

Diane Arbus

by Ali George

Visiting the Dean Gallery today (or indeed any day up until June 13th) you will be able to see an exhibition of work by the New York photographer Diane Arbus.

Arbus is known for her interest in taking pictures of people at the edges of society. Some of the work in this exhibition is quite challenging, particularly considered in the social context of 1950s and 1960s America.

One room, for instance, is dedicated to the 'Untitled' collection, which depicts people with additional support needs. An information placard states that it took Arbus several years to obtain permission to photograph them. Other sections have intimate portraits of people on the margins of society, including immigrants, mixed race and same sex couples, and transvestites.

The information placards are a little hard to read due to dim lighting (presumably this protects the pictures) and small text. You have to stand quite close to read them, and then you get in people's way. As a result, some of the steady stream of visitors aren't getting a lot of context to the pictures. I heard one person say, "I guess she's American, is that right...?"

Notwithstanding the practical difficulties in viewing the exhibition, the photographs stand alone as striking images without knowing their origins. The controversial Child With A Hand Grenade in Central Park is part of the collection, as is Patriotic Young Man With A Flag. Both of these images have modern resonance in spite of being almost fifty years old, and are definitely worth a look.



So head over to the Dean for another interesting and free exhibition. But get there early if you want a fruit scone in the café, because they go fast!