

## Contents

Copyright – Photos © Helmut Newton Foundation

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic means without prior written permission from the copyright holders. The publisher would like to thank all those who have kindly given their permission for the reproduction of material for this book. Every effort has been made to obtain permission to reproduce the images and texts in this catalogue. However, as is standard editorial policy, the publisher is at the disposal of copyright holders and undertakes to correct any omissions or errors in future editions.

<b>Preface</b>	10
The Princess of Hanover	
<b>Foreword</b>	12
Björn Dahlström and Matthias Harder	
<b>Newton: Both Sides of the Coin</b>	14
Guillaume de Sardes	
<b>Newton, Riviera</b>	26
Matthias Harder	
<b>Monte Carlo Is Beautiful</b>	36
Jean-Luc Monterosso	
<b>Helmut Newton: A Photographer of (Life)Style?</b>	38
Alain Fleischer	
<b>By the Grace of Helmut Newton</b>	42
Catherine Millet	
<b>A Bullet in the Eye: That's What a Shutter Is</b>	46
Ivan Barlafante	
<b>Helmut Newton: From Glossy Mags to Museums</b>	50
Simone Klein	
<b>Works Exhibited</b>	56
Swimming Pools / Mediterranean	59
Polaroids	77
Ramatuelle	87
Cannes Festival	105
Portraits	115
Fashion & Nudes	159
Private Collections	235
Ballets de Monte-Carlo	247
Curiosa	279
<b>Interviews and Testimony</b>	
Paloma Picasso	324
Edouard Merino	328
Charles de Meaux	332
Jean-Christophe Maillot	336
Philippe Serieys	340
<b>List of Exhibited Works</b>	344
<b>Author Biographies</b>	352





When he moved to Monaco in the early 1980s, Helmut Newton was already considered a giant in his field and in particular in the fashion world. So it was a privilege to see this extraordinary artist capture a world we thought we knew, starting with Monaco and the French Riviera, which we rediscovered through his eyes.

For him, the continuity with his earlier work was, I think, self-evident. The coherence between the fashion photography that made him successful and the series he did for the Ballets de Monte-Carlo, for example, is obvious. Newton's art explodes in every one of his pictures. Without even mentioning the private dimension and all the memories that they revive, I find the same pleasure in looking at them each time.

Jean-Christophe Maillot, Paloma Picasso and Newton's assistant Fifi tell us how the shooting sessions went. I had the good fortune to pose for him many times, but even without knowing how he went about his work, one can only be captivated by the images he knew how to build, with such rigour and precision. The appearance of ease is the mark of the greatest.

The Nouveau Musée National de Monaco is offering, as always, a necessary insight into Monaco's cultural heritage and artistic history. And there can be no doubt that visitors to the exhibition and readers of this book will return enthused from their immersion in Newton's Riviera and the imagination of this singular creator who, like so many artists, has given this part of the Mediterranean the dimensions of a myth.



The Princess of Hanover





Every artistic discipline, in every era, has its grand masters, but few can be said to have as single-handedly invented a visual language and revolutionised their medium as Helmut Newton. His distinctive aesthetic is recognisable at first glance, yet his work never ceases to surprise.

One thing is made clear here for the first time: it was with the move to Monaco that Newton developed his *maniera* – if the term makes sense for such a baroque photographer – and on the Riviera that he perfected his style. His encounter with the Principality seemed predestined, so much so that it resembled the setting that emerged from his imagination and became, in the course of the previous decade, indissociable from an oeuvre in which bodies and artifice merge in a fetishistic eroticism almost always verging on the uncanny.

Newton's photographs are literally fascinating. His *maestria* is measured by the propensity of his images to appropriate his subjects and their environment and to render them in an entirely new way. His world generates its own models and, scaled down by his lens, the most famous of them – the leading celebrities – are perceived above all as characters in his productions. Their aura fades in submission to the plasticity of the image, yet is at the same time strengthened by it.

In Monaco, in addition to producing stunningly sublime fashion photography, he experimented with the more personal genre of landscape. In both instances the city he shows us seems to have existed as such only for and through him, as the uncreated theatre of his intimate obsessions.

The Helmut Newton Foundation and the Nouveau Musée National de Monaco (NMNM) are proud to be celebrating one of the Principality's most exceptional residents with this exhibition at the Villa Sauber, a few steps from the apartment where Helmut Newton lived from 1982 until his death in 2004. This is an opportunity to renew our acquaintance with some of his most famous images and to discover little-known photographs carefully preserved by friends and local collectors. We thank them for sharing these treasures with us.

