

Interview

BOB COLACELLO HOLDS FORTH
ON HENRY KISSINGER'S CHUBBY HAND

by Nathan Taylor Pemberton
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"Henry Kissinger Holding Forth, Washington D.C.," c. 1976. Photograph by Bob Colacello. Courtesy of Vito Schnabel Projects.

Despite the uninterrupted programming of our reality TV presidency, Washington D.C. has never felt further away from the cultural milieu of Los Angeles, or New York City, for that matter. It wasn't always this way Bob Colacello likes say. The former editor-in-chief of these pages, and its erstwhile photographer, has a new show at Vito Schnabel Projects, *Pictures From Another Time*, that reveals a moment when the distance between politics and culture was collapsed. While Colacello is quick to announce his amateurism, he was expert in photographing, and instigating, the collisions of political elites with the doyens of the downtown New York art world that took place during the 1970s and 1980s "I like to think what we were really focusing on was the glamour," Colacello says, describing his and Andy Warhol's shared fascination with the politicians and leaders of that moment. Take Nancy Reagan, who'd never graced a magazine cover

before this magazine gave her the Richard Bernstein portrait treatment in 1981, or take President Gerald Ford's son, Jack, who was interviewed by Bianca Jagger and Andy on the White House rotunda in 1975. ("I have a hard time reading Andy Warhol's magazine. Really. It just doesn't grab my interest," Ford bitterly told Cameron Crowe a year after the fact.) Or, take Henry Kissinger, in Colacello's 1976 photograph of the former Secretary of State, mid gesticulation, at a Washington cocktail party, and now on display at the Schnabel show. Because a picture is worth something like a thousand words, we asked Colacello to do some holding forth of his own – on the moment he snapped it and on the allure of such a chubby hand.

275 words on "Henry Kissinger Holding Forth"

"I'm not a critic, or a fan, of Henry Kissinger. This photo is more about the hairdo than Kissinger. But, he's obviously a fascinating figure. It was always a privilege to be at a dinner party in New York, where he'd hold forth on the state of the world because he's so brilliant and logical and rational. You can see in the photo people were hanging on his every word. A woman in the back, half obscured, is trying to get in on the circle. I wasn't about to make Dr. Kissinger smile for the camera. This was in Washington, probably during the [Gerald] Ford years, making it sometime in the mid-70s. Most people assumed, then, that politics was one world and business and fashion and art were another – but as you got to the top of pyramid they all came together in this larger version of society. Let's face it. Who was buying art? The rich people. Who did the politicians need? The rich people. Who had the big apartments with their desire to entertain? The rich people. Unfortunately, that's gone today. People are so polarized. The White House didn't even entertain during the George W. Bush and Obama years. They'd make this big show of sitting down to dinner at 6 p.m. It's nice, sure, but it's not very presidential or very first lady-like. You don't have as much mixing in New York anymore, either. Andy [Warhol] always said, 'Politicians are a big story, but they always have their hand out.' I love Kissinger's hand in the photo, that chubby hand. It looks like it's about to grab Cambodia or something."