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'Annie Leibovitz: Pilgrimage' comes to Concord

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"I'm just so privileged to be here and to listen to such a wonderful program," El Khoury, of Cape Cod, said. "This was a once-in-a-lifetime experience for me."

Underneath a large white tent on the Louisa May Alcott Orchard House lawn, El Khoury, along with more than 300 people, gathered Tuesday evening to experience a pilgrimage world-renowned photographer Annie Leibovitz concluded last year.

Best known for her portrait photography, Leibovitz decided to do something different, focusing instead on objects and landscapes. The result is 'Annie Leibovitz: Pilgrimage.' Seventy images from the book are on display at the [Concord Museum](#) through Sept. 23.

In a conversation between Leibovitz and Pulitzer Prize-winning author, presidential historian and Concord resident Doris Kearns Goodwin, who wrote the introduction for "Pilgrimage," audience members learned what inspired Leibovitz to take this journey.

"This was a very different project and I really wanted to be drawn in," Leibovitz said. "I didn't want to be on assignment. I was really having a hard time in my life and in my work and I started this project very gingerly. I didn't know if I was really going to do it."

There are nine photographs from Leibovitz's journey taken in Concord in July 2010, including images from the homes of iconic figures Ralph Waldo Emerson and Louisa May Alcott as well as at the site of Henry David Thoreau's cabin on Walden Pond.

Leibovitz said she asked Kearns Goodwin if she would write the introduction for her book after hearing her speak about the historic Provincetown home of Norman Mailer, an influential writer from the second half of the 20th century. Leibovitz said it was literally only several days later when she called Kearns Goodwin and asked her if she would be interested in helping out with the project.

Kearns Goodwin said she fell in love with the idea for the book.

"There's no question that for those of us who write history, there's nothing better than being able to see a historic house where somebody lived," Kearns Goodwin said. "And that's what Annie's book is about."

Leibovitz said what was so different about this pilgrimage, for her, was that she was only dealing with what was left of historic objects and homes.

"I realized that I felt a little bit at a handicap at a certain level, because I was dealing with what was left," she said. "I realized that in order to evoke what you (Kearns Goodwin) do when you write, I needed to find some emotional way into the photographs."

Walking into Orchard House for the first time, Leibovitz said she could feel the Alcotts were still there in the house. While there, she decided to photograph the desk at which Louisa May Alcott wrote "Little Women."



PHOTO/ ANN RINGWOOD/WICKED LOCAL STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

With it placed on the wall next to photos she took at the Orchard House, Annie Leibovitz talks about the photo taken at the Concord Museum of Henry David Thoreau's bed that he used at Walden Pond. Staff Photo by Ann Ringwood

"I ended up putting the photograph of the desk in there because it is so unique and so special because her father built it," Leibovitz said. "Up to that point my project was really about places and locations ... I had to learn that in order to photograph an object, it has to have the same criteria as a landscape or room."

About the exhibit

The Concord Museum exhibit of "Annie Leibovitz: Pilgrimage" is its only New England stop.

The show is being presented in collaboration with [Louisa May Alcott's Orchard House](#) and follows the exhibition's presentation at the [Smithsonian American Art Museum](#), which organized the exhibit.

"The images speak in a commonplace language to the photographer's curiosity about the world she inherited, spanning landscapes both dramatic and quiet, interiors of living rooms and bedrooms, and objects that are talismans of past lives," according to a press release from the museum.

Peggy Burke, executive director at the Concord Museum, hopes people from all over come to the museum for the exhibit.

"It's a wonderful collaboration between the Orchard House and the Concord Museum," Burke said. "I think those who know Annie and her work will see a whole new perspective on her as an artist with this exhibition. It's a new direction for her."

Jan Turnquist, executive director at the Orchard House, said she is thrilled about the collaboration and added it's important for Concord. After the event on Tuesday, Turnquist said she was so happy to see so many happy faces.

"It couldn't have gone better," she said. "This was such a festive and happy time. From the moment people arrived tonight it felt like a party. The atmosphere was amazing."

In celebration of the exhibition, Concord Museum and the Orchard House will extend their hours on Thursdays and Fridays in July.

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