

The Art Scene

By Leon Graham

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At 35 and 82, Marilyn Monroe and Carl Sandburg seem an odd pairing. Yet there they are, only eight months before Monroe's death, chatting and even dancing in four of the remarkable photographs by Arnold Newman now on view at Joie de Livres Gallery @ Salisbury Wines.

Newman, who invented the term "environmental portraiture," was a meticulous craftsman with a gift for formal design. Concentrating first on abstract images and then on pictures of artists carefully posed in their own surroundings, or environments, Newman produced metaphorical photographs that set a high standard for artistic style and integrity as early as 1941, when he was only 22.

Working mostly on assignment from magazines such as Life and Look, Newman took his camera and lights to his subjects, whom he surrounded with visual elements evoking their professions and personalities, unlike contemporaries like Irving Penn and Richard Avedon, who preferred stark studio settings. Perhaps his most famous picture was of composer Igor Stravinsky, who is in the bottom left hand corner of the image, cropped to only head, shoulders and one arm, while the rest is taken up by the open lid of a grand piano set against a blank, white wall. (The image is in the Livres show.)

Among the 28 pictures in the exhibition, some are especially remarkable: an anguished-looking Jackson Pollock in his Long Island studio, dark and brooding with a skull to the left; Truman Capote, smugly lying on an awful Victorian sofa in his tacky apartment under a portrait of himself as a young man; Thornton Wilder alone on a

theater stage sitting in a spotlight; Georgia O’Keeffe and Alfred Stieglitz, she seated in profile looking left, he staring straight at the camera, the two separate but oddly connected and sensual.

Not all the pictures are of famous people: The three earliest, from 1940, are touching: Walker Evans-influenced images of poor black people in West Palm Beach, gazing back at the camera. And two from 1941 are gorgeous arrangements of lustrous violins, examples of Newman’s early authority over composition.

Hearts and Mind: Arnold Newman officially opens at Joie de Livres @ Salisbury Wines on Saturday, May 21, with a reception from 3 to 5 p.m. The gallery, which is at 19 Main St., is open Monday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. Call 860 248-0530 or go to www.infojoiedelivres.com.