



John Brook Self-Portrait, undated

Return to Riverrun

John Brook, 1924-2016

John Brook was born in Woonsocket, Rhode Island, on August 29, 1924. His interest in photography manifested early. Entirely self-taught, Brook began taking and developing photographs when he was twelve years old, encouraged by his father. His first portrait was published in *Mademoiselle* in 1940.

After graduating from Harvard, Brook officially started his photographic career, opening a portrait studio on Newbury Street in 1946, where he lived for the next 40-plus years. This was a significant step for photography in Boston, a medium that was steadily increasing its presence in museum and gallery exhibitions and collections. Brook began showing his work in Boston's Sidney Kanegis Gallery in 1955, and exhibited in galleries and museums across the United States and Europe in the first decades of his career.

In 1966 Brook was one of several photographers, including Jules Aarons, Harry Callahan, Paul Caponigro, and Minor White, to exhibit work in a group show at the reopening of the Carl Siembab Gallery on Newbury Street, where Brook showed frequently.

Brook was the inaugural exhibition in a newly designed gallery at the George Eastman House in 1961 and one of twenty photographers shown at the Kodak Pavilion of the 1970 World's Fair in Osaka, Japan.

He served as the staff photographer for the Boston Symphony Orchestra, and received numerous portrait commissions, including Thelonious Monk, Duke Ellington, Dave Brubeck, Igor Stravinsky, Walter Gropius, and Eleanor Roosevelt, among many others. His photography appeared in *Art in America*, *Modern Photography*, *Newsweek*, *LIFE*, *Vita Fotografica*, *Camera*, among others, and won awards, including the gold medal at the 3rd International Biennial in Milan.

In 1966, the thirtieth anniversary issue of *LIFE* magazine included the work of twenty of the world's major photographers, including Brook. He published two books, *A Long the Riverrun* (1970) and *Hold Me* (1977), featuring his timeless, romantic, pictorialist views – many shot with lenses that he constructed himself.

Brook's later years were spent in relative obscurity, full of colorful anecdotes that cannot be verified. However, by all accounts, he lost touch with friends and artists who had known him during his earlier years in Boston. He moved into a rehabilitation center in Brighton, Massachusetts, after an accident in the late 1980s, and died there on July 29, 2016, at the age of 91.

Jessica Roscio