Lee Miller's Surrealist Eye

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New Insights

Edited by

Lynn Hilditch

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MISTRESS OF L'IMAGE TROUVÉ

DEREK ADAMS

(Paris, 1929)
"The absolute power of desire – from the beginning, the only act of faith in Surrealism"
– André Breton.

she was a constantly moving eye,
she was absolute desire,
she was Surrealism,
she was moonlight silver plating skin,
she was the shadow of a net curtain blown by the wind,
she was the view through a window,
she was the obstruction of a blocked door,
she stepped out of the light, found me, spoke
'My name is Lee Miller and I am your new student'
That was the beginning and until the end,
despite everything, it is all I could claim.

From Derek Adams, *EXPOSURE: Snapshots from the life of Lee Miller*.
Guildford, Surrey, UK: Dempsey and Windle, 2019.

INTRODUCTION

LYNN HILDITCH

> …a pioneer across the fields of art, fashion and journalism. Her work encompassed experimental studio work, portraits, reportage and fashion shoots, and reflected the varied artistic circles of which she was part.
> —From "Lee Miller and Surrealism in Britain Timeline", Hepworth Gallery.[1]

Since the publication of Antony Penrose's ground-breaking biography of his mother *The Lives of Lee Miller* in 1985, American-born artist Lee Miller (1907-1977) has been increasingly championed by scholars and curators for her Surrealism-inspired photography. Her captivating images of Paris in the late-1920s and early 1930s taken when she was the muse and lover of the Dada-Surrealist artist Man Ray, her dreamlike portraits of desert landscapes and sexually suggestive architecture taken in Egypt in the mid-1930s, and her witty yet poignant and often harrowing photographs of the Second World War and its aftermath, have been widely deliberated. However, while popularity in Miller's multifaceted life and photographic work has been rapidly growing over the past forty years, her true worth as a prominent Surrealist artist has been somewhat overlooked. *Lee Miller's Surrealist Eye* aims to address this issue with a new collection of essays, the majority of which have been contributed by women scholars, that revalidate Miller's Surrealist position.

When I started researching Lee Miller's work at the tail end of the 1990s, I discovered a woman about whom very little was known. Sources were limited and initial internet searches brought up one single book review of Jane Livingston's *Lee Miller, Photographer* (1989), a catalogue of images published to coincide with an exhibition of the same name organized by the California International Arts Foundation in Los Angeles, USA. Only Penrose's biography provided any real insight into Miller's fascinating life, and the depth and quality of work of this extraordinary woman. It was Penrose's book that elucidated why Miller's name only seemed to appear,

[1] "Lee Miller and Surrealism in Britain Timeline", Hepworth Gallery, Wakefield, https://hepworthwakefield.org/lee-miller-and-surrealism-in-britain-timeline/.

often very briefly, in reference to the work of Man Ray or the British Surrealist and founder of the Institute of Contemporary Arts, Roland Penrose, who became Miller's second husband. Following the war, Miller suffered from exhausting bouts of the mental health condition we know today as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and became dependent on alcohol to numb the pain caused by her experiences. The strain on Miller and her family subsequently forced Roland to remove thousands of photographs, negatives, written notes, and letters, particularly from the war period, where they were safeguarded in the attic of their home at Farley Farm in Chiddingly, East Sussex, UK. The material was only rediscovered after Miller's death from pancreatic cancer in 1977. Consequently, it has taken Miller's son Antony, granddaughter Ami Bouhassane, and other dedicated scholars and researchers, years of painstaking work to piece together the many fragments of a life well lived.

This new volume of essays further explores Miller's oeuvre with the key aim to confirm Miller's status as a Surrealist artist rather than simply a muse, lover, collaborator, or assistant to the great men in her life. By focusing on significant periods in her career—from her time in Paris as artist and model, to her role as staff photographer at *Vogue* magazine, through the Second World War witnessing the devastation of the Blitz, the concentration camps at Buchenwald and Dachau, and the effects of the Third Reich's power drive, to her cookery and extravagant Surrealist dinner parties at Farley Farm—these essays aim to establish Miller as a polymorph, a remarkable creative with an ability to turn her hand to whatever interested her, and, as Becky E. Conekin describes her, "a quintessential modern woman".[2]

Lee Miller was born Elizabeth Miller in Poughkeepsie, New York in 1907 to Theodore and Florence Miller, and it was from Theodore that Miller inherited her love of science and technology as well as her strong-mindedness and determination to succeed. Theodore was an engineer and superintendent at the DeLaval Separator Company and, according to Carolyn Burke, a "prominent Poughkeepsian"; ambitious, influential, and eccentric with a controlling streak.[3] He was also an enthusiastic amateur photographer with a self-built a darkroom in a bathroom in the family home at Cedar Hill Farm in the affluent Kingwood Park area of the town. From a

[2] Becky E. Conekin, "Lee Miller and the Limits of Post-war British Modernity: Femininity, Fashion, and the Problem of Biography" in Christopher Breward and Caroline Evans eds., *Fashion and Modernity* (New York and Oxford: Berg, 2005), 41.

