DAVID
KORDANSKY
GALLERY

An American Beauty: Grateful Dead 1965–1995
June 23 – August 7, 2026
New York

Press Release

David Kordansky Gallery is pleased to present *An American Beauty: Grateful Dead 1965–1995*, an exhibition of photographs of the iconic band curated by Ricki Blakesberg and Jay Blakesberg. The show follows a major 2025 publication of the same name. The exhibition is on view in New York at 520 W. 20th St. from June 23 through August 7, 2026. An opening reception will be held on Tuesday, June 23, from 6 – 8 PM.

An American Beauty: Grateful Dead 1965–1995 features twenty large-scale and more than a dozen smaller photographic prints documenting all eras of the Grateful Dead experience. The exhibition centers on the work of Grateful Dead photographers Jay Blakesberg, Adrian Boot, Suki Coughlin, Greg Gaar, Andy Leonard, Rosie McGee, Bob Minkin, Ron Rakow, Jon Sievert, Elizabeth Sunflower, and Kirk West—who documented the Dead from its early days in the Haight-Ashbury through the Jerry Garcia years.

This presentation includes several images that are shown here for the first time, expanding on the exhibition's earlier iteration in Los Angeles and marking its New York debut. *An American Beauty* reflects the Blakesbergs' ongoing work overseeing the Retro Photo Archive and stewarding the legacies of the pioneering rock photographers who comprise it. Over the span of four decades, these photographers captured the Grateful Dead experience from a position of rare access and trust. Working within the band's extended orbit, these images capture both the musicians and the community that formed around them. Moving between intimate moments and large-scale performances, the work reflects a sustained engagement with a culture that redefined the relationship between artist and audience.

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. Other pictures, like a 1968 photograph by Rosie McGee of Jerry Garcia and author and Merry Prankster Ken Kesey, provide direct evidence of the breadth of the band's influence in the many spheres with which it intersected.

Jay Blakesberg says, *"I've been part of this Grateful Dead world for a long time—first as a fan, and then as a professional photographer. A lot of us Deadheads who were out there seeing shows started from the same place. We were documenting something organically from the inside as it was happening. I was just trying to capture the bliss that was in front of me. To see it recognized now, alongside the work of these other photographers at David Kordansky Gallery, makes it feel that much more important."*

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An American Beauty provides many windows into the core of the Grateful Dead experience, in which the energy between the performers and the audience formed a constant feedback loop. 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 unmediated and ephemeral, 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. Many photographs tap into some 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. Others—a 1979 picture by Blakesberg of Weir and keyboardist Brent Mydland at a Washington, D.C. No Nukes rally, for example—provide illuminating images of the societal context in which such moments were taking place. Throughout, the humanity of this band and community, an important factor in their evergreen appeal, are on vibrant display. From the initial LSD-fueled experimental flourishing of youth, through decades of constant touring, and eventually into the final years of the Dead's journey, the photographs explore moments of magic that the Grateful Dead and the Deadheads created. What emerges is not only a record of the band, but a portrait of a larger movement built on connection, participation, and shared experience.

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 publication emerge from gallerist David Kordansky's lifelong love of the Dead's music and a shared commitment with Jay Blakesberg and Ricki Blakesberg to bringing this body of work into a fine art context. Earlier iterations were presented in San Francisco and in Las Vegas as part of the *Dead Forever Experience* at Sphere during Dead & Company's 2024 residency, where the exhibition reached a broad public audience and underscored the enduring cultural resonance of this material.

Kordansky says, *"These photographs tell the story of an entire culture, but they also speak to the individual lives of the musicians, the photographers, and the many Deadheads like myself who have charted our lives alongside the Dead's music and shows. Collaborating with Jay and Ricki Blakesberg has also been a fascinating education in rock photography as an art form. With Bobby Weir's death in January, it's become all the more important to continue the legacy of what the Dead and its many tributaries have been nourishing all these years. 20th—and now 21st—century American art and culture are incomplete without these stories."*

The recent losses of Weir and Phil Lesh have reframed the view of the Grateful Dead zeitgeist, shifting it from an active cultural force to one increasingly defined by legacy. Within this context, these photographs and the archival and curatorial work of the Blakesbergs take on added significance—not only as documentation, but as acts of preservation that articulate the depth and reach of a movement that extended far beyond music.

Ricki Blakesberg says, *"Bringing these works together in this setting highlights just how expansive and enduring the Grateful Dead legacy truly is. These images carry the spirit of a community that continues to resonate and grow across generations. Being part of that community and helping to archive and share its story is incredibly meaningful to me."*

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