Björn Dahlström  
Director, Nouveau Musée National de Monaco

Matthias Harder  
Director, Helmut Newton Foundation

## **Newton: Both Sides of the Coin**



"People who write about photography are only writing for other people who write about photography," Helmut Newton is reported to have said, with a characteristic mix of humour and disdain for theory. He is also quoted as having remarked of art critics, "The main thing is that they spell my name right." This was his way of heading off any overly subtle approach to his work. Yet there must have been something special about his photographs for them to have outlived the fashions they illustrated, as well as something very personal for them to be so instantly recognisable. This is what I would like to try to elucidate here by restoring Newton's work in all its complexity, by painting a double portrait of him: on the one hand, the photographer of fashion and "beautiful people" that everyone knows, and on the other, the artist who earned, in his own words, a "bad reputation" by applying the Surrealists' programme of "total insubordination".

### A Success Story

The 1960s and 1970s were the golden age of fashion photography. With the advent of ready-to-wear clothing, new brands and the specialist press boomed, bringing increasing budgets and plentiful work. Some photographers became stars, as Michelangelo Antonioni brilliantly captured in *Blow-up* (1966). His model was David Bailey, but a decade later it could have been Helmut Newton. After a slow start in the early 1960s, Newton found his style and with it rapid success. Within a few years he earned enough to buy an apartment on fashionable rue Aubriot in Paris and a house in Ramatuelle, in the South of France ▶, where he and his wife June lived from June to August every year. Newton, a devoted swimmer since his teenage years in Berlin, now had the Mediterranean at his disposal. From Ramatuelle, where he frequented the Club 55, Saint-Tropez was a stone's throw away, and he got into the habit of making the trip on his Honda mini-bike and having lunch at La Voile Rouge. A new personal geography took shape for him: after Paris, whose nightlife, posh hotels and fashion designers he adored, he discovered the Riviera, with its white light, its posh hotels (again) and its Cannes Film Festival. Little by little, his centre of gravity shifted.

1981. "I like the sun, and there's none left in Paris," Newton is said to have told the Monaco official in charge of his residency application. Did he smilingly add that with the election of François Mitterrand, tax increases were on the horizon in France? Probably not, since that went without saying! Thus came the move to Monaco. He was 61 years old and the decade that was beginning represented a turning point in his work. Now famous, he tried his hand at landscapes ▶, developed his personal work and took more and more liberties in his fashion photographs, imposing his point of view on his clients. The entire Principality was soon transformed into a backdrop for his images: hotels, terraces, parking garages and even building sites, as in the magnificent series of photographs he took in 1986 for Versace: teasing brunettes holding each other by the waist in front of a dump truck ▶, a flawless blonde leaning against the giant bucket of an excavator ▶. Creatively, Newton's Monaco years were his best.

### Fashion

Newton's reputation is first and foremost as a fashion photographer, which may seem paradoxical given that he has never been "interested in clothing as such: contrary to what is at stake in more conventional fashion photography, for him it is a mere prop within an often literary or cinematographic narrative." (José Alvarez, *Helmut & June*, 2020) The upshot was images that are less a reflection of the world of the designers he works for than of his own. The clothes are not directly highlighted and often even seem to be there in the photograph by chance. Newton made no bones about this: "The perfect fashion photograph is a photograph that does not look like a fashion photograph."



91



310-311



187



189





174



172-173



128



195



170-171

It was this rejection of any Madison Avenue complacency that allowed him to develop his own world and immediately recognisable style.

That world, a blend of ostentatious luxury, sexual tension and play with vulgarity, is heavily influenced by the cinema. His images seem to tell stories – but not just any stories. Considerable influence came from Erich von Stroheim, whose aesthetic he very much admired, and to whom he paid tribute in *Hugh Hefner's Projection Room* (1986), taken in Beverly Hills: three young women in the foreground, seen in back view, are watching Jean Renoir's film *La Grande Illusion* (1937), in which von Stroheim masterfully plays Commander von Rauffenstein. It was from this fine film that Newton borrowed the idea of the neck brace, a prop he used in many photographs, to the point of making medical fetishism a trademark. Examples include two images created in Monte Carlo: *Eva Watched by TV Image* (1993) ◀ and *Bernice* (1994) ◀. Von Stroheim's influence was stressed by his compatriot and friend Karl Lagerfeld: "The example that especially comes to mind are particular scenes from *Foolish Wives* [1922]. The film is set in a place that Newton has a special liking for: Monte Carlo." Many of the images made by Newton are reminiscent of this film written, directed, starred in and edited by the brilliant Austro-Hungarian filmmaker. Von Stroheim plays the role of the fake Count Karamzin, who lives in a luxurious villa overlooking the sea, dresses meticulously, and has tumultuous relationships with women. He also wears a monocle, an old-fashioned accessory that Newton picked up in several images, including a famous 1983 portrait of Paloma Picasso ◀.