[3] Carolyn Burke, *Lee Miller* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2005), 6-7.

child, Lee was encouraged by her father to embrace technology and take an active role in his photographic pursuits. Burke writes, "She learned the rudiments of photography from Theodore, who gave her a box camera—at a time when Kodak ads enticed young customers to adopt the Brownie as the latest, and most creative, kind of toy".[4] She was inquisitive and quick to learn and according to Penrose, "Photography came to Lee like everything else—as part of her surroundings".[5] Burke describes Theodore as "a man of the future" advocating certain activities and lifestyle habits "considered eccentric by some and progressive by others, such as birth control, a diet of whole foods, and exposure to the sun's rays through nudism—practices in which Florence joined him. While these opinions made him seem advanced, he also enjoyed the reputation as one of Poughkeepsie's most influential citizens".[6] In adulthood, Miller adopted some of Theodore's health "quirks" almost bordering on hypochondria, and she certainly showed no inhibitions when it came to nudity. Lee became her father's muse, with Theodore recording Lee's childhood almost obsessively from the day she was born, but it was his nude images of Lee as a young adult, including the often-published stereoscopic portrait taken in July 1928,[7] which suggests a somewhat unconventional yet loving father-daughter relationship. Nonetheless, it is clear to see that Theodore was a dominant influence and supporter of Miller's artistic endeavours through his encouragement of her explorations and experiments with photography as a new technology and creative innovation.

It was Theodore who fully supported (often financially, as well as fatherly) Lee's trip to Paris in 1925 and her training (both formally and informally) with some of the leading innovators in art, theatre design, stage lighting and photography, including Ladislas Medgyès, Jacques Copeau, Hallie Flanagan, Edward Steichen, George Hoyningen-Huene, and Man Ray. In his 2007 book, written to accompany the Victoria and Albert Museum's exhibition "The Art of Lee Miller"[8], Mark Haworth-Booth acknowledges that "in addition to practicing the art of the model at the

[4] Burke, *Lee Miller*, 10.
[5] Antony Penrose, *The Lives of Lee Miller* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1985), 11.
[6] Burke, *Lee Miller*, 25.
[7] In Theodore Miller's *Nude Study of Lee* taken in Kingwood Park, Poughkeepsie in 1928, Lee sits in side-profile, arms bent behind her, recalling classical Greek statuary such as the *Venus de Milo*, the "living statue" in Jean Cocteau's 1930 Surrealist film *Le Sang d'un Poète* (Miller's only cinematic role) and Man Ray's 1929 portrait of Miller titled *Shadow Patterns* 1929.
[8] "The Art of Lee Miller" exhibition was on display at the V&A South Kensington from 15 September 2007 – 6 January 2008.

highest level, Lee Miller became one of the most interesting Surrealist photographers in Paris".[9] In 1927, at the age of nineteen she had already graced the cover of American *Vogue* becoming one of the magazine's most sought after models. She was, according to Phillip Prodger, "one of photographer Edward Steichen's favourite models",[10] and it was through Steichen's influence that Miller was introduced in 1929 via letters of introduction to George Hoyningen-Huene, Paris *Vogue's* master photographer, and Man Ray, an American expat and former Dadaist. After three years living and working with Man Ray, in 1934 Miller returned to New York to open her own commercial and portrait studio, *Lee Miller Studios, Inc.* with her younger brother Erik as her darkroom assistant. Her studio was short-lived, however, when in 1935 after a whirlwind romance she married her first husband, Egyptian businessman Aziz Eloui Bey, and moved to Cairo. Although this period of Miller's career has often been described as creatively latent, many of her Egyptian photographs stand as some of her most timeless images, such as the enigmatic *Portrait of Space* (1937), which is believed to be the influence for Rene Magritte's 1938 painting *Le Baiser*. Paris constantly beckoned and on a visit in 1937 Miller met the man who would become her second husband, Roland Penrose, and travelled with him around Eastern Europe before joining him in London in September 1939 just as war was declared. The onset of the Second World War saw Miller's career take a sudden diversion. While working as a staff photographer for British *Vogue* in 1940 and photographing the London Blitz, Miller joined the US Armed Forces as an accredited war correspondent becoming the only woman during the Second World War to photograph combat. As her close friend and colleague, the LIFE photographer David E. Scherman notes, "It is almost impossible today…to conceive how difficult it was for a woman correspondent to get beyond a rear-echelon military position, in other words to the front, where the action was".[11] With her steadfast resolve in the most challenging of circumstances, Miller was, according to Scherman, "the nearest thing I knew to a mid-20th century renaissance woman".[12] However, while writers such as David Hare and

