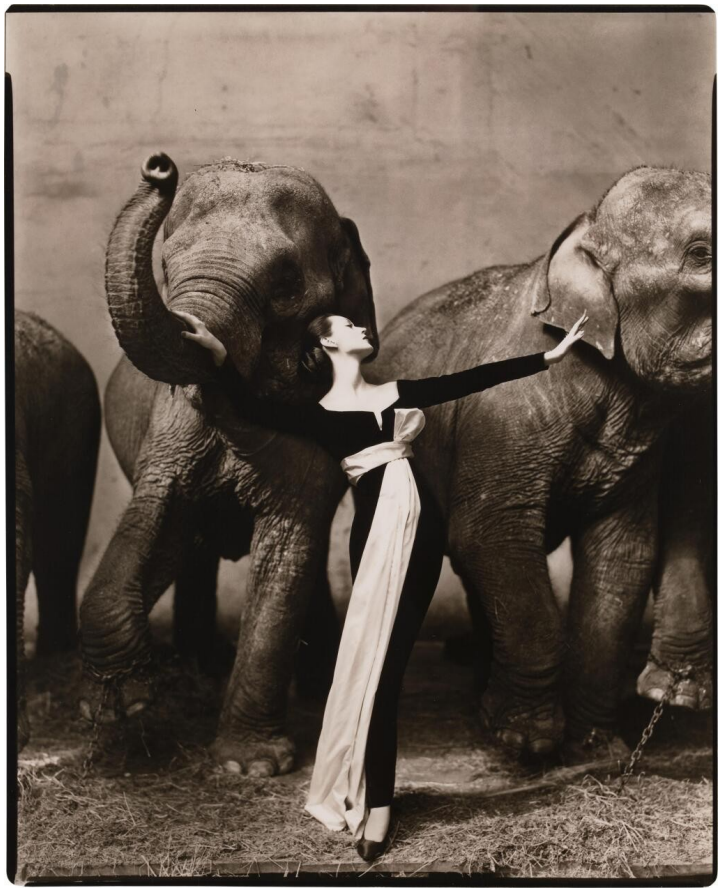
SESSION 18 · UNIT 2 — LIGHT & PERSON · Jan 26, 2027

Richard Avedon

1923–2004 · American

The white background as radical act — and all photographs are accurate, none is the truth



Dovima with Elephants · 1955

"All photographs are accurate. None of them is the truth."

— Richard Avedon

KEY WORKS

- Dovima with Elephants, 1955 — the definitive fashion photograph
- In the American West, 1979–84 — the series that changed everything
- The Warhol Factory portraits, 1969
- William Casby, Born in Slavery, 1963

CONTEXT

Avedon was the most influential fashion photographer of the 20th century. His In the American West — five years driving across America, photographing ordinary people against white seamless on an 8x10 camera — is what defines him. He removed all environmental context and put everything on the person. 'All photographs are accurate,' he said. 'None of them is the truth.' The debate about his American West subjects has never ended.

WHY THIS PHOTOGRAPHER

Avedon is the philosopher of the series — his words have run through the curriculum since Day One. Meeting the photographer behind those words is essential. His work raises the most important questions about photographer and subject, about power, about consent, about what we owe the people we photograph.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. 'A sitting is what I do to people. And they do it to themselves.' What does he mean? Who is responsible for what appears in a portrait?
2. He used a white background to remove all environmental context. What does that do to a portrait? What does it give? What does it take away?

MORE IMAGES



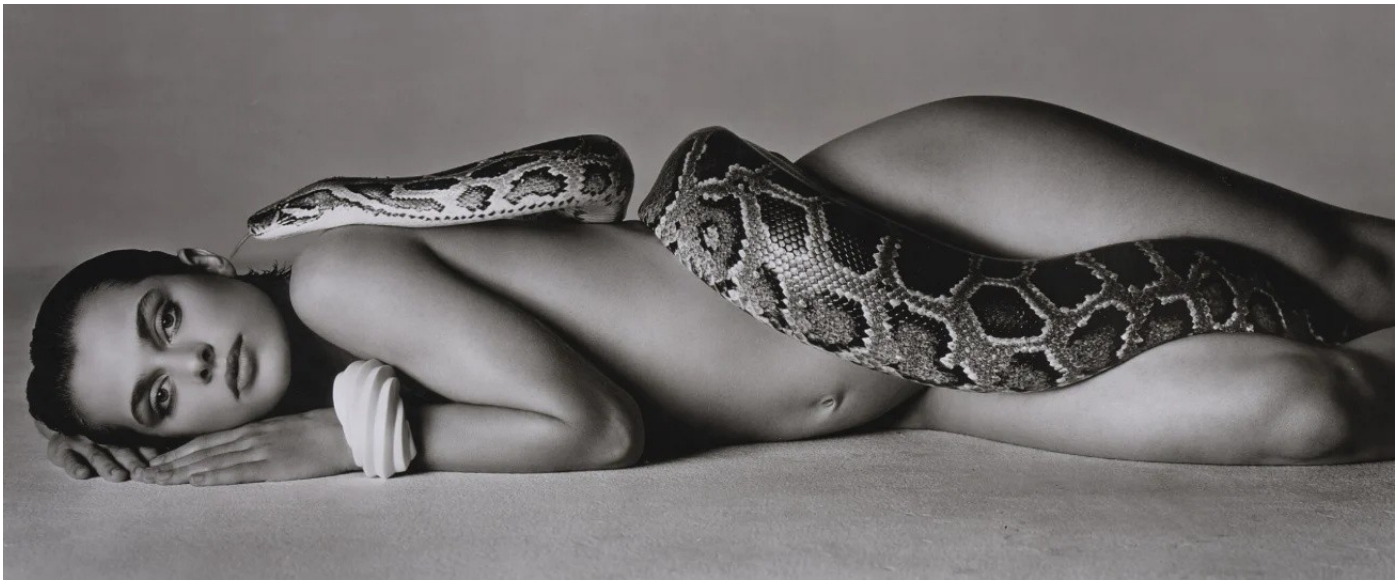
In the American West · 1979–84



Andy Warhol and the Factory · 1969



Marella Agnelli · 1953



Nastassja Kinski and the Serpent · 1981