

## VANITY FAIR

### Bob Colacello Remembers Life as Andy Warhol's "Human Tape Recorder"

by Erin Vanderhoof  
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Kevin Farley and Andy, New York, c. 1978  
© Bob Colacello/Courtesy of the artist and Vito Schnabel Projects.

#### The writer and longtime *Vanity Fair* contributor collects his photographs from the otherworldly 1970s.

In the early 1970s, before he became a longtime *Vanity Fair* contributor, Bob Colacello was Andy Warhol's right-hand man. Colacello was the editor of *Interview* magazine, which Warhol helped found and funded, but he also was a friend and party companion to the famous artist until his death, in 1987. The photographs that Colacello took during some of those years aren't just his personal mementos of inaugurations and society weddings—they're historical documents, a portrait of a moment in American culture when things felt decadent and new.

This week, a show collecting those photographs, *Pictures From Another Time: Photographs by Bob Colacello, 1976 - 82* opens at Vito Schnabel's gallery in Manhattan. We sat down to talk in Schnabel's office recently while the gallerist was out of the country. I recorded on an iPhone, which got us to talking about technology and the differences between his generation (boomer) and mine (millennial). "I can tell you that I'm grateful that when I was in my 20s in New York, nobody had phones with cameras," he said. "Because a lot of what went on would not have gone on, I don't think."

Colacello does not have too much love for the Internet,

though he does seem fond enough of individual millennials, like Schnabel, the 32-year-old son of painter Julian Schnabel, whom he has known since his youth. "I think that's a big difference between then and now," Colacello said of his life online. "I think people had more of a sense of humor about themselves and even about political issues. People weren't so ideological. I think as a society, we're becoming more and more humorless."

Colacello's collection of photographs do document a very different era. There's a shot of Cher and Gregg Allman kissing at Jimmy Carter's inauguration, and Henry Kissinger launching into a story, his mouth wide open. And, of course, a few great angles of Andy Warhol, reclining on a bed, laughing, mid-conversation, or in the backseat of a car with Mick and Bianca Jagger.

Colacello doesn't seem to begrudge the passing of time, though. "I knew the greatest old people back when I was a kid," he said. "Whether it was Diana Vreeland or Bill Buckley or Truman Capote—they all seemed ancient to me. [But] they were really curious about everything going on and they had young friends. And, I'm now [practically] their age. I'm lucky that I have friends like Vito, and that so many of my friends' children think I'm cool because I worked for [Andy.]"

BOB COLACELLO

**Vanity Fair: The show that is opening up at Vito's is focused mainly around the social circle you were in during the 1970s, specifically with Andy. The crowd you photographed is so varied—artists, actresses, musicians, politicians, writers, everyone. How were you coming into contact with them?**

Bob Colacello: The thing about Andy is he was such a magnet for so many interesting people in so many different fields. So, one day it would be Governor Rockefeller coming down to the Factory to look at some paintings. The next day it would be Mick Jagger to talk about his new album cover. Meanwhile, you had Joe Dallesandro, Candy Darling, Holly Woodlawn, and divas—the underground, so-called superstars. And, Larry Rivers was hanging out. He was a regular. He'd show up on his motorcycle in Montauk with some 17-year-old girl on the back. And, Dick Cavett lived next door. Lee Radziwill and Andy would call me up one morning and say, "Oh, Lee just called. She wants me to take her and Jackie up to Brooklyn Museum to see the Egyptian show. Hurry up. You should come with us."

Andy liked having me around, because I could talk to anybody, and I also have a great memory, particularly for what people had said. I didn't really remember so much what people wore or every painting in their house, which is what Fred Hughes could do. But I remembered whole conversations, and he said, "Well, if people won't let me tape record, you're my human tape recorder."



Gloria Swanson, Cartier Party, New York, 1979.  
© Bob Colacello/Courtesy of the artist and Vito Schnabel Projects.

**How did you go from being the human tape recorder to being the party photographer, too?**

I got a camera—we both got these Minox 35 ELs in Germany, which had just appeared in Europe. Until then Andy had this big Polaroid Big Shot that he carried in a plastic shopping bag from Bramley's Health Food Store, and this little camera you could have in your coat jacket pocket and just take it out and sort of sneak pictures. It was harder for Andy to do that, and that's sort of the difference between his photos from that time and mine, because people were so aware that they were with Andy Warhol, a celebrity, that as soon as they saw Andy taking a picture, they went into a pose.

But I was just the editor. I wasn't a photographer, and I was lazy. Andy would take three, four rolls in a night. His suit jacket pockets would all be bulging with tape cassettes and batteries on one side and extra film on the other, and flashes. Whereas, after taking a few pictures, I would want to party myself. I didn't feel like taking any more pictures.

**How do you think he managed to balance such an interesting array of people? He had Nelson Rockefeller and Candy Darling both as guests at his house, and it's hard for me to imagine a space in the 21st century where both of those people can coexist.**

First of all, the 70s were kind of when the 60s revolutions came true. The sexual revolution and the drugs revolution were more lived in the 70s and became more the norm. And [rich] people wanted to mix. They all lived on Park Avenue and Fifth Avenue, but they had parties. They wanted to meet artists. They wanted young people. It was just the cool thing to do. That, too, is like the 60s attitude being carried out.