Further evidence of this cinematic influence is to be found in Newton's proximity to the worlds of Fritz Lang and Alfred Hitchcock, a proximity that sometimes goes as far as quotation: an involuntary instance (the idea came from French couturier Thierry Mugler) is the robot from Lang's *Metropolis* (1927) in an image made for Mugler in 1995 ◀; and in a more deliberate vein is the quotation of the famous scene of the plane chasing Cary Grant in *North by Northwest* (1959), in a series made for *British Vogue* in 1967.

Having a world of one's own, however, does not on its own make an artist; that world also has to find expression in a personal style. In Newton's case that style is characterised by coldness, a distance that is accentuated by the use of black and white: "Black and white gives the photo an abstract value and induces in itself a derealisation of the subject," he commented. To the coldness one might add rigour. Swimming against the tide of an era that revelled in the messy, Newton created impeccable images in which nothing is left to chance. In this respect his photographs are an extension of classical painting, particularly the history painting genre with its pronounced emphasis on composition. Their theatricality is undisguised. He speaks of his "fascination with hotels, which all have a particular atmosphere, a theatrical aspect that suits [my] work very well", and adds, "Their stilted, highly artificial decors fascinate me. Artifice, decor: these words are keys to an understanding of my work." An image like *Iman as Odalisque at the Negresco* ◀ (Nice, 1991) is more than sufficient proof of the accuracy of this remark. The rigour of the composition, the artificiality, the coldness – all these factors underscore the leaning towards academicism. This is important because, in his best images, academicism of form and transgression of subject matter generate a tension between two opposing poles that is perhaps the most interesting, most innovative aspect of the oeuvre. It is what makes his photographs so ambiguous and so difficult to analyse.



### The Status of the Statue

Critics have always stressed the close links between photography and painting. Many of the earliest photographic images were landscapes or portraits, and by the late nineteenth century people were being photographed in the same way as previous generations were habitually portrayed by this or that fashionable artist. The obviousness of this original connection obscured another particularly visible one in Newton: the connection with statuary. The way a fashion photographer immobilises his model in what is rightly called "a pose" is, however, that of the sculptor as well as the painter. Newton's fascination with fettered bodies, whether chained or fitted with prostheses, stems among other things from his interest in the pose. An example is the photograph *Suzy Dyson, Quai d'Orsay, Paris* (1978). It shows a young woman standing very straight, feet together, and wearing heels in a room shaded by Japanese blinds and with a fur-covered floor. Having let her coat slip back over her shoulders, baring her bosom, she is now removing her skirt, revealing a garter belt. Her body is nevertheless made as rigid as an archaic Greek kouros by the wearing of an orthopaedic corset and a neck brace. Although half naked, the model is less sensual than hieratic.

This statue-like hieraticism characterises many of Newton's images, even the most unexpected ones, as when he photographs dancers from the Ballets de Monte-Carlo ▶ or a naked woman, at night, on the diving board of the Monte-Carlo Beach hotel in Roquebrune ▶. But it is in his series of *Big Nudes* ▶, exhibited in 1981 at the Parisian gallery Templon, that the relationship to statuary is most evident. In these images, of a highly unusual format for the time, the models, photographed against a derealising white background, are naked but for their high heels. Faced with these images of a visual force rarely achieved, the critic Bernard Lamarche-Vadel wrote, "Photography does not exist, the history of statuary continues."

### Portraits of the Beautiful People

The links between Newton's aesthetic and classical art, whether painting or statuary, are to be found in all his portraits. Here again, all spontaneity is excluded: the models pose. If Newton's portraits strike a balance between realism and transfiguration, it is because they are staged. As he himself admitted, "I have often and stubbornly attempted the 'decisive moment' dear to Cartier-Bresson, and have failed painfully." This explains the continuity of style that exists between his fashion photographs and his portraits, the separation between the two often being blurred, as is the case with the image he made in 2003 of Maurizio Cattelan, in a suit, sitting on a chair in the middle of an almost empty room with, at his feet, a half-dressed, unconscious woman ▶. Here, the staging is so extreme that one can legitimately ask whether it is still appropriate to speak of a portrait.

There is no denying that Newton photographed only the West's elite – and even then he was only interested in a part of it. His attention went not to politicians and businessmen, but to many art – in the broadest sense – and fashion personalities, in other words, people who are particularly sensitive to images in general and to their own in particular. The people portrayed not only have wealth in common, they also often live their wealth in what Thorstein Veblen termed a "conspicuous" manner. Producers, directors, actors and actresses, singers, dancers, ballerinas and so forth – all figures of the society of the spectacle.



272



292-293



177



154-155





281

But what kind of spectacle is this, exactly? Even if, as Dominique Baqué noted in her study *Helmut Newton, magnifier le désastre* (2019), Newton “refuses to be psychologised”, it is not uncommon for an impression of disillusionment and solitude to emerge from beneath the glitter, as if these celebrities were not fully able to believe in happiness.

