

The Museum of Modern Art



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"HOLLYWOOD PORTRAIT PHOTOGRAPHERS, 1921-41" TO OPEN IN MOMA'S AUDITORIUM GALLERY

Department of Film

The Museum of Modern Art will honor the Hollywood portrait photographer in an exhibition of 112 photographs to be displayed in the auditorium gallery from December 5, 1980 through February 28, 1981. HOLLYWOOD PORTRAIT PHOTOGRAPHERS, 1921-41 was organized by Mary Corliss, Curatorial Assistant in the Department of Film, in conjunction with John Kobal, author of The Art of the Great Hollywood Portrait Photographers (Alfred A. Knopf). The exhibition, which was designed by Jerome Neuner, will document the work of twenty-four photographers such as Ted Allan, Ernest Bachrach, Clarence Sinclair Bull, George Hurrell, Ruth Harriet Louise, and Laszlo Willinger, craftsmen-artists who helped create the screen images of stars for two decades and, in the process, created a glamorous form of photographic art.

When, in Sunset Boulevard, Gloria Swanson exclaims, "We had faces! They don't have faces like that any more," she might be paying tribute to the men behind the camera - the still camera - who helped define those faces through their play of light and shade. HOLLYWOOD PORTRAIT PHOTOGRAPHERS, 1921-41 is a rediscovery of those faces, photographs, and photographers.

In movie mythology, stars are born. In reality, they were "made" - molded, refined, packaged - by the studios that discovered them. Creating a star's image was a process involving producers, directors, make-up men, and hair stylists; a crucial participant, however, was the portrait photographer. With the right lighting, props, and pose, the photographer could turn a mortal actor into a screen deity - into Garbo or Dietrich, Gable or Grant. And, in so doing, he could not only define the personality of the actor, but comment on the Hollywood system as well. For if Hollywood was an idealized world, the photographer's studio was an idealized Hollywood.

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Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., has noted that the Hollywood portrait photographer co-starred with his subjects. But it was, for the most part, an anonymous role; the mythology of the studio system demanded that the consumer believe that the stars had sprung full-blown in their beauty like Aphrodite from the sea. In the past two decades, the roles of the director, screenwriter, cinematographer, art director, and editor in creating cinema magic and mystique have all been recognized. HOLLYWOOD PORTRAIT PHOTOGRAPHERS, 1921-41 will reveal to the public the heretofore unheralded Hollywood portrait photographers and the magic and art they created.

For further information, please contact Luisa Kreisberg, Director, (212) 956-2648 or Pamela Sweeney, 956-7501, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, NY 10019.
