

# Herald INTERNATIONAL Tribune

PUBLISHED WITH THE NEW YORK TIMES AND THE WASHINGTON POST

The World's Daily Newspaper

Edited in Paris Tuesday, April 8, 1997 Printed in New York

No. 35,490

TODAY:  
STYLE  
The Cloning of Cool, Page 11

## At 'The Last Party,' Sex, Nightlife and the End of 'Innocent Abandon'



Christopher Moore

Serge and Tatiana Sorokko with photograph of Andy Warhol at "The Last Party" exhibition.

International Herald Tribune

**N**EW YORK — They are the queens — and the drag queens — of the night. Here is Bianca Jagger riding into Studio 54 on a white horse in 1977 to detonate a hedonistic party scene that celebrates 20 years in April. There is a bloated Liz Taylor, a bleary Liza Minnelli and the doomed designer Halston, caught by the camera in an era when people partied until they dropped. Then they stopped.

"The Last Party" is the title of an exhibition of arresting images of the night world at the newly opened Serge Sorokko Gallery (430 West Broadway, until May 3). And also of a book by Anthony Haden-Guest, "Studio 54, Disco and the Culture of the Night" (William Morrow & Co.).

Both document an era that is over — killed by AIDS and destroyed by the loss of what Haden-Guest calls "an innocent abandon." Although among the photographs is an exuberant 1989 shot of a group leaping into a rippling swimming pool in St. Bart's. And also of an S&M scene taken in 1990s Berlin.

"The whole sexual thing has exploded in Eastern Europe and Russia,

and they are doing now what we used to do in the 1970s," says the Russian-born Sorokko, who lives in San Francisco with his wife, the model Tatiana.

Sex is at the heart of nightlife. You can hear it throbbing in the beat of the club-scene videos, on show in the gallery and put together as research for the film about Jean-Michel Basquiat — another doomed soul. Sex is explicit in a vintage

---

*The night world can also be poetic.*

---

Helmut Newton image: nude woman in open fur coat caught in the lights of a Paris street. It is blatant in shots of leather-strapped males swigging beer or Diane Arbus's pathetic 1970s image of dancing drag queens in tacky feathers. It is sweet and fresh when a couple are captured in rapturous laughter at the El Morocco club in 1955. The night world can also be poetic. In Brassai's overhead shot of the Folies Bergere in 1932, three dancers are spread-eagled on the stage like grounded fairies.

You come to recognize the cast of characters: "The Gang of Four" as Bianca Jagger, Halston, Minnelli and Andy Warhol were dubbed by photographer Christopher Makos in 1978. The ever-present Steve Rubell, cheerleader of Studio 54 and its depravities. The perky club owner, Nell Campbell. The occasional guest, like Valentino, caught in the lens of Roxanne Lowit in ringmaster gear in 1978.

"It's the energy of the moment, the intensity, the fun, the strangeness, the beauty and the timelessness — that's what makes a great party picture," said Lowit, as she plied her trade at Gianni Versace's after-show party. She saw the end of the great party era as both the rejection of the "free love" philosophy and the arrival of the posed "photo opportunity."

"The Last Party" is a fascinating exhibition because of the wide variety of its 60 different photographers and 300 images, excellently orchestrated and hung. But also because it captures its subjects unselfconsciously. In that, it pinions a butterfly moment of social history.

Suzu Menkes