

STILL LIFE

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Hollywood Photographs

Whitney Museum of American Art at Philip Morris

November 2-December 30, 1983



Hollywood films have played an undeniable role in the shaping of America, functioning as a sounding board for culture, fictionalizing our lives, appraising our mores, acting out our taboos. But in their attempt to depict real life, movies go well beyond mere reporting or documentation. Movies provoke fantasies, set the parameters for imagination and influence our emotional repertoires, our clothing, and our social behavior. Testing the extremes of artistic license through the exploitation of scale, time and narration, movies "heighten" reality to provoke "heightened" responses from the audience.

From the beginning of the film industry, the heads of studios realized that large audiences, and greater profits, required elaborate seductions. Years ago—before television, international distribution deals, and videotape—movies were thought to have one life only. "Our product spoils like fresh fruit . . . you get no second chance," said one studio publicity director. So, to celebrate the release of almost every feature film, an eager audience was bombarded with advertising. Movies were good or movies were bad, but publicity never made such distinctions. First impressions were even more important than usual. An entire industry depended on them.

A diverse but single-minded photographic industry evolved to support these promotional efforts. Studio publicity agents and magazine editors authorized the manufacture of thousands of images: glamour portraits, the stars at parties, the stars at home. A basic element in this enterprise was the unheralded work of the still photographer, assigned to a production unit during the course of filming. With increased frequency after World War II, color transparencies were shot during filming. Large, tripod-mounted cameras, filled with slow color film, were used. On the sets, at the end of each scene, the director and crew would withdraw and the stills man would pose the actors in the climax of a particular scene. Time was limited and tensions ran high, but the photographers transformed dramatic tableaux into processed still lifes which were handed over to publicists for distribution.

The color transparencies were put to many uses. Sections of images were incorporated into poster designs or used on lobby cards.

Quantities of transparencies were routinely supplied to editors of newspapers and magazines for possible reproduction. Countless transparencies were produced, but the majority went unused, rejected by studio executives or by the actors. They were either stored away and forgotten, or were destroyed. Transparencies that were used were often thrown away, stolen, burned, or sold. There is no way to know how much has been lost.

What remains, found in manila files, envelopes, and cardboard boxes, is a curious assortment. The identification of images, the names of photographers, or information concerning the actors is frequently missing. The color of the transparencies has often shifted or faded. Sifting through these photographic remains is similar to the work of an archaeologist reconstructing a culture from the sherds unearthed in excavations. What emerges is a lopsided history of post-war American life, defined by images of trysts and arguments, love and death; a checklist of life's exaggerated milestones.

In every photograph, something looks wrong. Withdrawn from a narrative structure, these pictures seem exempt from cause and effect. Each image is a punch line cut off from its story. Life never looked exactly like the movies and the movies never looked like these pictures; each seems as artificial as a diorama in a natural history museum. Each picture broadcasts an overstated sense of order; there is too much information, too much is revealed. What briefly flickers before you on a screen can now be slowly investigated. Cinematic myths collapse, but as they do, we can investigate the life behind the clichés of one of America's most potent art forms.

The photographs selected for exhibition were made from original color transparencies found in the holdings of film studios, publicity files, archives, and in personal collections. They were selected for their visual and emotional impact as well as for their cultural and historical interest. But given the current renewal of interest in representational subject matter, as well as a growing fascination with the influence of photography on our culture, these images serve yet another function. They suggest possible sources and stimuli for the works of many contemporary artists, whose visual influences most certainly included the movies.

# Checklist

The Cibachrome prints in this exhibition were made by Michael Wilder, Venice, California, from transparencies lent by motion picture studios, archives, and private collections. The prints are listed in chronological order; dimensions are 20 x 24 or 24 x 20 inches, depending on orientation. Unless otherwise indicated, the figures in the photographs are identified from left to right. Names of photographers are given when known.

June Vincent and Alan Curtis during a screen test, c. 1945  
Universal Pictures Company, Inc.

