



LIFE OF THE PARTY JEROME ZERBE AND THE SOCIAL PHOTOGRAPH

THE BEAUTIFUL, THE FAMOUS, AND THE RICH flocked to New York City's El Morocco in the 1930s. Photographer Jerome Zerbe documented the faces of actors, socialites, heirs, and heiresses—a world of success and excess that contrasted with the lives of the majority of Americans during a decade of economic upheaval. For many people across the United States, Zerbe's photographs of glamorous nightclub life—along with popular movies and magazines—were the images of an idealized way of life.

Jerome Brainard Zerbe, Junior, (1904-1988) was born in Euclid, Ohio. He entered Yale University in 1924 and was graduated in 1928. After a short stint providing images for Cleveland's *Parade* magazine in the early 1930s, Zerbe made his way to New York City and the El Morocco nightclub where

he became the on-site photographer for the remainder of the decade. The influential and the famous passed in front of Zerbe's camera: Cary Grant, Gloria Swanson, Clark Gable, Marlene Dietrich, Clifton Webb, Salvador Dali, Carole Lombard, Mona Williams, Brenda Frazier—Rockefellers, Astors, Whitneys—along with a few princes and princesses. The photographs he made were distributed free to magazines and newspapers, showing aspirational visions of the good life and serving as free publicity for one of the most popular nightclubs in the world.

Zerbe produced tens of thousands of pictures over several decades. During World War II he served in the Department of the Navy in the Pacific Theater and later held the title of Photo Editor for *Town & Country* magazine in the 1940s and 1950s. His work continued into the 1960s and 1970s as he created images for print advertisements and documented houses, parties, and celebrity gatherings. The publication in 1973 of his retrospective book, *Happy Times*, with text by Brendan Gill, brought his work to a younger and wider audience.

Jerome Zerbe was like many people in early 20th century United States who found the camera a fitting match for a creative impulse and a curious eye. In addition to an overview of Jerome Zerbe's life and work, this exhibition shows his photographs in parallel with the work of other documentary photographers represented in Beinecke's collections. The exhibition cases on the mezzanine level explore how other photographers pictured social



strata and forms of celebrity and displayed variant ways of engaging with their subjects; they offer glimpses into communities that Zerbe never documented. On view are photographs by Carl Van Vechten, Eve Arnold, Inge Morath, and Harry Adams—which serve as counterparts to Zerbe's view of America in the 20th century.

The Jerome Zerbe Papers and Photographs, donated by Frederick R. Koch, (Yale School of Drama, 1961 MFAD), includes over 50,000 images, in the form of negatives and as prints mounted in chronologically arranged albums.

Photographs by Jerome Zerbe, Copyright © Yale University: Rudy Vallee mixing drinks for John Perona and Judy Stewart at El Morocco, 1938; "Sunset behind Mt. Fujijama," Japan, circa 1944; Evangeline Bruce at Versailles on cover of *Town & Country*, October, 1954; Jerome Zerbe at work (photo by Sam Resnick), circa 1936; Alice Clifford, Dick Hall, Sarah Jane Sanford, and Winkie Brooks at El Morocco, 1936.

Life of the Party: Jerome Zerbe and The Social Photograph and Michael Childers: Author! Author! are on view at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library from May 16th through August 12th, 2019.