

1975/10

The Art of the Camera



Cecil Beaton

CECIL BEATON'S CAMERA

AN EXHIBITION OF OVER 100 BLACK AND WHITE AND COLOUR PRINTS BY CECIL BEATON, ONE OF ENGLANDS MOST FAMOUS PHOTOGRAPHERS. IN CONJUNCTION WITH KODAK (AUSTRALIA) AND THE KODAK PHOTOGRAPHIC GALLERY, LONDON.

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QUEENSLAND ART GALLERY

CECIL BEATON'S CAMERA

Sir Cecil Beaton Kt., C.B.E. is one of England's most famous photographers and film and stage designers. He gained his fame as a photographic artist mainly for his photographs of Royalty and of the world's most famous celebrities. His reputation as a high fashion photographer has been widely acknowledged, but his varied career has also included front line assignments in the Middle East and elsewhere during World War II.

Born in 1904 Cecil Beaton was educated at Harrow then Cambridge. The fact that Beaton began photography and collecting bric-a-brac at an early age could have been the main contributing factor to his lifelong interest and unqualified achievement in photography.

"One Christmas (probably when aged 11 years) I was given a Box-Brownie camera, and I tried very hard, but in vain, to photograph my schoolfriends or my parents, to look like leading theatrical figures. The results were extremely poor and large lumps of cottonwool seemed always to be in front of my victims."

His family were more frequently used as subjects for these early photographic experiments, his sisters particularly, improvising their exotic costumes from bath towels, sheets or curtaining.

"Having developed a mania for Early Victorian decoration and collected shell flowers under glass domes, beadwork, chairs and mother of pearl tables, I always introduced them into the elaborate snapshots which I took in imitation of the works of Octavius Hill and other pioneers of photography."

As a young man he was encouraged by all manner of people to pursue his photography, but plain commercial photography was not his aim - his ambitions were somewhat higher. In imitating some of the pictures of the London Salon of Photography he photographed the family's old Spanish cook to look like a Rembrandt portrait. There were many exciting and interesting people living in and visiting London at that time and an enthusiastic friend suggested he make friends with the incredible Sitwells (Edith, Robert and Sackeverell) which he did, and so expanded his circle of notable people and patrons of letters and art.

At the same time he was taking stage designs to Charles B. Cochran the leading theatrical entrepreneur of the time, but with little immediate success.

In a short time he gave up office work and travelled to Venice on a vacation and on returning to London set about to make a name for himself as a society and magazine photographer. Beaton's first exhibition of photographs at the Bond Street Galleries was an immediate success, so much so that a Court Photographer at the time wrote to congratulate him on his artistry and originality. He also noted he had the courage to portray his circle of friends in such a bold bizarre manner.

Even the American editor-in-chief of Vogue magazine was greatly impressed with Beaton's early work and was somewhat taken aback when it was admitted that the photographers darkroom was a converted cellar, his assistant in developing and printing, his "nanny", that the butler was his lighting technician, and that his battered and unstable camera was swathed in red cloth to prevent light penetration.

As a shy and unknown young man of 28, Beaton visited America with a letter of introduction from Lady Cunard and the friendly warning that rich Americans were often snobbish, that he must stay in the best hotel and that he charge enormously high prices for his work. The early months were fraught with many anxieties - the lack of work, funds and a suitable film processor who could be relied upon when work eventually came in, were some of many.

The fashion magazines such as Vogue, Vanity Fair and Harper's Bazaar were thriving in those days and working for them usually placed the mark of approval on any artist or photographer. Sufficient to say Beaton survived the early days of uncertainty and eventually reached the greatest heights of success his work rightly deserved.

In the area of film and stage design his settings and costumes became well known during the pre and post Second World War period. Such films as Black Vanities, Kipps, Pitt the Younger, Anna Kanenina, An Ideal Husband, Gigi and The Doctor's Dilemma were all the more memorable because of Beaton's sensitive and creative instincts.

Stage productions he has designed and costumed are equally numerous and striking, Lady Windemere's Fan (London, New York), The Second Mrs. Tanqueray. Quadrille (London, New York), Portrait of a Lady (New York) The Chalk Garden, My Fair Lady (New York, London), Vanessa (New York), Turandot, Coco.

Between the years 1936 and 1969 Cecil Beaton had numerous exhibitions of his paintings, stage designs and photographs in both London and New York.

