

# Anna GABRIEL

*Celebrity photographer Anna Gabriel's new book EYE-D is a vision*

Photographer to the stars *Anna Gabriel* published her first book **EYE-D** back in October, celebrating its release with a pair of Morrison Hotel Gallery exhibitions in Los Angeles and New York. It's an inspiring collection of photographs and excerpts shared over years of travel, backstage and in celebrity homes, and a perfect coffee table book to treat yourself in the new year.

Anna Gabriel's extensive studies of photography from undergraduate all the way up to a Masters program ultimately led her to switch gears to music video and documentary work, directing music videos since 1997 for her famous father, musician *Peter Gabriel*, as well as artists like *Joseph Arthur*, *Emmanuel Jal*, *Jesca Hoop*, *Less Than Jake*, her husband, *Adam Masterson* and *Shelley Segal*. Gabriel's schedule did not really ever include photography full-time, and it was designing album insert artwork for her father's 2010 title *Scratch My Back* that ultimately led to exploring photography once again, and eventually curating **EYE-D**.

The list of musicians, actors, public figures (and one chef) whose eyes are featured in the book sounds like a major award show, a Rock & Roll Hall of Fame or Kennedy Center Honors lineup with the likes of *Mick Fleetwood*, *Johnny Depp*, *Eddie Vedder*, *David Byrne*, *Paul Simon*, *Annie Lennox*, *Sting*, *Susan Sarandon*, *Kevin Bacon*, *Michael Stipe*, *Bon Iver*, *Nile Rodgers*, *Debbie Harry* and so many more. Through Gabriel's own long-term relationships and connections for many years in the entertainment business, she traveled mostly around New York and London, but also stopped in Los Angeles, Ireland and some other locations along the way to illuminate the wonders of the eye and the expression around it, detailed with eyelashes, eyebrows, creases and folds in the skin. Gabriel poignantly reminds us that our eyes are a two-way window to the world—both our way to experience our surroundings and a way into viewing a glimpse of ourselves.

Anna Gabriel broke it all down with *Cali Mag*, detailing her way back to photography after projects with her famous father, the long and winding road capturing images and finally publishing **EYE-D**, observing perception of people and celebrities alike and finally tapping into what makes each eye so special and memorable.



*Michael Menachem*

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**Anna Gabriel**

*"I thought there was something interesting here in just the eyes and forget so much the identity and focus on the spiritual identity and make it EYE-D."*

**CALI MAG:** When masks and Covid were in full swing, you were already years into creating your book. What sparked the idea of publishing EYE-D as your first book initially?

**ANNA GABRIEL:** In true Gabriel fashion, as I like to joke, it's many years in the making. It was sort of a side project. It started as dad's album *Scratch My Back* insert, for the CD cover and I did I think 11 images for that and as I was doing that I thought this is an interesting project and decided to continue on with it. At that time, we wanted to come up with an idea to show people's identification, but not just a



Rosanna Arquette



It's wonderful to finally have it out there.

**CALI MAG:** You have written beautiful things about your relationship with your dad. You also compared David Byrne to your dad in one passage. Youssou N'Dour is like a member of your family. The subjects in the book feel like one big extended family for you. You have worked with your father and collaborated with him a lot. You've mentioned the intimacy of looking at your dad —not just the star we all know but the man, knowing his facial expressions as you've grown up. Now as a mom, do you see that differently being the adult figure in your children's life?

passport. People can use eyes and fingerprints as your unique identity so that's what we wanted to do for the album. I thought there was something interesting here in just the eyes and forget so much the identity and focus on the spiritual identity and make it EYE-D. EYE-D was sort of born at that point, and then it was a side project for many years. Since I started the project, I've had two children, I got married, so it's been a while, and working on other things at the same time. It is also about getting time to grab the people and for them to be available and not on tour, although most of them I did grab them on the go, backstage, or a hotel room or something like that.

**AG:** Yes, they say when you're a baby and you first make eye contact with your parent there are actual physical things that happen in your brain, physiology that happens with the eye contact that creates the oxytocin, the feeling of love, and there's a real connection. An amazing spiritual connection, and now that I'm a mother myself I've had those moments with both of my children, as babies and every day. There's nothing sort of like looking at your child, or even anyone you love, but particularly a parent/child bond. When you're that close and you're looking in their eyes and there's just an overwhelming sense of love, and those feelings are released and you really can see it. It's interesting because on the other side of the sort of extreme love that you can pass through to each other by looking in their eyes, you can also do hate and the opposite emotions, and I think that it can be very intense and very uncomfortable to stare someone in the eye that you don't like and it can be very threatening. It can create all of those opposite emotions. So either way, it's just an incredible, powerful tool to just be looking directly into somebody's eyes. So I think it's really fascinating.

**CALI MAG:** Love them or hate them, masks have been with us for nearly three years and for many, they have given us just enough expression to interact with friends and family, as well as complete strangers and passersby. What did you experience during this period?

*When you're that close and you're looking in their eyes and there's just an overwhelming sense of love, and those feelings are released and you really can see it.*

**AG:** For me, during Covid it was sort of interesting because you can still tell if people are smiling at you or not, but you can also get the wrong idea. I was on the subway and someone was staring quite



**Nadya Tolokonnikova**

intensely at me and my kids and I thought they are not happy, they are annoyed, maybe my kids were too loud. And then they got off and said your kids are so cute, and that's the exact opposite.



