is now regarded as one of the most influential photographers of his generation.