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## A line in the sand for fashion photography as art

Suzy Menke

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**PARIS** The mutant modernism of Man Ray, the troubling eroticism of Helmut Newton, even the gaudy glamour of David LaChapelle, prove that fashion can be at photography's cutting edge.

But Paris Photo, the annual selling exhibition, which closed Sunday, suggested that fashion photography no longer cuts it in the art world. Among the 104 international exhibitors, only a smattering dealt in fashion images. The current economic climate had produced a calm and classic show, with much less pornography-as-art and a focus on nature rather than deliberately shocking images. But contemporary fashion was notable for its absence, apart from the misty visions of Sarah Moon and Paolo Roversi's slender nudes (from the Galerie Camera Obscura in Paris).

"Fashion is still a stepchild of photography, unless it is Louise Dahl-Wolfe showing a bathing suit and making it art," says Etheleen Staley of the Staley-Wise Gallery in New York.

Staley says that fashion needs "the distance of years" and her gallery's display included a joyous Willy Rizzo image from half a century ago of the young Yves Saint Laurent at Dior in 1953, framed by a group of merry models and a pouf of an evening gown. There was also a poetic 1982 Deborah Turbeville vision of an autumnal Ophelia lying among strewn leaves; a graphic 1990 Herb Ritts image of a Versace dress, and LaChapelle's transsexual Amanda Lepore with silicone bosoms and matching melon.

Staley says that there are clients - especially businessmen - who collect fashion photographs. But they do not register with Thaddaeus Ropac, who was showing nature landscapes at Paris Photo and the precise, saturated color images of Claus Goedicke in his gallery at 7 Rue Debelleyme.

"Fashion is not part of our contemporary photography world," Ropac says. "If you take the top six German photographers, their work is all about nature, architecture and portraiture. Clothes don't play any part, not even as a pattern."

Ropac says that he sees a photographer such as Nan Goldin inspired by social issues and that even Cindy Sherman's personal transformations follow an art, rather than a fashion, agenda.

Some photographic observations become incidentally fashion images: a graphic line-up of straw hats in San Paolo by Geraldo de Barros; Martin Parr's vivid red flowered flip-flop sandals taken in Benidorm, Spain, in 1997, or ethnic images brimming with color and decoration in the Mexican section of Paris Photo. Portraits can also resonate as fashion, as in a 1964 Diane Arbus study of Madame Gr's, with her tiny turbaned head, elbow-length gloves and hairs on a white fox stole defined as if in an Ert? drawing.

Occasionally a new cache of classic photographs is discovered. On instinct, Michael Hoppen of London traced to Little Rock, Arkansas, the first husband of Lisa Fonssagrives, the model muse of Irving Penn. The sculptural, graphic and dynamic images of Fernand Fonssagrives, who died in April, became instant collectors items, and a book of his work from the 1930's through the 50's - Lisa's elongated be-stockinged legs, her athletic body undulating among sand dunes or leaping across a gorge - has almost sold out.

For Hoppen, the trend in fashion photography follows the general evolution of Paris Photo. "The exhibition is less shocking, it's about quality, color palette and composition - the traditional aesthetics," Hoppen says. "And I particularly love the Japanese aesthetic."

Some of the most striking images had Japanese behind or in front of the lens. At the Ton Peek Gallery of Utrecht, the Netherlands, 19th-century, hand-tinted studies of Japanese girls by Adolfo Farsari contrasted with the modern portraits by Paul van Riel of young Japanese women in all their girly pseudo-innocence. Clothes abstracted from the body were strikingly photographed in Yuki Onodera's grainy pictures.

Paul Wombell, director of The Photographer's Gallery in London, regretted that he had not brought to Paris the work of Kyoichi Tsuzuki, now on show at his gallery. He cited Juergen Teller as an appropriate candidate for inclusion as photographer-as-artist. Yet Wombell admits that there is an unofficial demarcation - arbitrary yet definite - separating fashion photography from the rest.

Or, as Ropac put it: "Fashion photography is not embraced by the art world. There is a line drawn, however people might think that there is a connection between fashion and art."

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