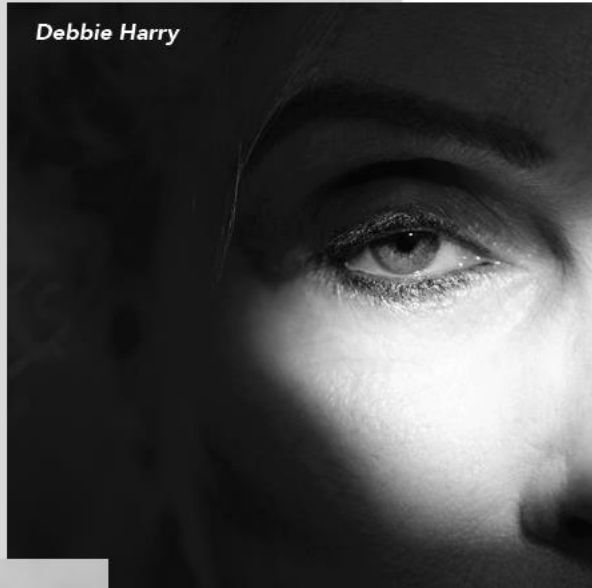
**CALI MAG:** If we could, how about breaking down some of these fascinating eyes in your book? Téa Leoni's is rather striking, *Michael Stipe's* is more sleepy, *Willem Dafoe's* is intense, Debbie Harry is just smoldering. Noel Gallagher and *U2's The Edge* have mischievous eyes, while *Annie Lennox's* eye is full of wonder. *Youssou N'Dour* has a warm and welcoming eye.

**AG:** He [Youssou N'Dour] is such the loveliest, warmest person, that it really comes across. It's funny, because the last few years when we've all been walking around with our masks on and just covering our nose we've been kind of now trained to look at the eyes and get that emotion from someone. It's really interesting to me because you really can get so much from just the eyes and not the rest of the face. You don't need someone's mouth to see that they're smiling.

**CALI MAG:** What is the story with *Michael Stipe's* eye that you captured?

**AG:** He was interesting because he was in his apartment and he was one of the earlier ones. He really wanted to put on gold eyeliner and I was close up. He ran to the bathroom to put on this eyeliner and it looked incredible in color because of the gold. That was the one image in the entire book that I really thought would have

*Debbie Harry*



been brilliant in color, because just having the gold eyeliner really expressed something about him and what he wanted to do and show for that moment. I also get asked why didn't you do it in color, 'cause obviously you want to see the color of somebody's eyes. The reason being, that's the first thing that everyone says is you've got blue, green, brown eyes, instead of looking at the emotion of the eyes.

**CALI MAG:** *Willem Dafoe* is a fantastic actor, and his characters are often intense, scary and even creepy. Whether it's intentional or not, we make judgments about people based on what we see or know or even don't know. What can you say about how we may perceive his eye?

**AG:** Absolutely, that was consciously in this book. I used well-known people in the book, these are faces that we see all the time.

We all have judgments on who we think they are, it's also being the factor of celebrity and being in the public eye, you are put out there and you are judged, from what the press says and what people say and what you hear. And you don't know the person even though a lot of the time you think that you do. I thought by doing this it was another way to look, cut the rest of the eye out and really try and see the emotion and see a person there, who they are for real and what they might be thinking, feeling in the moment.

**CALI MAG:** What were some of the stories from the shoots in California like? *Nadya Tolokonnikova* from the band *Pussy Riot* was one of your subjects here.

**AG:** [Nadya] is mainly in LA now, and I shot her on the street, along Sunset [Blvd.] somewhere, and it was a



*Shane MacGowan*

## ART

CALI·MAG  
*State of Soul*

really beautiful day as usual, a typical California day. She grabbed this hat off a stand on the street and cut a hole in it and put it over her head. The light against the white wall was just beautiful, it really popped through the mask. I thought the combination of shooting her in what she represents and what the mask represents for her in a beautiful, sunny California setting was kind of the opposite, but it really felt and turned out beautifully, it's one of my favorite images in the book.

**CALI MAG:** And you photographed members of the band *TV On The Radio*.

**AG:** I shot two of the TV On The Radio guys, two of them live in LA. It's funny, that was an interesting band because two of them lived in LA and two of them lived in New York, so it was half-half. The ones in New York were in an apartment just down the road from where I live in Williamsburg and the LA ones were I think in the Highland Park area. We went up to their house and they had all these great dogs in their yard and we played with them, and we shot them outside. The best part about shooting this project in California is obviously the light is always great as I'm shooting in daylight, whereas London and New York can be iffy.

**CALI MAG:** You photographed some others in California as well, what were those adventures like?

**AG:** And then *Randy Newman* was another one of my favorites. I shot him at his house in the Pacific Palisades, he has a beautiful place up there and we went to his garden and shot outside of his house, so that was lovely. And *Rosanna Arquette* too, I shot her in Malibu. We had some flowers and we were on the beach and hers was interesting because I wanted to get the flower sort of shape across the face and actually her eye is slightly out of focus, which I deliberately did because I didn't want to make them all the same. For me, it felt like imagewise it was more beautiful, in that out-of-focus sense.

**CALI MAG:** Your travels saw you off to Wisconsin with *Bon Iver* and in the Florida Keys with singer-songwriter *Mary Gauthier* and Ireland for both *The Edge* and *Shane MacGowan*. You even got a celebrity chef in there, *Mario Batali*.

**AG:** Yes, I really wanted to get more people like writers, sportsmen and different people and just really because my access is primarily to musicians so that's the way it went really in the end.

**CALI MAG:** This year *America's Got Talent* judges and fans roared for Lebanese dance troupe The Mayyas to eventually win the 17th season, a talented act baring only their eyes. It's clear the eyes are really the only external part of the body to tell you something.

**AG:** A lot of people come back and say how they were surprised at how much emotion you can get from the photographs, which is lovely to hear. I always felt taking the images you can really capture a lot of emotion out of the closeup of one eye.

**For more on Anna Gabriel and her book *EYE-D* visit: [eyedphotographs.com](http://eyedphotographs.com)  
Instagram @annagabrielphotography**

