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Jeanette Montgomery Barron: Manhattan through the lens of a Georgia Peach

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BY [BO EMERSON](#) - THE ATLANTA JOURNAL-CONSTITUTION

Jeanette Montgomery Barron, the Atlanta-born daughter of Coke royalty, walked into some strange places when she was photographing Manhattan's artists and scenesters in the 1980s.

Perhaps the strangest was her assignment to shoot a portrait of writer William Burroughs, who 30 years earlier had drunkenly shot and killed his wife while playing William Tell at a party in Mexico City.

"He was staying in the loft of a friend on Broadway above a bookstore," said Barron, 56. "Somebody opened the door – it wasn't Burroughs – and I looked to the side and there was a huge table full of shotguns. This kind of creeped me out."

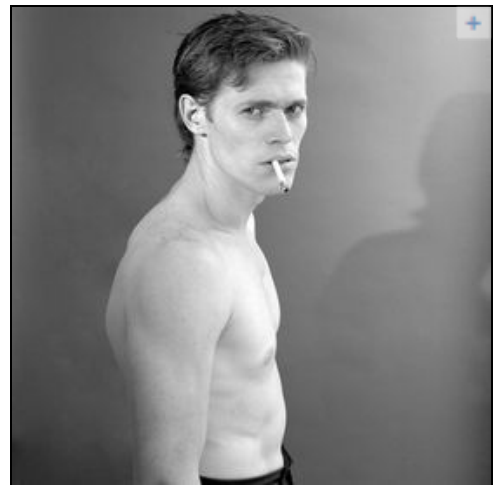
It turned out that Burroughs had a valid and non-lethal reason for his weaponry. When he wasn't writing, he liked to create "Shotgun Art" by aiming his shells at spray paint cans perched in front of canvases. The resulting spray produced a kind of Jackson Pollack-inspired action painting, but with slightly less control. Barron wishes she had known about that back then.

Her moody black and white portrait of a fedora-wearing Burroughs is part of a new collection of Barron's photographs, which have been published as a book called "Scene." Fourteen of those photos are on display at the Jackson Fine Art gallery through Nov. 2. The book and the show are an intimate look at the outsize personalities – from Andy Warhol to Jean-Michel Basquiat – who made the Manhattan art scene of the go-go '80s such a clamorous, glamorous time.

"It's a time people romanticize," said Barron, whose book also includes

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her own memories of that period. “I don’t know that it was a more innocent time. I think people were doing all kinds of non-innocent things.”

It wasn’t a pizza, for example, that sullen painter Basquiat was awaiting, when Barron brought her cameras to his loft one evening. “He was waiting for a drug delivery,” she said, “and these guys came and then he got in a better mood.”

Though she came to know many of these artists and writers, her entry into the scene wasn’t zipless. Bianca Jagger kept Barron cooling her heels for three hours before their shoot: “Because that’s what she did. But when she got there, she looks great, she’s easy to photograph, she’s performing for us: Forget it, we’re not mad any more.”

It is a measure of Barron’s charm that she became workout buddies with Bianca. And while Warhol gave her only five minutes in their first sitting and 15 minutes in their second, Barron became a regular at Warhol’s studio, The Factory, and the studio manager and Warhol partner Paige Powell threw a baby shower for Barron at Cafe Luxembourg on the Upper West Side.

“She took me under her wing,” said Barron of Powell. “She arranged for me to photograph people, she would invite me to The Factory, take me out to dinner.”

Barron hit it off with others as well.

“Francesco Clemente did a portrait of me, Alex Katz painted me, but didn’t offer anything in exchange,” she said. That’s a pity, since Clemente’s work sells in the high five figures. Barron never thought to ask. She was always focused on shooting her next assignment, often for such magazines as W, Interview and Vanity Fair.

Barron’s father, Arthur Montgomery, who was president of Atlanta Coca-Cola Bottling Co., died last year. Her mother, Eleanor Morgan Montgomery Atuk, who died in 2007, was a dramatically well-dressed social butterfly and her wardrobe was the subject of a previous photo book by Barron called “My Mother’s Clothes.”

As a young photographer, Barron came to New York in the mid-1970s, attending Finch College and the International Center for Photography. She met her future husband, art dealer James Barron, on an elevator in a building on Fifth Avenue. They have two children: Isabelle, 23, who is studying to be a yoga instructor in Austin, Texas, and Ben, 20, who is attending Bard College.

photographer and Atlanta native Jeanette Montgomery Barron in a new book and gallery show featuring personalities from the Manhattan art scene of the 1980s.



Jeanette Montgomery Barron: Manhattan through the lense of a Georgia Peach



[Jeanette Montgomery Barron: Photos](#)

Barron lives part-time in Rome and part-time in New York. Though she didn't emerge from the 1980s with any free canvases, she did collect a remarkable book of autographs.

"I always got model releases from everyone right away," said the practical photographer. "I knew eventually I wanted to do a book. I've got signatures by all these people, which are fun to look at."

Jeanette Montgomery Barron will sign copies of her new book "Scene" 6-8 p.m. on Friday, Sept. 6, at Jackson Fine Art, a Buckhead gallery that is also hosting an exhibition of 14 prints from the book, seven of them oversized. Free. The gallery exhibit will continue through Nov. 2. Jackson Fine Art, 3115 East Shadowlawn Avenue; 404-233-3739, www.jacksonfineart.com/

Barron will also sign copies of her book 1-4 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 7, at the West Side women's clothing store Ann Mashburn, 1198 Howell Mill Road; 404-350-7132, www.annmashburn.com/

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