[9] Mark Haworth-Booth, *The Art of Lee Miller* (London: V&A Publications, 2007), 7.
[10] Phillip Prodger, *Man Ray, Lee Miller: Partners in Surrealism* (London and New York: Merrell, 2011), 27.
[11] David E. Scherman quoted in Antony Penrose, ed., *Lee Miller's War* (London: Condé Nast Books, 1992), 9.
[12] Scherman quoted in Penrose, Lee Miller's War, 13.

Holly Williams[13] have suggested that Miller retreated from photography in the 1950s—Hare claiming that Miller descended "into a sort of aimless rural rage, seeing life only from the bottom of a whisky glass or over the flyleaf of a recipe book"[14]—with "Working Guests", published in British *Vogue* in 1953[15] often quoted as her final professional work, it is naïve to suggest that Miller completely abandoned her career for domesticity (Miller married Penrose in 1947 in the same year gave birth to her only son, Antony). An accelerated passion for cookery became her number one "jag" and her Surrealist eye and mentality was once again put to work in creating wonderful and naturally bizarre recipes for elaborate dinner parties she hosted at Farley Farm; her love of kitchen technology and gadgets, stemming back to her early childhood, providing yet another connection to her father.[16]

About this Collection

The essays in this volume follow Miller's development as a Surrealist artist from the 1920s to her later postwar career as an established gourmet cook and hostess, a passion she continued until the 1970s. Each chapter follows a broadly chronological order guiding the reader through some of the key points in Miller's life while confirming her distinctly Surrealist vision.

The Surrealist practice of fragmentation and the isolation of (usually female) body parts are an uncanny presence throughout Surrealist art and literature. As Sabina Stent writes, "…hands are a prominent symbol of fetish; they have the potential to produce both pleasure and pain in intense

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[13] See Holly Williams, "The Unseen Lee Miller: lost images of the supermodel-turned-war photographer go on show", *The Independent*, 21 April 2013, accessed April 23, 2013, http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/features/the-unseen-lee-miller-lost-images-of-the-supermodelturnedwar-photographer-go-on-show-8577344.html.

[14] David Hare, "The Real Surrealist", *The Guardian*, 26 October 2002, last accessed April 23, 2021, http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2002/oct/26/art.photography.

[15] "Lee Miller", *National Galleries Scotland*, accessed August 1, 2022, http://www.nationalgalleries.org/art-and-artists/features/lee-miller#:~:text=After%20acquiring%20Farley%20Farm%20in,Dubuffet%20and%20Georges%20Limbour%2C%201959.&text=Miller%20continued%20to%20write%20for,Vogue%20until%20the%20early%201950s.

[16] Ami Bouhassane, *Lee Miller, A Life with Food* (Oslo, Norway: Grapefrukt Forlag, 2017), 169.

forms".[17] Unsurprisingly perhaps, hands appear throughout Miller's artistic oeuvre and are a focus of discussion in chapters one and two; as a surreal object created and exhibited in 1937, and as a subject in her fashion photography for *Vogue* during the early years of the Second World War. According to Kirsten H. Powell in her 1997 essay "Hands-On Surrealism", "Hands figure as weird, magical, uncanny objects, as texts to be read to unlock the secrets of the psyche, as connectors between our modern world and our primitive past, and even as icons of art in an age of Surrealist mechanical reproduction".[18] In chapter one, Eleanor Clayton illuminates on a rare Surrealist sculptural work created by Miller titled *Le Baiser*. Featured in the 1937 exhibition "Surreal Objects and Poems" at the London Gallery, Clayton's essay carefully outlines the background of the sculpture's conception, how it was made, and the context in which it was exhibited. Clayton metaphorically looks at the sculpture from all angles, using an examination of materials and sculptural thinking to reveal the broader cultural landscapes and artistic inspirations that led to its creation, thus situating Miller within the field of modern sculpture.