### Surreptitious Surrealism

“The only provocation I hate is that of the surrealist image. It has no place in my world,” Newton told Bernard Lamarche-Vadel in an interview for the magazine *Artistes* (January–February 1981), once again blurring the lines between humour and bad faith. One only has to look at images like *Legs by the Sea, Monte Carlo* (1987) or *Legs Coming Home, Monte Carlo* (1987) ◀ to realise this. In the first, we see two legs unconnected to anybody, ending in high heels in front of a balustrade, contemplating – if that’s the word – the sea; in the second, two legs are walking through the door of an apartment as they “come home”. On the other hand, we note their quasi-identity with two works from the Surrealist movement: Marcel Mariën’s photograph *L’Esprit de l’escalier* (c.1952), in which we see two men’s shoes climbing a staircase, and Pierre Molinier’s untitled Super 8 film known as *Mes Jambes* [My Legs] (1965). Lasting just over nine minutes, the film – the artist’s sole venture into cinema – consists of alternating shots of his legs sheathed in stockings and stilettos, and of a mannequin.

If, despite his claimed individualism, Newton is close to any artistic movement, it is Surrealism, both personally – he was a friend of Brassai, of whom he made several portraits – and in terms of aesthetics and spirit. Could we not align him with the provocative assertion by the Czech Karel Teige: “Photography is beautiful precisely when it is not art”?

### Beyond the Real

Much has been said, not without reason, about the way Newton always starts out from reality. As Karl Lagerfeld put it: “His vision is always an optical idealization of a not always ideal reality which inspired him.” Newton, in fact, describes what he sees, then emphasises certain aspects of it. Explaining this, he has said, “I wanted to show the rules of a certain society. It’s just bringing out into the open certain types of behavior.” But what he sees and understands is another factor. This is why he has only photographed the social class he belongs to. He makes no secret of this: “There are always women ... who are apparently rich. I photograph the upper class because I’m well acquainted with it.” “Everything is based on reality,” he says. But while he uses real situations as his launchpad, he always pushes them a little further. “Everything that is beautiful is a fake,” one of his notebooks tells us. And also: “The most beautiful lawn is plastic” – a frank declaration of an aesthetic of artificiality.

This is why there are no images taken on the spot: his is a process of visual recreation. Asked by Lamarche-Vadel how he sets up his subjects, he replied: “It’s a long process. Something no one knows is that I do all of my work in writing first. I always carry around a little notebook in which I can jot down the minutest details concerning photos that I’ll take some other time. I can’t draw. So I make notes on props, lighting, the compositional parts of my picture. Perspiration under the arms, puffed-up lips, a kiss, a man’s shoulder, a woman’s hand, the inside of the elbow, the interplay of muscles, ... a man and woman naked to the waist, a man.” This applies, as we have seen, both to the portraits, which are posed, never “snapped”, and the fashion photographs, with their ironic mimicking of a certain dream life. For Newton, photography does not



serve to authenticate reality, but to blur the values of true and false, of reality and illusion. But isn't this exactly what the Surrealists set out to do? Hadn't André Breton already written in 1928 that there is no reality in painting? This similarity of viewpoint is all the more striking in that in Newton's time, that is to say in the pre-digital era, photography by its very nature was conceived as a way of capturing the world, whether it be Henri Cartier-Bresson's "decisive moment" or Roland Barthes' "that-has-been".

The influence of Surrealism on Newton is not limited to this general conception of the image/reality relationship. We find it, too, in his taste for collages, which he made from his own photographs for the "amusement" of his friends ▶. One thinks, for example, of the ones he gave to Ago and Tiqui Demirdjian, with their intimations of certain collages by Max Ernst, Paul Éluard and Georges Sadoul. But it is above all the obsessive repetition of a set of motifs that betrays the Surrealist influence. These motifs, characteristic of the movement created by Breton and his close associates, are night, the mirror, the eye, the mannequin and sadomasochism.

### Night

"I really enjoy working at night," says Newton. And indeed, many of his most successful images have been made at night: think of the famous photograph taken on rue Aubriot in 1975, of an androgynously beautiful woman in a Saint Laurent trouser suit, pensively smoking a cigarette; or, the following year, in Ramatuelle, his wife June, naked, clinging to a frail weeping willow on a windy evening ▶. This marked taste for the night places him in the tradition of the Surrealists. From Léon-Paul Fargue to Henry Miller, from René Crevel to Georges Bataille, from Louis Aragon to André Breton, all of them made noctambulism an attitude as well as an artistic practice. Breton in particular gave it a substantial role in his trilogy *Nadja*, *Communicating Vessels* and *Mad Love*. In the second volume, published in 1932, he evokes "the grand night which knows how to mingle garbage and glories" – a paradoxical synthesis also to be found in Newton's series *The Woman on Level 4* and in his crime scenes inspired by various events.