The writer of many books all of which are listed below show his added talents as an author:

The Book of Beauty	1930	Cecil Beaton's Scrapbook	1939
Cecil Beaton's New York	1939	My Royal Past	1939
History Under Fire	1941	Time Exposure	1941
Winged Squadrons	1942	Near East	1943
British Photographers	1944	Far East	1945
Chinese Album	1946	Ashcombe	1949
Photobiography	1951	Ballet	1951
Persona Grata	1953	The Glass of Fashion	1954
	It Gives me Great	Pleasure	1955
The Face of the World	1957	Japanese	1959
Diaries -	1922-1939	The Wandering Years	1961
Quail in Aspic	1962	My Fair Lady	1964
	Diaries - The Years Between		1965
The Best of Beaton	1968	My Bolivian Aunt	1971
Diaries - The Happy Years	1971	Diaries - The Strenuous	Years 1973

This exhibition speaks for itself and although the common expression - the camera never lies - may be true, it has been known to deceive, flatter, insult, surprise and embarrass its subject through technical manipulation and processing operations which allow the photographer to make artistic judgements and statements according to his whim or fancy. Many of Beaton's photographic portraits are penetrating and biting but generally he is the master of flattery realizing from his early days in New York on which side of the bread to spread his caviar.

CATALOGUE

THE MAN HIMSELF

1. *Cecil Beaton in the Middle East. 1943*
2. *Cecil Beaton on film set of 'My Fair Lady'*

THE ROYAL PATRONS

3. *Her Majesty the Queen*
4. *Her Majesty the Queen*
5. *His Royal Highness Prince Charles*
6. *Her Royal Highness Princess Alexandra*
7. *Her Royal Highness Princess Margaret*
8. *His Royal Highness Prince Charles*
9. *Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother*
10. *Her Royal Highness Princess Alexandra and the Hon. Angus Ogilvy.*
11. *Duke and Duchess of Windsor*
12. *Duke and Duchess of Windsor*
13. *Queen of Bhutane*
14. *Princess Berar*
15. *Princess Hercolani*

MEN OF POLITICES, LETTERS AND THE ARTS

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|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 16. <i>Lord Goodman</i> | 17. <i>Sir Winston Churchill</i> |
| 18. <i>W. H. Auden</i> | 19. <i>Aldous Huxley</i> |
| 20. <i>Krishnamurti</i> | 21. <i>Bernard Berenson</i> |
| 22. <i>Ian Fleming</i> | 23. <i>Balanchine</i> |
| 24. <i>Alexander Quennell</i> | 25. <i>Dr. Roy Strong</i> |
| 26. <i>Harold Pinter</i> | 27. <i>Alan Webb</i> |

LADIES OF FASHIONS, LETTERS AND HIGH SOCIETY

28. *Mrs. Moscockle. 1930*
29. *Coco Chanel*

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|--|--------------------------------|
| 30. <i>Edith Sitwell</i> | 31. <i>Lady Astor</i> |
| 32. <i>Gertrude Stein and Alice Toklas</i> | |
| 33. <i>Edith Sitwell</i> | 34. <i>Nancy. 1934</i> |
| 35. <i>Fashion Photograph. 1945</i> | |
| 36. <i>Paula Gellibrand</i> | 37. <i>The Wyndham Sisters</i> |

THE ARTISTS

- | | |
|--|---------------------------|
| 38. <i>Walter Sickert and Wife</i> | |
| 39. <i>Augustus John</i> | |
| 40. <i>Graham Sutherland with Somerset Maugham</i> | |
| 41. <i>Picasso</i> | 42. <i>Henry Moore</i> |
| 43. <i>Francis Bacon</i> | 44. <i>Salvadore Dali</i> |
| 45. <i>Andy Wahol</i> | 46. <i>David Hockney</i> |

MEN OF MUSIC

- | | |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 47. <i>Arthur Rubenstein</i> | 48. <i>Igor Stravinsky</i> |
| 49. <i>Benjamin Britten</i> | |

THE PERFORMERS

- | | |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 50. <i>Martha Graham</i> | 51. <i>Christopher Bruce</i> |
| 52. <i>Dame Margot Fonteyn</i> | 53. <i>Maria Callas</i> |
| 54. <i>Leontyne Price</i> | 55. <i>David Warner</i> |
| 56. <i>Patrick Procktor</i> | 57. <i>Mick Jagger</i> |
| 58. <i>David Warner</i> | |

