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Lisette Model, Diane Arbus, Eliot Porter and Herman Leonard
On Photography: A Roundup of Notable Area Gallery Shows

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Model/Arbus:
Great Photographs
of the 20th Century
Hasted Kraeutler

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Noting that most of the pictures here are familiar is just to recognize how central Lisette Model (1901-1983) and Diane Arbus (1923-1971) must be considered. Both were included among the 16 photographers Jane Livingston identified as “the New York School” in her important study of the midcentury artists who fundamentally changed the medium. And it is right for these two to be in a show together; Ms. Arbus studied with Ms. Model, and what she learned is apparent from the juxtaposition of their prints.

Both had a fine sense for the markers of social class. The two aging women in Ms. Model’s “Fashion Show, Hotel Pierre” (1940-46), with their discreet jewelry and veils, seem as bored as they do rich. In Ms. Arbus’s “A Family on Their Lawn One Sunday in Westchester, N.Y.” (1968), the young couple on lounge chairs seem separated not just by the table between them, but by some emotional gulf; the child playing at a wading pool in the background is also emotionally distant. Both pictures have pronounced psychic ambience. You cannot miss the woman’s bouffant hairdo in Ms. Arbus’s “Four People at a Gallery Opening, NYC” (1968), but notice the medallion on a chain around the neck of one of the men in tuxedos. The white shoes are as indispensable to the heavy woman Ms. Model shot on the “Promenade des Anglais, Nice” (1934) as her umbrella and generous hat.

