

LEE MILLER

A PHOTOGRAPHER BETWEEN WAR AND GLAMOUR

10 JUNE TO 24 SEPTEMBER 2023

The exhibition *Lee Miller. A Photographer between War and Glamour* at the Bucerius Kunst Forum showcases one of the twentieth century's most versatile photographers and photojournalists. Elizabeth "Lee" Miller's (1907–1977) oeuvre is a study in contrasts, ranging from Surrealist imagery to fashion photography, from portraiture to travel scenes, all the way to war reporting. The photographer constantly ventured onto new terrain in terms of both content and geography. The current show sheds light on how the different phases in Miller's biography influenced her photographic approach. The entire scope of her life's work is unfurled here based on 150 photographs dating from the period between 1929 and 1951.

Organised in cooperation with the Museum für Gestaltung Zürich and the Lee Miller Archives, the exhibition divides Miller's creative phases into the chapters *Modelling, Fashion and Portraits, Surrealism, Women at War, Miller's War, Concentration Camps, Liberated Paris* and *Food, Friends, Farley Farm*.

In the 1920s, Lee Miller posed for the pre-eminent photographers of the twentieth century. After two years in front of the camera, she then switched sides. She met the photographer Man Ray in Paris and worked with him on joint photo projects and experiments with the solarisation technique. Miller also made contact with other fellow artists among the Parisian avant-garde and dabbled in the Surrealist style before developing her own artistic language.

In 1932 Miller left Paris and returned to her native New York, where she ran a highly successful photography studio for two years. She married the Egyptian businessman Aziz Eloui Bey in 1934 and moved with him to Cairo. The natural forms she chose as subjects for her landscape scenes from this period attest to her keen eye for the ambiguous character of reality, schooled as it was in the Surrealist point of view. The Egyptian desert was the setting for many of her best-known Surrealist works, such as *Portrait of Space*. When the Second World War broke out, Miller was living in London with a new partner, the English artist Roland Penrose. In 1940 she worked as a photographer for the American edition of *Vogue*. Her photographs for the fashion magazine are often artfully staged and plainly betray the influence of Surrealism. In her photojournalism, by contrast, Miller compellingly captured the social impact and disastrous consequences of the war. In 1942 she was one of the few Americans to be accredited by the US Army as a war reporter, and from 1944 onward she reported from the front lines for *Vogue*. Miller followed the Allied conquest of Normandy with her camera and proceeded to move across Europe with the advancing US troops. She was one of

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the reporters who witnessed and documented the liberation of Paris. Beginning in 1945, Miller turned her lens on the aftermath of war in Germany and Austria. She was among the first to document the crimes that had been committed by the Nazis in the Dachau and Buchenwald concentration camps. During a stopover in Munich, the photographer stayed in what had once been Adolf Hitler's private apartment, in the meantime occupied by American soldiers. It was there that she took the famous photo of herself in the dictator's bathtub. Miller's haunting accounts of the war for *Vogue* made her one of the most renowned photojournalists of the twentieth century. The impact of Surrealism on her photographic practice would give her a unique way of approaching the gruesome sights she encountered at the recently liberated concentration camps. Miller's pictures indeed seem absurd at times, and yet these are uncensored scenes of the real-life horrors of war.

Traumatized by her wartime experiences, Miller returned to England after the end of the war and ceased work as a professional photographer. She discovered cooking as a new pursuit, creating her own recipes and welcoming many prominent figures on the European art scene to her home in Sussex.

An extensive catalogue will be published by Hirmer Verlag to accompany the exhibition, with essays by Ami Bouhassane, Elisabeth Bronfen, Karin Gimmi, Cathérine Hug and Katharina Menzel-Ahr.

The exhibition is sponsored by

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