

Irving penn

Literature



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Irving Penn was a photographer widely known for his fashion, still life and portrait work. His work has been exhibited internationally and continues to be regularly used for exhibitions after his death. Irving Penn was born on the 16th June 1917 in New Jersey, United States of America. Penn studied drawing, painting, graphics and industrial arts, while studying Penn also worked at Harper's Bazaar where some of Penn's work was published.

His first job upon graduation was director of a magazine company until the age of twenty-five when he quit his job and using all his savings, moved to Mexico where he spent the next year painting, he decided his work was nothing more than mediocre and decided to return to New York. The art director of Vogue magazine Alexander Liberman hired Penn as his assistant, Liberman asked Penn to take photographs of his ideas, using borrowed cameras and drawings he did while in Mexico Penn arranged a still life. It was published as the cover of Vogue for the 1943 October 1st Issue, this became Penn's step to launching a career as a photographer.

" Photographing a cake can be art," quoted Penn during the opening of his studio in 1953, it did not take long to back up his statement as he produced a series of advertising illustrations that helped him establish his reputation and has kept him amongst the greats of photography ever since. Penn is notably best known for his fashion photography which began with his popular 1950's Paris collections; Penn removed the frequently used space or scale and allowed fashion to become the main focus of his imagery.

Penn always took deep pride in the presentation of his work, he experimented with new techniques and he often combined old with new. Penn's usual use of minimal, flat and plain backgrounds is often thought of

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as the beginning of new and modern era of fashion photography. His work has been included in Vogue magazine for the American, British and France editions. Penn has stated that he enjoys bringing imperfections such as gray hair, dirt and wrinkles which usually would go unnoticed on cluttered and destructive backgrounds; he believed this to be his vision of natural beauty.

Penn's work has been included in exhibitions worldwide including those at The Museum of Modern Art, The Metropolitan Museum of Art as well as The Baltimore Museum of Art. Penn has fully established himself in advertising illustration as well as photography, his ability to push boundaries and apply his own interpretations to his work especially in his portraits and still life have won him major credibility and his unique talent is often said to set him in a league of his own. His work is often imitated by photography students as well as contemporary photographers; his work is recognised worldwide and given much applause.

Image 1:

Irving Penn Hells Angels Photographed in 1969 The shadows of their faces are in the cameras focus therefore giving the photograph a dark and moody persona. The subjects clothing and accessories such as the sunglasses they are wearing I feel give an intimidating feeling, the closeness between them though and how they are all standing and sitting give a sense of a family bond and close friendship. The Vietnam War took place in 1969 therefore this photograph could symbolise brotherhood amongst soldiers.

Image 2:

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The photograph of Georgia O'Keeffe is an extremely good example of the work Penn produced during his early years as a photographer. The lady looks almost lost in her own world, standing in the deep of a corner making her appear to be fragile and unable to escape from her thoughts or the corner itself. She no longer holds a powerful persona that she may have once, Penn positioning of his camera is clever as he pulls the camera back to enforce the heaviness of the corner walls. The corner shows nervousness of his subject, for the uneasy atmosphere of the post war era they were in at the time of this photograph. O'Keeffe stated that she hated her portrait and once wrote to Penn himself asking him to destroy the photograph.

Image 3:

Irving Penn photographed Capote in 1965, he focused a lot on his hands and face, highlighting the stress lines and wrinkles on this man, yet his facial expression seems relaxed and deep in thought. Penn made a change to his usual portraits style making this more direct and working at a closer range of his subject. Also he no longer has the corner as the backdrop of his portraits which he was an extremely familiar thing for him to do. This time he gave an intense and personal close up of an anonymous background.

Image 4:

This image defeats the objective of fashion photography by being extremely minimal and plain, some of the best fashion photography has usually been those who have taken advantage of a make belief situation, Penn's simple photograph of a beautiful model in a long black dress, is considered a masterpiece of its kind. The photograph pretends to honest, straightforward

and plain that the nineteenth-century photography always was. The luxurious stage lightning and beautiful textures, the elegance and the obvious social ambiance. Yet all that remains is a simple portrait of an extremely elegant woman. The simplicity of the photograph is not quite true, if someone covered the models physical beauty with their hand, the modern viewer would perhaps be able to recognise that the only thing to remain is a seemingly thin body of a woman, rather than the silhouette of a an orchid flower.

As a description of the dress the photograph goes on to be a more of what meets the eye piece as only someone with great knowledge of the 1950's fashion would be able to identify that the pattern of this particular dress is reasonable. The true subject of the photograph is in fact the simple yet rich line that describes the silhouette of the dress, the line that has nothing or very little to do with a real dress but actually the elegance to do with the way woman wanted to perceive themselves and the social acceptance they aspired.

Irving Penn, one of the greatest photographers of our generation, named one of " The World's 10 Greatest Photographers" in 1958 for an international poll held by a popular photography magazine. Penn photographed a variety of people from the world of literature, music and visual performing arts; these include Salvador Dali, Grace Kelly, Edith Piaf and Harold Pinter. Irving Penn has work often very simple or consisting, but his creations were very intellectual and always made a statement at the time. Irving Penn has a legacy to the visual arts and his work is highly recognised by public and

artist alike, his art will not be soon forgotten, he will continue to influence young and aspiring photographers for decades to come.