Photographically speaking, the great Surrealist nocturnal book is Brassai's *Paris by Night* (1932). In his preface to this album, Paul Morand refers to the "strangeness" of the night as "the supernormal fears that haunt the modern mind". According to art historian Quentin Bajac, night for Brassai is the moment "when values are stood on their head". No coincidence that in Brassai Newton recognises a master.

Newton's fascination with night is undoubtedly due to the fact that it favours murky, even disturbing settings. Whereas day is naturally associated with clarity – of situations, characters, intentions – night means ambiguity, indeterminacy, lost bearings. Metaphorically, then, day is on the side of the norm and night on the side of the forbidden. Let's not forget that Barthes went so far as to suggest that "a perverse pleasure is taken in nocturnal work". This would explain why Newton's most disturbing, violent and sexualised scenes take place at night. Just think of this frontal nude from 1981, taken in Nice and titled, in homage to Marcel Duchamp – another Surrealist – *Nude Descending the Stairs* ▶; or, better still, this 1996 image for Valentino shoes, taken on the pebble beach at Bordighera, which shows two women bound together in the same black garbage bag, two corpses that seem to have been washed up by the sea.



241



89



296-297





300

### Mirrors

Since by their very nature mirrors reflect reality, tweaking them offers direct access to a "surreal" aesthetic, which makes it unsurprising that the Surrealists resorted to them so often. One example is Luis Buñuel's short film *L'Âge d'or* [The Golden Age] (1930), in which the mirror in which the heroine contemplates herself reflects not her face but the passing of clouds in the sky, as if to better depict unmoored emotion. This is also the case with René Magritte, who in his *Not to be Reproduced* (1937) is painting a man facing a mirror – a mirror that reflects not his face, but his back.

For Brassai, the mirror is a means of presenting an augmented image of reality in the continuity of the Cubist project. In his famous photograph *Lovers, Place d'Italie* (c.1932), the mirrors break up the unity of the scene to offer different points of view. A similar device is used in Newton's image *Yvonne in My Apartment* (1998) ◀, in which a blond woman lies unconscious on the floor, partially obscured by a pillar, but at the same time revealed in full by the mirror on the right-hand edge of the image.

Both the Surrealists and Newton were much taken with the potential of reflections for making portraits. In 1917, for example, Marcel Duchamp had a multiple portrait made in which, thanks to a set of mirrors, he appears five times: from behind, twice in three-quarter view, and twice in profile at the ends of the image. This is the device that Newton uses, in simplified form, for the portrait *Karl Lagerfeld at Chanel* (1983). In a composition very similar to that of Duchamp's portrait, Lagerfeld appears from behind and twice in three-quarter view.

A final remark about Brassai, whose influence on Newton has not yet been fully appreciated by critics. Brassai assigns another function to the mirror: to bring into the field of the image a signifying fragment of its reverse. This is the case, for example, as Rosalind Krauss has so finely pinned down, in *Washing up in a Brothel, Rue Quincampoix* (c.1932). In this image, a man turns his back to a prostitute busy washing herself, a scene he is also observing as he studies her reflection in the mirror of a cupboard door facing him. If Brassai's use of the mirror to present a scene and its reverse in the same image is relevant here, it is because Newton uses it in the same way several times. The best known is probably his *Self-Portrait with June and Models* (1981). In this example a model is shown from the back in front of a large mirror. The mirror reflects the naked woman, wearing only high heels, and behind her, Newton, bent over his Rolleiflex, as he photographs her. We can also make out the crossed legs of another model, located off-camera, and above all, sitting next to the mirror on a folding chair, on the right-hand edge of the image, an older woman serenely observing the scene. This woman is Newton's wife, June...



123-124



111

### Eyeing and Spying

Newton's images frequently bring into play the connection between exhibitionism and voyeurism. The exhibitionism is that of the model who shows herself naked with no apparent sense of shame, or the least discomposure – think Brigitte Nielsen in a suite at the Hôtel Hermitage in Monte Carlo ◀ or, more provocatively still, the woman who opens her bathrobe wide in front of another on the beach at the Carlton in Cannes ◀ – to the point where the "coldness" of the models has come to be seen as a characteristic of Newton's style, but above all as a generalised voyeurism. A voyeurism sometimes implicit and sometimes so explicit that it becomes the very subject of the photograph.



