

An American Beauty: Grateful Dead 1965–1995

July 15 – August 16, 2025

Los Angeles

Press Release

David Kordansky Gallery is pleased to present *An American Beauty: Grateful Dead 1965–1995*, an exhibition of photographs of the iconic psychedelic rock band curated by photographer Jay Blakesberg and his daughter, Ricki Blakesberg. Timed to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the founding of the band, as well as the release of a major new publication of the same name, the show will be on view in Los Angeles at 5130 W. Edgewood Pl. from July 15 through August 16, 2025. The coffee table book will be available for pre-order beginning June 12 at shop.davidkordanskygallery.com, and will be officially released on August 1 in honor of Jerry Garcia's birthday.

To mark the opening, a panel discussion will be held on Tuesday, July 15 at 5 PM, featuring Jay Blakesberg; Shirley Halperin, Co-Editor-in-Chief of *The Hollywood Reporter*; Ron Rakow, whose photographs are included in the exhibition and served as part of the Grateful Dead's management team during the late 1960s and early '70s; photographer and storyteller Rosie McGee, also an iconic member of the early Grateful Dead inner circle and family; and moderated by Stuart Krimko, staff writer at David Kordansky Gallery. The discussion will be followed by an opening reception from 6 – 8 PM.

An American Beauty: Grateful Dead 1965–1995 features 28 large-scale and 32 smaller photographic prints documenting all eras of the Grateful Dead experience. Selected from the 275 photographs included in the book, these exhibition images were taken by notable Grateful Dead photographers—Ron Rakow, Jay Blakesberg, Rosie McGee, Adrian Boot, Beth Sunflower, Snooky Flowers, Jonathan David Sabin, and Andy Leonard—who documented the Dead phenomenon from its early days at the peak of the Haight-Ashbury hippie renaissance through its rise as a stadium-filling, Top 10 cultural force.

Over the course of their thirty-year history—and beyond—the Grateful Dead provided both a soundtrack and gathering point for cultural and countercultural movements. Their community, known for its inclusivity and eccentricity, nurtured many renowned rock photographers of the era, some of whom began their journey as Deadheads—passionate fans who evolved into important documentarians with an intuitive talent for capturing the energy of the scene around them. While portraits and performance images of the band became iconic symbols of the group's visual identity, equally important are images of the Deadhead community itself.

An American Beauty provides many windows into the core of the Grateful Dead experience, in which the energy between the performers and the audience was constantly feeding off each other. Blakesberg's photos of ecstatic Deadhead audiences, resonate with contemporary trends in music, fashion, and art, underscoring the Grateful Dead's lasting impact on generations of artists and cultural thinkers. These images also capture a time before cellphones and social media changed the experience of live music. Fans are seen sharing a unique cultural communion that was happening in the moment, often outside the purview of commercial and corporate forces. Together, the images in this exhibition offer a sweeping view of an influential segment of American cultural

production during pivotal decades of political, social, and creative transformation. They tap into many of the band's major milestones, including the Wall of Sound, Egypt, and celebratory moments such as their annual New Year's Eve runs in the Bay Area. They also depict the humanity of this band and community, an important factor in their evergreen appeal. From the initial LSD-fueled flourishing of youth, through decades of constant touring, and eventually into the final years of the Dead's journey, the photographs explore moments of the magic that the Grateful Dead and the Deadheads created.

The artistic and cultural value of these photographs has found new expression through the collaborative vision that brought these images together into *An American Beauty*. The exhibition and book emerge from gallerist David Kordansky's lifelong love of the Dead's music and a shared vision with Jay Blakesberg that began in 2023 when the two met during a previous iteration of the exhibition at the Haight Street Art Center in San Francisco. The most recent iteration was presented in Las Vegas as part of the *Dead Forever Experience* at Sphere during Dead & Company's 2024 residency, where the exhibition drew more than 65,000 people.

Kordansky says, "I've been looking at some of these photographs of the Grateful Dead and Deadheads since I was 12 years old. To say that they are formative parts of my visual life—and important factors in my decision to devote my life to art and creativity—would be an understatement. They're also crucial documents for understanding how American culture—including music, visual art, and technology—has evolved since the 1960s. It's a dream to be able to collaborate with Jay and Ricki Blakesberg on this project. Jay is one of the true masters of rock photography as well as one of its most ardent and knowledgeable scholars."

For Jay Blakesberg, "*An American Beauty: Grateful Dead 1965–1995* is not just a celebration of the band—it's a visual journey through three decades of cultural evolution, community, and creativity. To bring this work into the fine art context of David Kordansky Gallery is deeply meaningful. It affirms what so many of us have always known: that the Grateful Dead's impact reaches far beyond music. These photographs tell the story of a movement, a family, and a spirit that continues to inspire new generations."

Co-curator Ricki Blakesberg says, "It is incredibly special to see this wild, beautiful, and unique thirty-year span of rare Grateful Dead images come to life here within the hallowed halls of David Kordansky Gallery. Assisting David and my dad, Jay Blakesberg, in the curation of this exhibit has been an immense honor, and demonstrates just how powerful the Grateful Dead continues to be in their ability to inspire across generations."