

PRESS INFORMATION

Helmut Newton Photographs

May 31–December 31, 2008

Museum of
Modern Art

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Helmut Newton and His Women

“Bullshit! I love the girls. This is all a feminist misunderstanding.” This was Helmut Newton’s response several years ago to Alice Schwarzer, editor-in-chief of ‘EMMA’ magazine, accusing him and his nude photographs of being sexist, even racist. Newton was used to rejection. With his staged photographs, Newton put the self-confident sexuality of women into the picture in a revolutionary way. “I’m a feminist,” he once said about himself.

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The photographer of the beautiful and the famous, who worked for the largest fashion magazines in the world, never remained within the narrow confines of commissioned work, rather he used the fashion industry to stage his own photographic fantasies. His meticulously staged photographs with their consciously displayed sexuality were innovative fashion photographs, social provocation, and outstanding artistic works that smoothly entered the great annals of nude photography.

The Exhibition—A Celebration and a Discussion Forum

After Gotthard Graubner, Gerhard Richter, Thomas Demand, Gregor Schneider, and Jörg Immendorff, the Weserburg, Bremen’s museum of modern art, is now presenting photographs by Helmut Newton from a private collection in Bremen, images that have never before been shown in this way. “With the Newton show, the Weserburg is continuing along its path of presenting outstanding artists of our time in Bremen. [This course] reinforces the museum’s position as a beacon of Bremen’s art scene and as a leading institution for contemporary art in northwestern Germany,” said Mayor and Senator of Culture Jens Böhrnsen in his preface to the exhibition.

On about 750 square meters of exhibition space, from May 31–December 31, 2008, the Weserburg is presenting one of the most successful and most controversial photographers of the twentieth century in the exhibition ‘Helmut Newton: Photographs’. “The exhibition is a celebration of great photographs and provides a forum for the debates and discussions that surround these images. We can hardly wait!” is how the director of the Weserburg, Carsten Ahrens, describes the conceptual approach.

The exhibition shows the wide spectrum of work by the revolutionary fashion and nude photographer. In addition to the large-format, life-size ‘Big Nudes’, which Newton was inspired to create after seeing life-size wanted-person photographs of RAF terrorists, there are also pictures from a variety of series by the artist: suspense-laden scenes in calculated photographic stagings that suggest they are part of a cinematic narrative are displayed



alongside portraits of stars from the dazzling world of glamour.

An Eventful Biography

Helmut Newton, who was born in Berlin in 1920, was the son of a wealthy button manufacturer. He attended high school until the Nuremberg Race Laws required the separation of Jewish and “Aryan” students. His father enrolled him in the American School in Berlin. The issue of school, however, remained a minor one. Newton was more interested in swimming, girls, and taking photographs. In 1936, he was finally able to become an apprentice to the photographer Yva (Else Simon), one of the most important photographers at the time. Yva was murdered by the Nazis in Auschwitz. On December 5, 1938, at his mother’s instigation, Newton boarded a train at Berlin-Zoo and left Germany via Trieste and Singapore to Australia, where he was initially detained and then beginning in 1940 served for five years in the Australian army. After the war, he founded his first small photo studio in Melbourne and worked occasionally for the Australian issue Vogue. In 1948, he married the actress June Brunel, who from 1970 onwards also worked as a photographer under the professional name of Alice Springs and lastingly influenced her husband’s work.

A Life of Luxury

With little money and big dreams, at the end of the 1950s Newton and his wife returned to Europe, first to London and then to Paris, where his great career began as a photographer for ‘Vogue’, ‘Elle’, and ‘Queen’. Newton found the definitive motifs for his work in the red-light district of the city. His first books—‘White Women, Sleepless Nights, and Big Nudes’—which were published in the 1970s, place him among the ranks of artistic photographers. It is said that in the 1980s, Newton received up to 100,000 marks a day. The couple lived in luxury in Monaco and Los Angeles. In October 2003, with the words “When we’ve kicked the bucket, everything goes to Berlin,” the photographer gave more than 1,000 of his works to the Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz. These works constitute the basis of the Helmut Newton Foundation, which presents exhibitions on Newton’s work and contemporary photography in its center on Jedben Strasse at the Bahnhof Zoo. A tragic car accident suddenly ended Helmut Newton’s life in January 2004. What remains are his photography and the memory of an impressively enchanting human being who seems to virtually come alive in the exhibition when one reads what his contemporaries, such as Karl Lagerfeld, have to say about him.

Tickets for ‘Helmut Newton: Photographs’ can be purchased at the museum box office or at Northwest Ticket; they can also be bought at www.weserburg.de, www.nordwest-ticket.de, or by calling +49 (0)432 36 36 36.

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