

FTWeekend

SATURDAY MAY 6 / SUNDAY MAY 7 2006

REVIEW 'PEOPLE', THE PHOTOGRAPHY OF LEONID LUBIANITSKY, BARYSHNIKOV ARTS CENTER, NEW YORK

Colourful characters, in black and white

Bordered by Chelsea's expanding gallery district to the south and the theatre district to the north, the west midtown home of the new Baryshnikov Arts Center in New York has become the city's latest cultural destination.

It has just inaugurated its visual arts programme with an exhibition of portraits by New York-based photographer Leonid Lubianitsky, whom Mikhail Baryshnikov regards as "among the best artistic portrait photographers I know".

Lubianitsky grew up in Leningrad during the siege of the city, lost his father (who had mentored his artistic development) early in life, struggled under Soviet artistic repression, and then suf-

fered a devastating fire that wiped out a quarter of a million negatives and a planned retrospective exhibition. When an artist has suffered

After such trials, one might anticipate a show coloured by the artist's past

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such trials, one might easily anticipate a show moodily coloured by the artist's past.

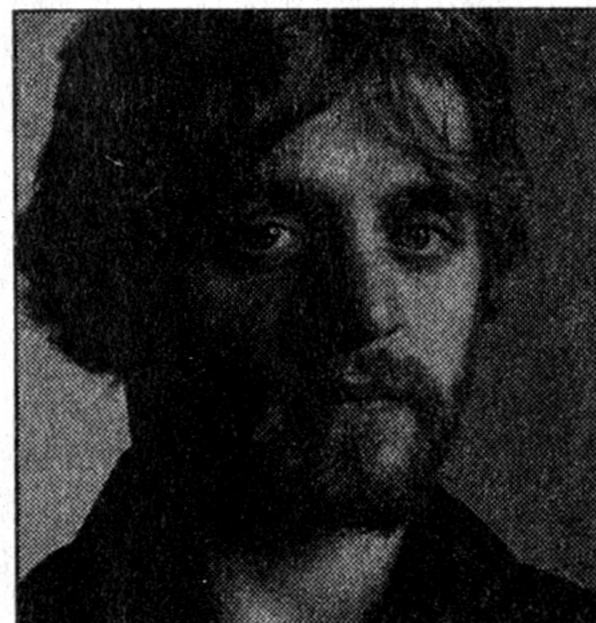
Certainly there are hints of darkness. But this exhibition of 32 black-and-white portraits is a celebration of character and spirit, and there is

a timelessness to Lubianitsky's best work. In noting this quality more than a decade ago, the Nobel Laureate poet Joseph Brodsky observed "an amazing sensitivity and zest" in Lubianitsky's portraits, "while being an uniquely exhaustive record of the cultural, political and sports icons of our times".

After assisting Richard Avedon for a year, Lubianitsky had the opportunity to compile such an extensive portfolio through his long working relationships with publications that included *Vogue*, *The New York Times Magazine* and *Time*, and ad agencies such as Ogilvy & Mather and Ted Chin. Making this panorama even more noteworthy is the fact that this is the first time the

work of this 68-year-old artist has been assembled for public exhibition.

Among the show's strongest and most memorable images is that of Jack Lemmon. Technically precise and perfectly composed, the image is wonderfully sardonic; Lemmon cupping



champagne in one hand, a cigar in the other, gazing at us with a remarkable expression that asks and answers the question: "Is this all there is?"

The artist's portrait of the Georgian ballet dancer and co-founder of the country's national ballet, Nino Ramish-



vili, is a celebration of age. With no attempt to diminish the pronounced lines and veins of this grande dame, Lubianitsky sculpturally configures Ramishvili's hands and arms around an expression that appears at perfect peace with herself.

Lubianitsky's portraits of



designer Diane von Furstenberg and the French actress Marina Vlady reveal characters that are simultaneously strong-willed and sensuous. His image of a pensive Aaron Copeland is unexpectedly disturbing. In spite of being a close-up, the composer of America's most celebrated and joyous classical sounds is moody and removed.

The darkest image here is the deeply chiaroscuro portrait of a very young Donald Sutherland. A frontal view, with one eye peering out from a shadow that covers half his face, we can't tell if Sutherland is acting or revealing a bit more of himself than he planned on. Either way, it's a startling portrait that beguiles in its ambiguity.

The exhibition has virtually no weak images, save for a blurred Ann-Margret dancing in her Broadway musical costume. But this is clearly the exception to a show that also features compelling portraits of Richard Nixon, Duke Ellington, Pelé and a very young and bearded Mikhail Baryshnikov.

In all, the exhibition begs us to wonder what more the artist would have produced had his career not been stunted by a tragic fire.

Eric Uhlfelder

The exhibition runs from April 28-May 11 at the Baryshnikov Arts Center, 450 West 37th Street, New York; www.baryshnikov-dancefoundation.org

Hot shots: from left, Mikhail Baryshnikov, Donald Sutherland and Jack Lemmon