

VANITY FAIR

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Eye of the Voice by James Wolcott

Way over at West 23rd street, slightly past the Half-King restaurant and in the shadow of the High Line, is where I found myself yesterday, haunting the white walls of Steven Kasher Gallery, attending the "Fred W. McDarrah: Save the Village" show, which most of the Village Voice vets seem to have already seen. As usual, I was pulling up the rear, by which I intend no innuendo, not when it's this cold and gray (the weather, I mean, not my rear). McDarrah was the staff photographer of the Voice before I enlisted and after I was gone and the show was awash with personal memories and memories that suffused the atmosphere then and are scrapbook images now, cultural keepsakes. There on one wall was the photograph of Norman Mailer appearing poised to launch a loogie at the camera as Voice editor Dan Wolf cagily leans back in his office chair--is that a cigar he's smoking? This photo was hanging in Wolf's office when I first interviewed for a job, any job, at the Voice. On the same gallery wall is a photo of a far less convivial office couple, Voice publisher Ed Fancher and editor Clay Felker after Felker had assumed captaincy of the paper; the young (we were all young then) Lucian K. Truscott IV, whose serialized memoir reveals what came after; movie critics Andrew Sarris and Molly Haskell (so glamorous) chatting with Woody Allen; poet, columnist, and Mets bard Joel Oppenheimer sitting in a crowded booth.

Iconic is an overused word (sometimes it seems as if every word today is overused), but McDarrah's shots of Allen Ginsberg as Uncle Sam, Bob Dylan snapping a salute, Andy Warhol's superstar menagerie, Robert F. Kennedy in the shadow of martyrdom, Susan Sontag looking like a German silent film star, and Jack Kerouac making like a lumberjack messiah are inescapable images of a dirtier, mangier, more creatively churning time that is receding into legend. The photo that delivered the most unexpected kick was that of a gutty Tennessee Williams, looking like a rogue right out of American Hustle.

And then there's this protest shot, the dignified women who are bearing witness undeterred by the sleaze clamoring around them. It's the most poignant one in the show.

Go.

Fred McDarrah: Save the Village, at Steven Kasher Gallery, 521 West 23rd Street, until March 8th