

CREATING CONCEPTS

CHAPTER REVIEW

“You have to be prepared—to have an idea of who you are photographing and what they do.”

—Annie Leibovitz

SUBCHAPTERS

- Research
- Concepts
- Having a Role to Play
- Case Study: The Pirelli Calendar
- Case Study: Keith Haring

Annie began creating posed, conceptual photographs in the late 1970s, when she was making portraits for the cover of *Rolling Stone*. Her earlier work for the magazine was primarily reportage—observations of what was happening in front of her. Covers provided an opportunity for something different—a photograph that would convey a more specific comment on the subject’s life and work. This kind of portrait has both literal and allusive aspects. When Annie shot the comedian Whoopi Goldberg, she photographed her in a bathtub full of warm milk. Goldberg’s dark limbs and face emerge from a white sea. It is a startling image based on Goldberg’s heartrending, politically charged impersonations of a little black girl scrubbing her skin in the hope that she will become white.

Conceptual portraits are driven by an idea. Somewhere in the raw material of information about who the subject is and what he does is the nucleus of what the picture will become. It doesn’t have to be a big idea. It can be simple. For Annie, the series of portraits of poets she made for *Life* magazine in 1980 established a method of working that successfully accomplished what she was aiming for. Robert Penn Warren had been writing about death. His poems were infused with the fleshiness and fragility of living things. Her portrait of Penn Warren sitting on his bed, his shirt off, conveys that.

The key thing about a conceptual portrait is its connection to the subject. The idea begins with the person.

Conceptual portraits can be theatrical or subtle. For the 2016 Pirelli calendar, Annie went against tradition and photographed women of various ages who she chose because of their accomplishments. The Pirelli calendar, which is distributed in a limited edition to private clients by the Pirelli Tire Company, had for over 50 years been known for its photographs of nudes. Annie had photographed nude torsos of dancers for the 2000 calendar. In 2016, she was asked to photograph “distinguished” women. They were most certainly not asked to appear naked. The twist in Annie’s series was that the final photograph, which featured the comedian Amy Schumer, was a nude, but the model was not

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conventionally sexy. Schumer portrayed someone who had not gotten the memo that this year people were wearing clothes.

LEARN MORE

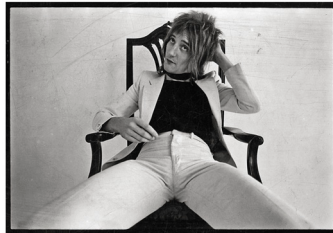
- Read the poetry of [Robert Penn Warren](#) and [Tess Gallagher](#) as Annie did in preparation for photographing them. Can you see the tone of their verse in Annie's images?
- Robert Penn Warren died not long after Annie photographed him. Photography and death have always had a close association. Consider the connection of the medium to death in Roland Barthes's *Camera Lucida*, and [learn about](#) the Victorian tradition of photographing the dead. Another article on the subject can be found [here](#).
- Annie discusses Robert Mapplethorpe's photos of Grace Jones, which were an inspiration for her portrait of Keith Haring. See more of the photographer's work [here](#).

ASSIGNMENT

- Consider photographing an elderly person in your community or in your life. As part of your preparation for the shoot, ask for photos of them when they were younger. How does the younger photo inform how you will approach photographing them now? Consider going through their wardrobe with them, finding clothes they haven't worn in years, and ask questions.

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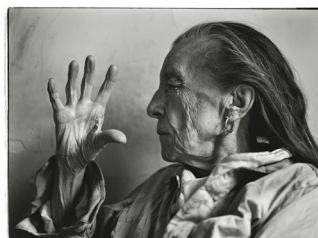
Rod Stewart
San Francisco, 1970



Grace Slick and Paul Kantner
Bolinas, California, 1970



Whoopi Goldberg
Berkeley, California, 1984



Louise Bourgeois
New York City, 1997



Robert Penn Warren
Fairfield, Connecticut, 1980



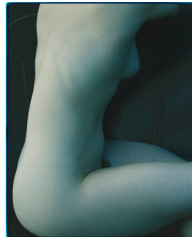
Tess Gallagher
Syracuse, New York, 1980



Meryl Streep
New York City, 1981

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Lauren Grant

White Oak Plantation, Yulee, Florida, 1999



June Omura

Rhinebeck, New York, 1999



Sadie Hope-Gund and
Agnes Gund

New York City, 2015



Fran Lebowitz

New York City, 2015



Yoko Ono

New York City, 2015



Shirin Neshat

New York City, 2015



Amy Schumer

New York City, 2015



Amy Schumer and her sister, Kim
Caramelle

New York City, 2015



Amy Schumer

New York City, 2015

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Keith Haring
New York City, 1986



Keith Haring
New York City, 1986