- The Flag Speaks*, 1940  
Unidentified actor  
Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer
- June Vincent (on stairs) and Alan Curtis (kneeling on stairs) during a screen test, c. 1945  
Universal Pictures Company, Inc.
- Dana Andrews and family at home, 1946  
Photograph by Arnold Johnson for *Movie Life* magazine
- Ingrid Bergman, 1947  
Photograph by Arnold Johnson (or Mel Traxel) for *Movie Life* magazine
- Jane Wyman and Ronald Reagan at home, 1947  
Publicity photograph  
Warner Bros. Pictures, Inc.
- June Haver, studio costume designer, Charles Lemaire (right), and unidentified associate during a wardrobe conference, 1948  
Publicity photograph  
Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation
- Betty Hutton and husband Ted Briskin at home, 1948  
Photograph by Bob Beerman for *Modern Screen* magazine
- Betty Hutton's home, 1948  
Photograph by Bob Beerman for *Modern Screen* magazine
- Ann Blyth, 1949  
Publicity photograph  
Universal-International Films, Inc.
- Lassie, 1949  
Publicity photograph  
Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer
- Paulette Goddard (left) being fitted for a fashion layout, 1949  
Photograph by Bob Beerman for *Modern Screen* magazine
- Jane Powell (seated, right) and husband Geary Steffen (standing) host a dinner party at home, 1950; Polly Bergen, Jerome Courtland (front), Barbara and Marshall Thompson (rear)  
Photograph by Bert Parry for *Modern Screen* magazine
- Let's Dance*, 1950  
Fred Astaire  
Paramount Pictures Corporation
- Ruth Roman, 1950  
Publicity photograph  
Warner Bros. Pictures, Inc.
- Ann Blyth moving into her home, 1953  
Publicity photograph  
Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer
- Woman's World*, 1954  
Clifton Webb, Van Heflin (rear), Cornel Wilde, Fred MacMurray  
Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation
- Dolores Gray, 1955  
Publicity photograph  
Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer
- The View From Pompey's Head*, 1955  
Richard Egan, Cheryl Callaway, Dorothy Patrick  
Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation
- Bigger Than Life*, 1956  
James Mason, Christopher Olson (seated), Barbara Rush  
Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation

- The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*, 1956  
Gregory Peck  
Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation
- Bernadine*, 1957  
Terry Moore, Richard Sargent  
Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation
- The Fuzzy Pink Nightgown*, 1957  
Jane Russell  
United Artists Corporation
- South Pacific*, 1958  
Mitzi Gaynor, Rossano Brazzi  
Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation
- A Private's Affair*, 1959  
Barry Coe, Christine Carere, Sal Mineo,  
Terry Moore, Gary Crosby, Barbara Eden  
Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation
- National Velvet*, 1960  
Joseph Scott (kneeling, foreground), Carole  
Wells (standing), Lori Martin  
NBC-TV/Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer
- Ocean's 11*, 1960  
Frank Sinatra (back row, center), Peter  
Lawford (next right), Richard Conte  
(lying on sidewalk)  
Warner Bros. Pictures, Inc.
- Claudelle Inglish*, 1961  
Diane McBain  
Warner Bros. Pictures, Inc.
- Parrish*, 1961  
Dub Taylor (left), Hope Summers (rear).  
Sara Taft, Bibi Osterwald (seated, front).  
Connie Stevens, Troy Donahue (standing)  
Warner Bros. Pictures, Inc.
- X-15*, 1961  
Lisabeth Hush, Ralph Taeger, Patricia  
Owens, Stanley Livingston (front), Charles  
Bronson  
United Artists Corporation
- The Chapman Report*, 1962  
Efrem Zimbalist, Jr., Jane Fonda  
Warner Bros. Pictures, Inc.  
Photograph by Bert Six
- Rome Adventure*, 1962  
Angie Dickinson  
Warner Bros. Pictures, Inc.
- It Happened at the World's Fair*, 1963  
Joan O'Brien, Elvis Presley (at table, right  
of center)  
Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer  
Photograph by Virgil Apger
- The Man with the X-Ray Eyes*, 1963  
Ray Milland  
American International Pictures
- Youngblood Hawke*, 1964  
Set decoration by John P. Austin  
Warner Bros. Pictures, Inc.
- Beach Blanket Bingo*, 1965  
Annette Funicello, Frankie Avalon  
American International Pictures
- Cast a Giant Shadow*, 1966  
Angie Dickinson, Kirk Douglas  
United Artists Corporation
- Easy Come, Easy Go*, 1966  
Frank McHugh, Elvis Presley  
Paramount Pictures Corporation
- Big Mouth*, 1967  
Ben Gazzara  
Columbia Pictures Corporation
- The Spirit is Willing*, 1967  
Sid Caesar, Vera Miles  
Paramount Pictures Corporation
- Berserk!*, 1968  
Marianne Stone (foreground, bottom), Diana  
Dors (foreground, top), Ty Hardin  
Columbia Pictures Corporation
- The Champagne Murders*, 1968  
Stephane Audran (on floor), Anthony  
Perkins, Maurice Ronet  
Universal Pictures Company, Inc.
- A Dandy in Aspic*, 1968  
Tom Courtenay (in doorway), Mia  
Farrow, Laurence Harvey  
Columbia Pictures Corporation
- Prudence and the Pill*, 1968  
Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation  
Photograph by Harold Bennett
- Angel, Angel, Down We Go*, 1969  
Charles Aidman  
American International Pictures

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