The former includes images such as *Video Man and Woman Videoed, Beverly Hills* (1989), *Voyeurism, American Playboy, Los Angeles* (1989) and *Heather Looking Through a Keyhole* (1994); as well as photographs like the one taken that same year in Monte Carlo for *Vogue USA*, showing a platinum blonde sitting in a wheelchair with a powerful pair of binoculars in her hand ▶, or, four years later, still in Monaco, a young woman in a silver cocktail dress leaning arms crossed against the fence of a vacant lot, and a young brunette with lips highlighted in red and seen as if through a telephoto lens ▶.

As for the implicit voyeurism, does not a diffuse voyeurism permeate all of Newton's images? Don't his images often give us the impression of catching characters in action? This is very visible in his most scripted images, when the gaze, as in the cinema, is not directed towards the lens. But it is also apparent in some of the portraits, such as that of Carla Bruni sitting on her father's lap, while her mother looks on ▶. Doesn't this family portrait leave the viewer with the feeling of being a witness to a moment of ambiguous intimacy?

If, as art historian Klaus Honnef has it, there are "voyeuristic tendencies" in Newton's work, identical tendencies had already existed among the Surrealists, and not only in the case of Paul Éluard, who, it is said, always carried next to his heart a photograph of his wife Gala naked – a photograph he did not hesitate to show to his friends. As the curators of the landmark exhibition *La Subversion des images* [The Subversion of Images] (Centre Pompidou, 2009) wrote in a joint text, "For the Surrealists photography was the instrument of a powerful desire to see, of a *scopic urge*." They point out that this urge found expression in an "immoderate use of the close-up", a use that we find applied by Newton to that ultimately Surrealist motif: the eye.

As another art historian, Guillaume Le Gall, has noted, "the eye, the source of vision, is at the centre of Surrealist concerns". One thinks of the visual obsession of a Salvador Dalí or a Man Ray. It is hardly surprising, then, that the eye is one of the movement's most characteristic motifs, whether in its literary form, with Georges Bataille's *Story of the Eye* (1928), or sculpturally with Alberto Giacometti's *Point to the Eye* (c.1931). But it is in Surrealist photography and cinema that this obsession is most strongly felt. Here the similarity of Newton's images is so striking that it is difficult not to speak of a tribute. I am thinking in particular of the photograph of Simonetta's eye taken in Bordighera in 1982, suggestive of Lee Miller's eye photographed by Man Ray in 1932 ▶. Similarly, as Dominique Baqué has rightly pointed out, the photograph of Arielle, also taken in 1982, but this time in Monte Carlo, with her left eye held wide open by an arm framing her face, irresistibly conjures up one of the most shocking moments in world cinema, in which a man slices a woman's eyeball with a razor ▶. This scene – need I remind you? – is the opening sequence of what filmmaker Amos Vogel has called "the most famous avant-garde film ever made": Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí's *Un chien andalou* (1929).

### Guises and Dolls

As early as his first manifesto in 1924, André Breton was postulating the marvellous as the core of Surrealist aesthetics: "The marvellous is always beautiful, anything marvellous is beautiful, in fact only the marvellous is beautiful." The word is, of course, to be taken in the sense of that which surprises by its extraordinary, inexplicable character – that which "causes great wonder", as the New Oxford American Dictionary defines it. Many of Newton's images are of this kind. We have already mentioned the pair of legs leading an independent life. Another example is the image made in 2003 in a former stone



180-181



322



143



212



213





208



65



209

quarry for *Vogue USA*, in which a young woman in heels holds a huge rock above her head, seemingly on the point of hurling it at the viewer ◀. One could add, too, the numerous images Newton made with mannequins of very different sizes, a motif he used throughout his career, giving the smallest the disturbing appearance of a doll. This play on scale can be seen in an image from 1972, where two scuba-diving figures seem to be trying to rescue a giant stranded on a beach ◀; or in another from 1998, where a small plastic soldier is threatened with being crushed by another giant, which, in a derisory gesture of self-protection, he points a gun at ◀.

In another of its meanings that Breton would not have disavowed, France's *Littre* dictionary defines the marvellous as "the intervention of supernatural beings such as gods, angels, demons, genies and fairies, in poems and other works of imagination." But isn't this exactly what we are witnessing in this 1993 photograph, in which the model Nadja Auermann, lying back on a narrow bed, is making love to a swan? The swan, of course – if any reminder is needed – is none other than Jupiter metamorphosed for Leda, with Newton simply revamping a classic subject from Ovid, after Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Veronese, Rubens, Boucher, and the list goes on.