STARS OF THE STAGE AND SCREEN

- | | |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 59. <i>Lady Diana Cooper</i> | 60. <i>Greta Garbo</i> |
| 61. <i>Gloria Swanson</i> | 62. <i>Gladys Cooper</i> |
| 63. <i>Marlene Dietrich</i> | 64. <i>Audrey Hepburn</i> |
| 65. <i>Marilyn Munroe</i> | 66. <i>Ingrid Bergman</i> |
| 67. <i>Julie Andrews</i> | 68. <i>Twiggy</i> |
| 69. <i>Michael York</i> | 70. <i>Marilyn Munroe</i> |
| 71. <i>Barbara Streisland</i> | 72. <i>Vivien Leigh</i> |
| 73. <i>Katharine Hepburn</i> | 74. <i>Mae West</i> |
| 75. <i>Grace Kelly</i> | 76. <i>Buster Keaton</i> |

WAR TIME TRAGEDIES

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| 77. <i>Tobruk Harbour</i> | |
| 78. <i>War Debris. Middle East</i> | |
| 79. <i>Battlefield Debris. Western Desert</i> | |
| 80. <i>War Debris. Middle East</i> | |

81. *Plane Wreck. Middle East*
82. *Battlefield Debris. Middle East*
83. *Bomb Damage. Tobruk. 1942*
84. *R. A. F. in the Western Front*
85. *Ruins of a City Church. 1940*
86. *Tobruk Nurses*
87. *Road Accident, Pihu*
88. *Arab Legionaire, Ayria. 1944*
89. *Wounded Troops Comforts. Burma*
90. *Soldier Resting, Burma*

THE HUMAN TRAGEDIES

91. *Bomb Victim. 1941*
92. *Polish Boy Refugee. 1942*
93. *Canadian Mission Hospital. Chengtu. 1945*
94. *Orphan Children. 1941*

A RETURN TO PEACE

95. *Wild Flowers. Cyprus*
96. *White Rose*
97. *Still Life*
98. *Japan in Winter*
99. *Dyed Kimono Cloth. Japan*
100. *Poppy Field*

LOOKING AT THE WORLD AGAIN

101. *Turkey*
102. *Market Day. Madagascar*
103. *Bora Bora Girls*
104. *Bolivian Nun*
105. *In a Chengtu Street. 1945*
106. *Chinese Village*
107. *Bangkok*
108. *Bangkok*
109. *In Old Delhi*
110. *Scottish Lake*

PHOTOGRAPHY AND ART

Though it had been practised earlier, photography was introduced to the world in 1839. Its significance for art was immediately recognized. On one hand it could supply artists with 'sketches' from nature of a fidelity hitherto unknown. On the other it threatened to render obsolete those artists whose sole function was to reproduce the literal appearances of the physical world. Not only did photographs provide a vast amount of visual information but in their peculiarities of form imaginative artists discovered new means of representation. In painting and drawing the greater authenticity of TOPOGRAPHICAL views and popular GENRE themes set in the Near East can be attributed to the influence of photography. The use of blurred forms by COROT and DAUBIGNY to effect the appearance of movement in LANDSCAPE forms and later, in the paintings of the IMPRESSIONISTS, to impart a sense of motion to pedestrian figures very likely originates in certain idiosyncrasies of the camera image.

Portrait painters could now dispense with the many uncomfortable sittings previously required and, utilizing a few photographs, produce the necessary likeness with much saving of time and trouble. But by the same token the art of portraiture was in danger of being superseded by the photograph. In fact the demise of MINIATURE painting and the diminishing importance of larger portraits on canvas was a direct result of the increased efficiency and productivity of the photographic camera and the greater preoccupation of the public with photographic accuracy.

Photographic 'Academies' or collections of nude studies were put out for the use of artists and students. The shift away from the IDEAL nude based on ANTIQUE prototypes to a more apparent NATURALISM is also attributable to the non-selective character of the lens. This can be seen in the work of DELACROIX and COURBET, both of whom employed photographic nudes. Delacroix, a charter member of the first photographic society in France (1851), positively advocated their use though he warned artists that photographs must be handled with great care. They were interpretations of nature, he wrote; they revealed her secrets: 'If a man of genius uses the Daguerrotype as it should be used, he will elevate (his art) to a height hitherto unknown.'

Photographers were not content to be designated merely factotums to art. Not only were many of them practising painters and sculptors as well, but their talents as artists were brought to bear in the manipulation of the camera. They conceived of their medium as an art. They had their own exhibitions, and they saw no reason why they should not enjoy all the advantages bestowed on the other arts. Though a small number of photographs had been shown earlier in official exhibitions of FINE ART in 1859 the French SALON contained a photographic section. Considering this an impertinence, probably, and reacting to the proliferation of photographic styles in French painting, Charles BAUDELAIRE called photography 'the mortal enemy of art' (Salon review of 1859). He attacked the public who look 'only for truth'. With typical irony he wrote: 'Since photography gives us every guarantee of exactitude that we could wish, then photography and Art are the same thing...If photography is allowed to stand in for Art in some of its functions it will soon supplant or corrupt it completely.... It must return to its real task, which is to be the servant of the sciences and of the arts, but a very humble servant.'

