



NS

Norman Seeff

The Bar at Hotel Bel-Air welcomes stunning life-size images by photographer and filmmaker Norman Seeff, who has a treasure trove of material representing thirty-five years of creative powerhouses behind his lens.

“Something interesting about Mick: he’s very disciplined. One shoot with the Rolling Stones started at midnight but once we began – no matter what they’d been doing up until then – they put their heads down and delivered. Everything I asked they were willing to do and then add something to it. If you don’t approach Mick at a depth you won’t get anything but if you do, he’ll be willing to open up and you’ll get some wonderful treasures.”

“Tina – she’s a powerhouse.

She’s like being in a room with a nuclear reactor. And, at the same time very present, observant, exploratory and confident in herself but willing to step into new situations and not get her defences up. In her case, the vitality of the imagery was almost there from the moment she walked into my studio; she just knows how to turn on the juice.”

Tina Turner Los Angeles 1983



Every career has its advantages but that of Norman Seeff is particularly privileged in that he has had the opportunity to engage the most brilliant talents and finest creative minds of our time, from Mick Jagger to a young entrepreneur named Steve Jobs. This was always in the service of a certain magazine editorial feature, advertising account or record label but his primary concern was – and is – to create and capture moments of authenticity and, from there, share a clear witness to the nature of creativity, including its mysterious and ephemeral processes.

A South African native, Seeff is no less fascinating than the myriad of characters he has captured on still or moving film. He was a professional soccer player before a serious injury re-orientated him towards earning a medical degree and practicing medicine. At age thirty, he made a radical decision

to move to New York and pursue a dream. Fast forward a difficult start and his career skyrocketed, making him the hottest celebrity photographer in the 70s and 80s and, in Los Angeles, a pioneering Artistic Director at United Artists Records and later in television commercial production for brands like Apple, Levi's, Nissan, General Motors and more. Today, he describes himself as a multi-media artist who uses photography and filmmaking as vehicles to explore the creative process.

The Bar at Hotel Bel-Air welcomes a large-scale installation of a sampling of Seeff's black-and-white celebrity photography. The images serve not only as backdrop to the cocktails had therein but also to a quarterly lecture series hosted by Seeff – "a little salon", he calls it – which are complimentary and open to the public. In these lectures, Seeff uses his archive of film and video to illustrate

how his sessions were an exploration into the inner dynamics of creativity, capturing his subjects on a multitude of levels: "I was focused on diving inward into their inner psyche to talk about not what they do but how they do what they do." Seeff's intention with the lecture series is to empower others in their own creativity. Entitled 'The Power and Passion to Create', its content will soon appear as a feature documentary, book and TV series, and in gallery spaces worldwide. Hotel Bel-Air is the first public place to show his images as large murals after ten years of archive organisation. Before then, Seeff quips that he had been involved in research and development in creativity for over three decades. "I started filming my sessions because I realised that I had access to all these amazing, cutting-edge, and creative people across disciplines." He continues, "I've filmed so much material that the whole archive...is probably

“Cher is a consummate artist; every pore of her body is filled with creativity. And, underneath the Hollywood glamour there’s a real vulnerable, powerful woman.”

“With John Belushi, I was able to tap into him emotionally and feel two things in him: one was the tortured part of him, and the other was the very loving part of him. His humour, in a strange way, was very motivated by his love for people. Nothing I ever shoot is posed – everything is spontaneous.

That was a moment; there was some kind of deep reflection going on inside of him and that energy is in the photograph. It’s not like I ever tried to tell a story. I’m just working with a human being, their emotions, and a plain backdrop.”

the largest archive of film of artists in the act of creation on the planet that is unseen.” In many of his sessions, artists would write and perform songs on set. “I’ve got some amazing people creating right in the sessions. When you show the film you literally see the creative process in action.” Seeff believes this material to be both brilliantly provocative and potentially transformative.

His approach was to be fully engaged. “I didn’t want passive shots of a physical body, I wanted an alive, vital, emotional touching of the person’s soul...I realised if I create an authentic experience, then the images that I capture will be authentic.” He continues: “I quickly realised that photography has nothing to do with the camera or the technology and everything to do with my ability to create vulnerable intimate relationships with artists. So my intention was to get to a level of authenticity but the scariest thing was that I had to be the first to open that door”. In this way, Seeff’s career was an external journey that became an internal one. “Emotions are the juice of the creative process; they are absolutely the fundamental resource out of which you create, and imagination is where

everything is birthed...creation begins in the consciousness, not out there; it’s not something you do with your hands. Every artist that I worked with – the extremely successful ones – were highly imaginative, incredibly emotionally present and vulnerable in a positive sense.”

Beyond photography, Norman Seeff’s interest in human consciousness makes his lecture series at The Bar at Hotel Bel-Air broad and enriching, as one of the many co-creative projects of his career. It has been transformative, in its own way, of his perception of the L.A. destination. “I used to pass it because I had friends that lived in Bel-Air but I always thought, ‘not my kind of place, a little too formal’; then, this came up and changed my mind completely. The people running it are just fabulous – so open, enthusiastic, cultured and informal – exactly the opposite to what I thought. I love it there. The surrounding nature is also beautiful. It’s a very unique place.” This is quite a compliment from an artist who encourages, recognises and captures uniqueness with brilliant precision. ✕

www.seeffphotography.com

John Belushi Los Angeles 1981. Cher Los Angeles 1977