That Newton shared the Surrealists' taste for the marvellous is clear, but this common fascination does not end there. Delving deeper into Breton's "Surrealist Manifesto", we find the marvellous arising where least expected: it "is not the same in every period of history; it partakes in some obscure way of a sort of general revelation only the fragments of which come down to us: they are the romantic *ruins*, the modern *mannequin*, or any other symbol capable of affecting the human sensibility for a period of time." Take the mannequin: we all know its importance as a symbol of the modern condition in the paintings of Giorgio De Chirico, as well as in the work of Hans Bellmer and Pierre Molinier: but let's not forget, either, that mannequins also fascinated the photographers Eugène Atget, Brassai, Raoul Ubac, Man Ray, Pierre Jahan and the young Cartier-Bresson. The incorporation of mannequins into his stagings is recurrent in Newton's work and clearly inspired by Surrealism. If any single work needed to be adduced as evidence in this regard, it would be *At Maxim's, Chanel* (1978), where we see an elegant young man kissing a hand – a hand held in his own and detached from the arm of the mannequin he is greeting. If a second example were needed, it would be the lighter, later (Monaco, 1997) image of Eva Herzigová lying on an inflatable mattress in the company of an equally inflatable doll: between suggested eroticism and deliberate kitsch.



95



285

### Sublimation: Violence and Pornography

There remains one final link between Newton's work and Surrealism: a shared proclivity for the set of practices – bondage, discipline, domination, submission, sadomasochism – currently referred to as BDSM. Although in 1930 Michel Leiris commissioned Jacques-André Boiffard to take photographs of this genre for issue no. 8 of the magazine *Documents*, it was above all Man Ray (with Lee Miller, then Meret Oppenheim) and Hans Bellmer (with Unica Zürn) who are responsible for the most transgressive stagings. Here again, Newton's iconography matches that of the Surrealists.

Of the many BDSM-inspired images that Newton produced throughout his career, the most outstanding are the famous 1976 photograph of a horse-woman on all fours on a bed with a Hermès saddle on her back (an image Newton must have been particularly fond of, as he gave his friend Ago Demirdjian a small print of it as a birthday present), and the one from 1980 and his house in Ramatuelle, where we see a bare-breasted young brunette tied up with rope ◀ (a motif reprised in 2000 in his series ◀ *The Woman on Level 4*).



While Newton was discreet in confiding his fondness for nineteenth-century erotic photography to Klaus Honnef, he bluntly told another critic, "I still find the sadomasochism movements very interesting." Like the Surrealists, he was an avid reader of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's *Venus in Furs*, discovered in the family library when he was a child. In the early 1960s he came upon a rare edition of Dominique Aury's *Histoire d'O* [*Story of O*] in a bookshop. Published under the pseudonym Pauline Réage, with a preface by Jean Paulhan, a close friend of Paul Éluard and André Breton, the novel tells the story of how a young woman called O becomes a sex slave. Newton admitted that this book "had a profound influence on my fashion photographs". But it was apparently only later in life, in the 1980s and at the invitation of filmmaker Barbet Schroeder, that he first attended an S&M party in Los Angeles, which he photographed in a series that has remained unpublished until now.

Far from insignificant, this fact would seem to show that Newton's interest in the BDSM scene was primarily aesthetic. In his 2003 autobiography, he acknowledges the fascination that Berlin's prostitutes had for him as a teenager: "The way the whores dressed was extraordinary. Even they had an inborn feel for fashion that was brought out in the way they dressed themselves to attract the customer – a sense of showing what their specialties were by the way they dressed.... Many were dressed in boots – really high boots, like military boots – with whips, and chains around their necks and around their arms." If Alain Fleischer has got it right, "It is in pornography that photography finds its ultima Thule, its ideal object, its *raison d'être*" (*La Pornographie, une idée fixe de la photographie*, 2000), then it could be said that Newton found in the BDSM aesthetic, whose key words are rigour and attire, a way to sublimate this pornographic temptation. BDSM, in short, may have facilitated an escape from the banality of the raw image.

### **A Simple Provocateur?**

We know that André Breton, from the very beginning, placed the Surrealist enterprise under the sign of subversion. The first "Surrealist Manifesto" makes this very clear: "Surrealism was not afraid to make for itself a tenet of total revolt, complete insubordination, of sabotage according to rule." The praise of de Sade that follows signals a desire to overturn morality in order to place life under the sign of desire. Seen in this light, can Newton still be dismissed, as is sometimes the case, as a simple provocateur? Should we not rather see in his approach an echo of Surrealism?

As he himself explained to Bernard Lamarche-Vadel, "I like and look for reactions. I don't like kindness or gentleness. I want to provoke, but not by choice of subject, although I do need certain subjects in order to create new photographic effects, and especially to find new visual tension." This is important: not only does Newton reject the idea of gratuitous provocation, he also rejects any judgement based on values other than aesthetic. It is the search for "new effects", that is, creative necessity alone, that dictates his choice of subject.