Andy was like a child. So, that when you went to a party with Andy, he noticed everything that was wrong with the picture. And, as soon as he left, he was always sure the husband was gay. He was always sure they were half-Jewish and not saying it. I always say, I don't really miss working for Andy, because at a certain point you just can't hang around a genius too long. They just suck everything out of you. But I do miss going to parties with Andy. His rolling commentary and especially the dishing afterwards in the taxi uptown or nine in the morning when he'd call on the phone. But this is far afield from photography.

**I don't think it is—it's interesting to think about how similar the photographs of the parties are or aren't to the memories you have of actually being there. Do you think you learned anything from watching Andy at these parties?**

BOB COLACELLO



Mark Shand with Diana Vreeland, New York, c. 1979. © Bob Colacello/Courtesy of the artist and Vito Schnabel Projects.

One of the things that Andy really believed was that everybody was interesting and that everybody was beautiful in a certain way. And I really came to see how he was right. What was so great about Andy is at a party, he did not gravitate towards the most famous person. He very often talked to the teenage son or daughter of the fancy socialite who was giving the dinner. He was sort of documenting his times, not documenting celebrity culture. It was bigger than that.

**What do you think the difference is?**

Well, I think “the times” really means all kinds of people. If you look at my photographs, you look at Interview, it’s kind of the elite that were immersed in. Andy—more than me and more than most people in that world, really—[looked outside of that]. He would ask the elevator man for ideas. He was really interested in people and what made them tick. He was always trying to figure out relationships. It was something he wasn’t good at. In the beginning, I was in awe. But, I ended up . . . we all ended up kind of feeling sorry for Andy and very protective of Andy. People thought he had an iron will, but he still felt like he’d been shot. He seemed fragile, and he was not that articulate. And he was lonely. Deep down, he was really lonely.

**Some of the photographs make me think of that**

**beautiful Alice Neel painting that they have of him at the Whitney, with that forlorn look on his face.**

Yes, there’s a photo that we’re blowing up big, [that I took] in Bonn, the afternoon we got our cameras. We’re climbing on his bed, he’s in his jeans, and the wallpaper is this bizarre sort of 1970s graphic design. In the small photo you can barely see it. But, when you blow it up big, he looks just like the Alice Neel portrait. What I think differentiates my photos of Andy from almost everybody else’s is that, again, they’re not posed. He was not self-conscious around me. And, there’s a photo of him with Steve Rubell and André Leon Talley at Bianca’s birthday dinner at Mortimer’s, and he’s laughing uproariously.

People don’t have pictures like that of Andy, because he too, when there were photographers, he went into his “brand.” We didn’t call it that, but his identity—this cool, I’m a machine, I’m Mr. Pop Art. He always had this hard, fake look on his face. Andy was into branding before the phrase really existed. The way he dressed, the silly stuff he would say in interviews. It all fit the brand.



Unidentified Club Boy, Ron Ferry, New York, c. 1979. © Bob Colacello/Courtesy of the artist and Vito Schnabel Projects.

**The danger about that type of cool is that you’re sometimes leaving out the human stuff. Do you feel like there was anything that your photos from that period left out?**

The sex! I normally wouldn’t have pictures of people taking cocaine, which they did a lot at the time I was taking those photos. I’ve always been a journalist who was reporting from the inside. I wasn’t out to burn bridges or expose people for doing the same thing I was doing.

Looking back I do think, God. I was at Jimmy Carter’s inauguration at the White House with [Robert] Rauschenberg—why didn’t I take more pictures? Why did I

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only have one picture of Rosalynn Carter? I regret my laziness. On the other hand, since I really didn't take that many pictures and not that many were printed at the time, I have a rarity factor. So, I guess I can charge more.

**It's a great market decision.**

Yes. But, it wasn't a great documentarian decision.

**Did you think of it in those terms even when you were taking them, that you were doing some sort of documentation?**

It started for a practical reason—it was so much easier once I had a camera not to ask to take a photographer with me to parties. You know? But, I think everyone was aware that we were documenting our times, or at least documenting Andy's life in a way and Andy's work and Andy's world. We

were not self-conscious, and that was considered really uncool—to think you were doing something important.

That was another great thing about Andy. He never hung his own art in his house. He was modest, and he was kind of humble, in a lot of ways. Andy's philosophy was to just do it. If it's not fast, easy, cheap, and new, then it's not worth doing. If it's too expensive, if it's taking you too much time, it means it's not the right thing for you to do. And, when kids would come to Andy for advice, and say, "I want to be a photographer, but I don't have a really good camera." He'd say, "Well, just take pictures with your bad camera. Just get started. Just do it."

*Pictures From Another Time: Photographs by Bob Colacello, 1976-82* will run from May 3 to June 21 at Vito Schnabel Projects (43 Clarkson Street, New York City)