Three years later a decision was announced by a French court in which photography was declared to be an art. This provoked a hostile response in the form of a petition on which the name of INGRES headed an imposing list of artists. Never, they stated, could photography 'be compared with those works which are the fruits of intelligence and a study of Art.' Ingres and other academicians resented the obvious development towards a tonal style in painting. They blamed photography for the decline of 'good drawing', which was considered essential for the expression of all the 'noble' elements of art. 'I greatly fear', wrote Hippolyte Flandrin in 1863, 'that photography has dealt a death blow to Art.'

The phenomenal expansion of the photographic industry not only worried painters but made artistic photographers uneasy as well. The cost of a photograph was only a fraction of that for a painting and considerably below the price of a good engraving. According to calculations made in 1863 (*Photographic News*, 27 February), based on the sale of photographic materials, over 105 million photographs were produced the previous year in Great Britain alone. This economic factor and the greater ease with which photographs could be made by even the least experienced should be considered in estimating the chain of consequences from the more 'artful' use of photography to the ascendancy of POST-IMPRESSIONISM.

As early as 1842 a writer in 'The Spectator' said: 'The artist cannot compete with the minute accuracy... of the Daguerreotype but... not all the delicate truth of photographic delineation can supply the want of colour. By imitating the local colour and atmospheric effect alone can landscape painters hope to stand against such a formidable rival as Nature. (Artists should also) strive to imitate the appearance of movement in figures and foliage, water and clouds.' Advice of this kind was frequently offered. Yet in 1863, the year of the famous Salon des Refuses, some of the earliest examples of natural colour photographs (though impermanent) were exhibited in the same building. From the 1860s artists and critics became sensitive to the imminence of colour photography. The apparent dichotomy in Impressionist painting between its photographic accuracy of tone and its more arbitrary colour and brush-work may well have reflected the general artistic dilemma resulting from the progress of photography.

From about 1860 large quantities of 'snapshot' photographs were produced, usually in stereoscopic form. Their inevitable peculiarities of composition were undoubtedly exploited by DEGAS in the formulation of his characteristic style. With the appearance in 1878 of Edward Muybridge's instantaneous photographs a previously unknown universe was brought to light. In these sequential views every intermediate phase of human and animal locomotion was clearly defined. They demonstrated the inaccuracies of conventional representations and deficiencies of human vision. Many artists, battle painters particularly, immediately subscribed to the revelations of the high-speed camera. But others objected to them. Not what actually exists, they said, but only what can be seen to exist may, legitimately, become the subject of art.

In the 1880s important variations of Muybridge's consecutive series photographs were made by the artist Thomas EAKINS and the physiologist Etienne Jules Marey. These are generally known as chronophotographs, characterized by the superimposition of forms and often combining both blurred and instantaneous images. They showed more clearly the patterns of the movements themselves, and Marey's photographs were undoubtedly the source of Marcel DUNCHAMP's 'Nude Descending a Staircase' (1912) and some of the paintings and sculpture by the Italian FUTURISTS: BALLA, BOCCIONI, and SEVERINI.

The appearance in the 1880s of the Kodak camera and cinematography marks a turningpoint in the visual arts. Not only painters but many photographers too were deliberately moving away from purely imitative towards more interpretative representations of the natural world. Photographers had never really been divorced from the prevailing currents in art and in many ways they matched the virtuosity of even the most imaginative painters. Despite the intrinsic limitations of their medium, photographers like Alfred Stieglitz, Edward Steichen, Robert Demachy, Paul Strand, and Edward Weston, among many others in the 20th as well as the 19th c., have demonstrated that photography too can be a creative art.

But the intrinsic power of the photographic image was recognized by many artists in the 20th c. By the use of actual photographs and by rendering their subjects in a highly photographic manner DADA and SURREALIST artists, Max ERNST in particular, gave a pictorial logic to the irrationality of disparate juxtapositions. In the photograms of Man Ray (1890-), Tristan Tzara, and Kurt SCHWITTERS, called pure Dada objects, the metamorphosis of real things was supported by the credibility of photographic CHIAROSCURO. Among BAUHAUS artists photography was brought into a closer relation with the other visual arts than had ever been possible before. The photomontages of MOHOLY-NAGY, Hannah Hoch, and others revealed again the potential of the photographic form, even when that form was fragmented and used in different contexts.