While this search is evident in his fashion photographs, it is even more visible in the images he made for himself, in addition to his commissioned work. Newton usually extended his shoots for *Vogue* and other magazines to make room for more personal images, benefiting from the presence of models, hair-dressers, make-up artists and stylists, which he complemented with props brought for the occasion: "I always carry chains and padlocks in my car trunk, not for me but for my photos." One could say that his fashion photographs are watered-down versions of the images made at these moments. What makes the fashion pictures so disturbing is the background of a desire and violence that is never explicit, but that, on the contrary, is clearly evident in his non-commercial images.





68



299



316-317



320-321



319

Through the stagings he conceives for fashion, Newton suggests a world beyond appearances. Behind the facades of the buildings of the upper class, in the vast bourgeois salons, the mask of respectability falls. The society he presents is irrigated by glitz, violence and sex. What happens there always has to do with money, power and domination. Photographs such as *Woman Examining Man* ◀, taken in 1975 in Saint-Tropez for *Vogue USA*, or *Fat Hand with Dollars* ◀, made in Monte Carlo in 1986, leave no doubt about this. Newton's implicit criticism of capitalist society is reminiscent of his compatriot Rainer Werner Fassbinder's more direct criticism of post-war German society. Both are keen to reveal society as it really is, with the veneer of illusion stripped away. Is this not the "sabotage according to rule" that Breton urged?

Sometimes the violence that underlies Newton's fashion photographs is explicit to the point of becoming the main subject. This is the case of the *Yellow Press* images, first exhibited from December 15, 2002 to February 14, 2003. Here Newton's project is unequivocal: he is out to show those moments when his usually diffuse violence reveals itself in the paroxysmal form of crime. For example, a young woman on her hands and knees in a bathroom, wearing white high heels and a garter belt, is mopping up the blood of a dead man, leaving only the outline of his body as traced on the marble floor by the police ◀ (*American Vogue*, Monte Carlo, 2003). In another image, *Murder Scene*, made in Cannes in 1975, a woman is seen suffocating a man lying unconscious on the floor with a pillow ◀. Elsewhere, a woman in red high heels sits contentedly in an armchair, hands behind her head, while at her feet lies the corpse of a man she has just poisoned ◀ (*TV Murder in a Hotel*, Cannes, 1975).

Despite their elegance, all these images are suffused with tabloid sensationalism. Beneath the stylisation lies reality. Newton is emphatic: "My inspiration also comes partly from news photos.... In my opinion, news is an exciting field for a photographer. I've studied the work of the paparazzi photographers very closely." Through these news-inspired murder scenes Newton offers society representations of itself it would rather turn a blind eye to, that are particularly thought-provoking in their personification of the guiding thread that runs through Newton's work: everything – absolutely everything – is undermined by passions. Passions are a force for negation, a brake on society. They shatter the straitjacket of its conventions, sometimes tragically so. We're all familiar with the colloquial expression "to love someone to death" – a radical vision of the world that brings the German photographer closer to both the Surrealists and the filmmakers Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Pier Paolo Pasolini and Nagisa Oshima. A vision to which he brings, in the final analysis, an extra touch of glamour.

### Exemplary Freedom

To those who were scandalised by his work, Newton riposted, "You always have to live up to your bad reputation." To Lamarche-Vadel he declared, "I love vulgarity. I am very attracted by bad taste – it is a lot more exciting than supposed good taste which is nothing more than a standardized way of looking at things." This is a direct defence of artistic freedom and, more fundamentally, a rejection of political correctness. On this point he is of the same mind as Georges Bataille, whose 1929 article "Figure humaine", in the Surrealist-inflected magazine *Documents*, openly acknowledged the shameless pleasures of bad taste.



Newton might have shocked, but he simply didn't care. He was part of a twentieth century that included Surrealism and which, according to the philosopher Carole Talon-Hugon, "had a relationship with morality that was much more provocative than submissive" (*L'Art sous contrôle*, 2019). One could appreciate or deprecate his images, deem them beautiful or vulgar, but it would have seemed to him absurd to judge them from a moral point of view. Today, the landscape has changed considerably. Under the influence of American thinking, censorship is making an unexpected comeback. Petitions are being signed to take down a Balthus painting, paper rectangles are being added to Egon Schiele's nude posters, a curator at the Manchester Art Gallery has decided to remove John William Waterhouse's *Hylas and the Nymphs* (1896) on the grounds that it presents an elaborately fantasised view of women. Given that to evaluate an artwork via non-artistic criteria involves both a category error and an aesthetic contradiction, in this new context it is not impossible that Newton, unanimously hailed – in a sense "co-opted" – as a master, could become a subversive again. But in anticipation of possible attacks, he parried with, "If I look for a real point of view, I'm not going to start by looking at what art will accept so I can conform to that." A beautiful lesson in freedom. More than a provocateur, Newton is a rebel.