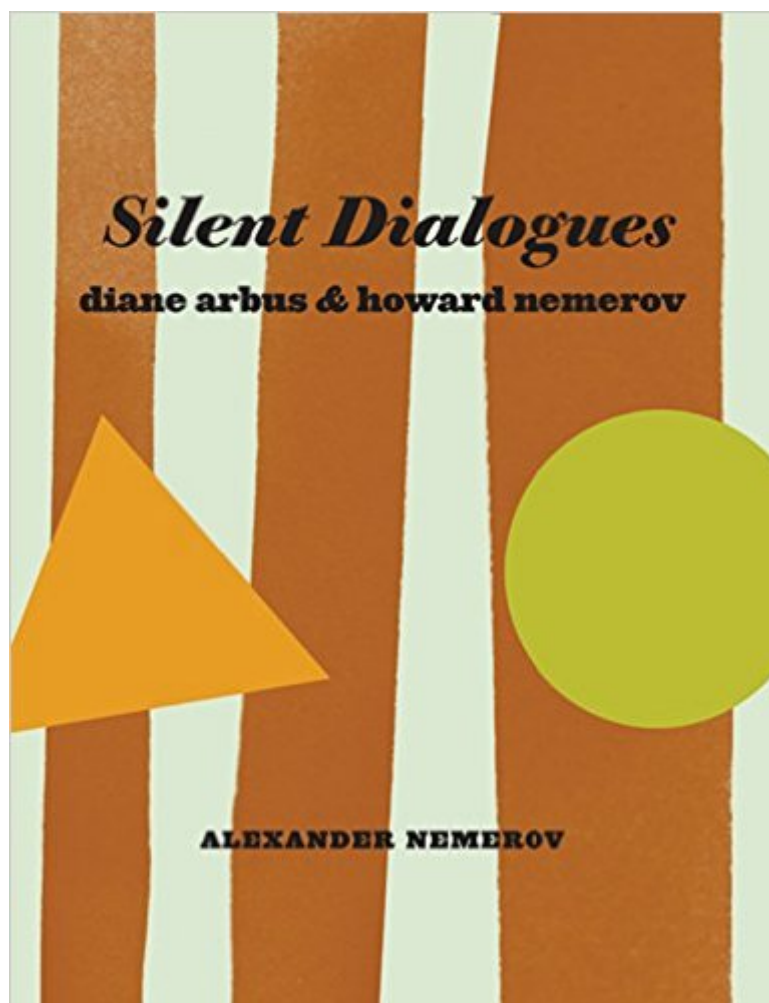


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Silent Dialogues: Diane Arbus & Howard Nemerov



Synopsis

Silent Dialogues, by art historian Alexander Nemerov, is a probing, intimate reflection about photographer Diane Arbus, the author's aunt, and her brother, Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Howard Nemerov, the author's father. "I have no memories of Diane Arbus," begins Alexander Nemerov in the first of two meditative essays that comprise this book. "A Resemblance" examines Howard Nemerov's complicated responses to his sister's photography. "The School" focuses on a body of Arbus' work known as the Untitled series, photographs made at residences for the mentally disabled between 1969 and 1971, in the last years of her life. Through their work, the author explores the siblings' disparate and distinct sensibilities, and in doing so uncovers signs of an unexpected aesthetic kinship. Illustrations complementing the essays include numerous examples of Arbus' photographs; paintings by artists as diverse as Pieter Brueghel, Norman Rockwell, Paul Feeley and Johannes Vermeer; and a selection of poems by Howard Nemerov, chosen by his son.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Diane Arbus (née Nemerov) is famous. Her poet brother, Howard Nemerov, is less so. (Nonetheless, based on my more-than-passing acquaintance with the work of each, I prefer his poetry to her photographs.) In SILENT DIALOGUES, Alexander Nemerov -- Howard's son, Diane's nephew -- writes about the siblings, their personal relationship, and connections (and differences) between their approaches to their respective crafts. The book is intelligently and handsomely produced. It contains two essays by Alexander Nemerov. They are inter-related, although the first,

"A Resemblance", deals more with Howard's "complicated responses to his sister's photography", while the second, "The School", focuses on a dozen photographs Diane made at residences for the mentally retarded between 1969 and 1971. Accompanying the text are numerous illustrations -- Diane's photographs, texts of Howard's poems, and other cultural ephemera that Alexander refers to. Howard didn't care for Diane's photography. She gave him a print of her most famous photograph, "Identical twins, Roselle, N.J. 1966", which she inscribed "to h" and signed at the bottom. He kept the print, neither matted nor framed, in a drawer in the living room along with his children's drawing supplies. But then Howard didn't like photography as a medium: "He thought it was just a mechanism, a copy of the world. * * * There was no imagination, no creativity, to it. * * * Photography was part of the journalistic disenchantment of the world -- a pragmatic wish to know, to expose, to develop. And it was a kind of voyeurism." Alexander writes that a dose of competitive artistic jealousy might very well have underlain Howard's attitude towards Diane's photography.

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