

## The Barnstable Patriot

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### **'Eye on the 60s' at Cape Cod Museum of Art in Dennis**

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The 1960s was one of the most momentous decades of the 20th century, which explains the many 50th anniversaries this decade marking the start of the Peace Corps and Special Olympics; the era of JFK, RFK, MLK and LBJ; the March on Washington; the introduction of the Beatles and Bob Dylan; Woodstock and the first astronauts' deaths.

Photographer Rowland Scherman was there, capturing all of it for the world to see in his now-iconic Life magazine spreads. His personal journey through that decade is retraced in the documentary "Eye on the 60s," which is being brought back for a Cape audience at Cape Cod Museum of Art's Artfull Thursday event on Aug. 10. Scherman and film director Chris Szwedo, both Cape Cod residents, will be present for audience questions and to describe how the two of them, without a crew, made the self-funded film over a period of 14 months, retracing sites where Scherman captured his famous photographs.

The film premiered at the Cape Cinema in 2013 and has since been shown on PBS, in Washington museums and many theaters and is still frequently requested. Benton Jones at the museum saw it and wanted to bring it back, Szwedo said in a phone interview.

Szwedo explained how the concept for the film started by accident when he stumbled on some of Scherman's photos in Artworks Gallery in Orleans in 2012. On seeing the images of President Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Joni Mitchell, Arthur Ashe and others, he said to himself, "You're going to make this (film)." It was a "higher calling moment" for him, he said. "I felt a sense of urgency to make something people haven't seen."

The photographs touched him because he grew up during the 1960s and could

recall vividly the day as a second-grader in an Upstate New York Catholic school when his teacher announced that President Kennedy was dead. Szwedowas aware then that the “world had just shifted terribly.”

When he saw Scherman’s photos, it was only two weeks away from the 50th anniversary of the Peace Corps, which was Scherman’s first big freelance job where he photographed Peace Corps workers around the world. The young photographer he had been moved by President Kennedy’s inaugural speech urging citizens to ask what they could do for their country. Scherman hung around the Peace Corps offices with his camera until he was offered a job as its first official photographer, thereby launching his career.

Szwedow tracked down Scherman and the two attended the Peace Corps anniversary in Washington. Filming began there, and over the next year the two men visited the sites of Scherman’s historic photos: the Newport Jazz Festival, where he captured the first images of Dylan performing with Joan Baez; the Woodstock Festival crowd; Arlington National Cemetery and the funeral of Apollo 1 astronauts Virgil “Gus” Grissom and Roger Chaffee; and the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, where he had captured the March on Washington in August 1963.

For Szwedow, going to those sites helped him “fill in some of the blanks I was looking for” and he said that Scherman was “the perfect choice” to help explain the era. “When you have a good photo, you can see it and know what he saw.” Szwedow describes the film as a biography of Scherman and how he recorded his view of the world.

“You’re your own best piece of equipment. It’s a way of looking at life. It’s not just a slide show,” Scherman said. “You’re taken into the interior viewpoint of how you do something.” The film is about past, present and future as it talks about becoming older. Scherman is now 80.

“Photography is immortal. Photographers are not,” Szwedow said.

In addition to visiting the photographed sites, a highlight for both Szwedow and Scherman was gaining access to the National Archives in College Park, Maryland, and being allowed to scan about 200 of Scherman’s most famous photos, which did not credit him as the photographer.

“The March on Washington sequence became the linchpin of the film, and my work for the Peace Corps and the March are now correctly credited,” Scherman said in an email. “Had the movie not been made, it is unclear if that would have ever happened, so I am grateful for that.” Scherman said he is not one to “toot my own horn,” but admitted, “The photographs in the film are over a half century old, and have gained quite a bit of gravitas over the years.”

He also was glad he got “to hang out with the redoubtable Judy Collins for a while, to talk about our times together.” Collins, who was among the many famous people he photographed in the '60s, is one of three other people interviewed in the film, along with his Life boss, Richard Stolley, and friend Tom Clark.

Scherman said he does not mourn the demise of Life magazine, which he said “was doomed when the electronic media showed they could offer real-time visual coverage to the newsworthy events of the moment.” He added, “The magazine industry has responded by offering many many beautifully photographed and edited specialty magazines in travel, food, fashion, health, entertainment and all the rest. There will always be a market for excellent and timely photographs.”

He believes there are plenty of “talented photographers worldwide whose images can be transferred instantly to all corners of the globe from the remotest regions imaginable.”

The photographer said he is lucky to be spending his later years on the Cape, where he still shoots pictures almost every day, “mostly with the notion I will digitally transform them into abstract fine art paintings and prints. But I still do, and will always do, portraits. It’s what I am best at and what I enjoy the most.”

Artworks Gallery in Orleans has an extended Rowland Scherman exhibit, and is selling some of the photographs as well as archiving his million or so negatives into a historical perspective

Szwedo, who has been making films for 30 years, says he will continue to look for “stories of people who follow their passion in this age of computers and technology.” He certainly found one such story in “Eye on the 60s.”