

Story of 'Freak' accident

Gregory Gibson (r.) has made a career out of unearthing rare and valuable manuscripts, books and images. But even he has never stumbled upon a cache like the one uncovered by dealer Bob Langmuir. In Gibson's new book, **"Hubert's Freaks"** (Harcourt, \$24), he details the strange adventure of Langmuir, who bought fascinating freak show material from several sources including Okie, a self-proclaimed Nigerian prince.

Hubert's Dime Museum and Flea Circus was once a Times Square institution. But mixed in among stacks of old posters, address books, diaries and other ephemera was the truly unexpected — lost images by the famed photographer Diane Arbus.

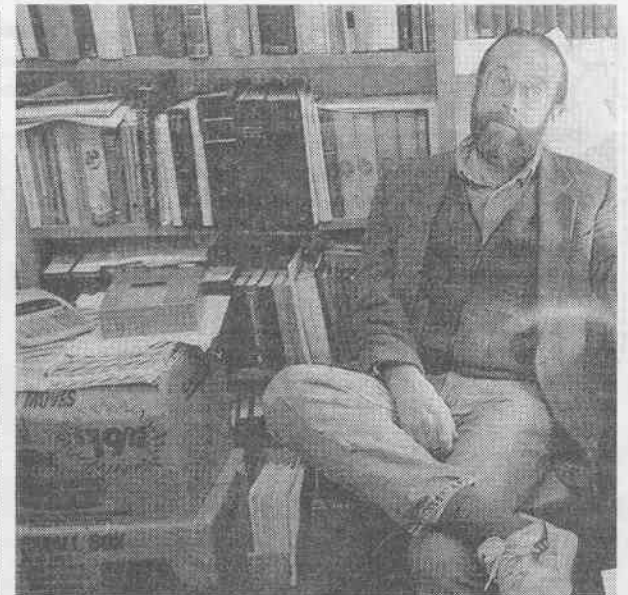
How did you find out about Langmuir and all his strange connections to Diane Arbus, such as his being in a life-threatening car accident the same day Arbus committed suicide?

I bumped into Bob four and a half years ago ... and him telling me basically the story that's in this book over one long night that went from the bar through dinner and me saying, "Holy smokes, I'm in love with this story. It's going in so many directions, it has so many legs, it's like a centipede."

I suppose a story involving Diane Arbus and a freak show is bound to be strange. But what happened when you gave a reading at the Strand?

Okie the Nigerian prince was there and he challenged me as to why I painted him as a criminal. I said, "I'm not a painter. I'm a nonfiction writer." There was some other clown there who claimed he was the guy who found this stuff and not the Nigerian prince.

Discovering a treasure like unknown Diane Arbus photographs must be the dream of everyone in the business.



It's everybody's fantasy of opening that box and, "Oh my God, it's the magic load and I just found it." But what happens when you really do find it?

For Bob Langmuir, that meant an auction recently that was called off at the last minute due to bizarre circumstances involving a possible lawsuit.

As you can imagine, the effect on Bob, the consigner, has been devastating. When it looked like it was going to be a happy ending, I wrote that it was really strange that a tale accompanied by this much strangeness should seem to end so simply and directly. I guess my instincts weren't far off.

Michael Giltz

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