In chapter two, hands feature again in Lynn Hilditch's essay "Art and Fashion: Lee Miller's Surrealism in *Vogue*", which concentrates on Miller's early wartime fashion photography for *Vogue* magazine. Miller was appointed Head of British *Vogue's* Photography Department in 1940 when paper shortages had inexorably reduced the size of the magazine and circulation was cut from fortnightly to monthly. However, *Vogue* proudly announced, "Supplies may be limited but we raise the 'carry-on signal' as proudly as a banner".[19] Jean Gallagher writes, "The US government actively recruited women for jobs historically held by men and encouraged home front economies and sacrifices, while at the same time cultural apparatus such as film and magazines continually reinscribed women's roles as consumers of fashionable goods, despite wartime commodities shortages".[20] Therefore, it was essential that magazines such as *Vogue* continued to provide women with a fashion market and a sense of normality during the

[17] Sabina Stent, "Surrealism, Symbols and Sexuality in Un Chien Andalou (1929) and L'age D'or (1930)", Silent London, 14 March 2014, https://silentlondon.co.uk/2014/03/14/surrealism-hands-and-sexuality-in-un-chien-andalou-1929-and-lage-dor-1930/#_ftn8.

[18] Kirsten H. Powell, "Hands-On Surrealism", *Art History*, Vol. 20, No. 4, December 1997, 517.

[19] Robin Derrick and Robin Muir, eds. *People in Vogue: A Century of Portraits* (London: Little, Brown, 2003), 76.

[20] Jean Gallagher, *The World Wars Through the Female Gaze* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1998), 75.

war for propaganda purposes—albeit well-redefined and reduced in scope for most European women at this time—to uphold morale. Selected photographs by Miller during this period demonstrate how she naturally applied her Surrealist eye to her fashion assignments while drawing on the innovative creativity of several artistic mentors to present low-cost fashion in exotic and surreal locations. In *Lee Miller: Portraits from a Life* (2002) curator Richard Calvocoressi aligns Miller's position as a portraitist and fashion photographer with the techniques of Man Ray who, accordingly to Calvocoressi "taught her everything in her first year [1929], '…fashion pictures…portrait…the whole technique of what he did'".[21] When looking through Miller's *Vogue* fashion assignments, it is evident that her wartime photographs do contain a distinct element of Surrealism, however, there is also evidence of other artistic influences, which this essay will address.

While Miller's work was inexorably shaped by the vision of her creative mentors, chapters three and four move towards an exploration of how Miller's art can be compared to, and in some cases has inspired, the work of other contemporary female artists. In "Intimate Portraits, Surreal Experiments", Eleanor Jones draws a fascinating comparison between Miller and the British photographer Barbara Ker-Seymer, while in "'Women Are Well-suited to Being Photographers'", Megan Wellington-Barratt discusses the contemporality of Miller's work and its legacy on today's women photographers. Jones explores how interwar British photographer Barbara Ker-Seymer (1905-1993) spoke along similar lines when reflecting on her own style of portraiture although Miller and Ker-Seymer have rarely been discussed together. Although there is little concrete evidence to suggest they met, it is likely the two women were aware of each other, at least socially, as they both navigated the overlapping networks of the European and American avant-gardes. Jones' essay places Miller in dialogue with Ker-Seymer and traces the aesthetic connections between the two women, as their forays into fashion photography and studio portraiture went hand-in-hand with innovative approaches to printing, texture and light. By investigating the affinities and dissonances between Miller and her contemporary, Jones brings a new and more nuanced understanding of Surrealism to light, while raising the profile of two significant women photographers and exploring the roles intimacy and friendship played in their studio practice and their mutual articulation of Surrealism-inspired images.

[21] Richard Calvocoressi, *Lee Miller: Portraits from a Life* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2002), 7.

In a 1932 interview for the *Poughkeepsie Evening Star and Enterprise*, Miller shared her observations on the role of women in photography: "It seems to me that women have a better chance at success in photography than men, women are quicker and more adaptable… And I think they have an intuition that helps them get personalities more quickly".[22] Wellington-Barratt discusses how Miller's work crossed many boundaries and social norms for the time in which she was making photographs establishing how Miller's work fits into no singular box and was far reaching in subject, intent, purpose, and realisation. Wellington-Barratt addresses the candid and brave nature of Miller's work as a standalone artist in relationship to photography by women today. In addition, she explores Miller's extraordinarily timeless gaze on the subject matter of food, self-portraits, fabric and domestic textures, fashion, femininity, and playfulness, and acknowledges how Miller sought to continually push the boundaries of being a working woman in the first half of the twentieth century. Wellington-Barratt explores these themes by drawing on theoretical and social standpoints that have emerged since Miller's work was made, examines themes of domesticity through the contextual framework of Gillian Rose and Sarah Pink, and draws comparisons to the work of contemporary photographers such as Juno Calypso, Clare Strand, Natasha Caruana, and Sophie Calle. Miller's granddaughter Ami Bouhassane writes "…as her significant contribution is slowly rediscovered by the world, we enjoy watching how she continues to be relevant to new generations, inspiring equality, strength in the face of adversity and the creative world".[23]

Much emphasis has been placed on analysing Miller's images of devastation and conflict and chapters five and six focus on Miller's photographs of ruins, monuments, and destruction from the mid-1930s in Egypt to her photographs of the London Blitz in 1940. In "Tombs, Ruins and Embalmed Bodies", Iman Khakoo offers an eloquent reading of Miller's Egyptian photographs and her connection with the Egyptian Surrealist circle, *Art et Liberté*, while in "This Dreadful Masterpiece: Lee Miller, *Grim Glory* and Photographing the Blitz", Josh Rose looks specifically at Ernestine Carter's Ministry of Information publication *Grim Glory: Pictures of Britain Under Fire* (1941), which included twenty-two of Miller's photographs taken during the German bombardment of London and other UK cities. Patricia Allmer writes, "Interest, in modernity, in the breakdown of the conception of civilization and the territorialisations

[22] Lee Miller, quoted in Julia Blanshard, "Other Faces are Her Fortune", *Poughkeepsie Evening Star and Enterprise*, 1 November 1932.
[23] Ami Bouhassane, *Lee Miller* (*Modern Women Artists 05)* (Eiderdown Books, 2019), 50.

accompanying it is eternal and thus stable and monolithic, embedded (for example) in Surrealism's concern (evident in works by Max Ernst, Giorgio de Chirico, and Rene Magritte) with the crumbling or decaying monument and its decomposing significatory functions, is a recurrent and central focus of Miller's work".[24] Navigating these artistic and socio-political landscapes, Khakoo's essay centres on Miller's unique portrait of Egypt, painted both as active cultural agent in her independent artistic practice, and in collisions with other Surrealist artists and networks. Through a careful curation of Miller's works, two aspects of her Egyptian oeuvre are explored: her photographs of monuments, and those of ruins, all the while highlighting Miller's seminal role in traversing British and Egyptian Surrealism – or as a *flâneuse des deux mondes*. In the final section of her essay, Khakoo reconsiders these photographs as documents of and within visual and literary cultures, exploring how they relate to the new lines of cross-cultural affiliation established by Georges Bataille's Surrealist journal *Documents*, to propose an alternative frame for viewing Miller's Egypt.

The aesthetic and the documenting of war's destruction is subsequently examined in Rose's essay, which explores varying portrayals of the Blitz, including those in *Grim Glory* as well as other sources, to specify the ways documentary photography and photojournalism have been used to represent *reality* versus André Breton's concept of a *surreality* as informed by related Surrealist practices**.** Anchoring this approach is a comparison of Miller's fellow *Vogue* photographer Cecil Beaton's smoky, otherworldly *St. Paul's London* with the starkly-composed Surrealist documentary approach Miller employs in many of her Blitz images such as *Revenge on Culture* (1940) and *Bridge of Sighs* (1940).[25] The contrast between the two photographers will establish Beaton's aesthetic approach as one of a "populist Surrealism," deriving from the British public's awareness of Surrealism from the late-1930s, whereas Miller's approach is one steeped in Surrealist theory and practice. As British Surrealist Julian Trevelyan noted in his 1957 autobiography *Indigo Days*, it "became absurd to compose Surrealist confections when high explosives could do it much better, and when German soldiers with Tommy-guns descended from the clouds on parachutes dressed as nuns. Life had caught up with Surrealism or Surrealism with life,

[24] Patricia Allmer, *Lee Miller, Photography, Surrealism, and Beyond* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 129.
[25] Beaton's photograph is included in *Grim Glory* as image 36. Ernestine Carter, *Grim Glory: Pictures of Britain Under Fire* (Lund, Humphries, 1941).

and for a giddy moment we in England lived the irrational movement to its death".[26]

In her 2011 book *Women Modernists and Fascism*, Annalisa Zox-Weaver writes how Miller's "eye was drawn to dark absurdity, to before-and-after ironies, to images that, once charged with subduing power, become impotent and self-mocking after Nazism's fall from power".[27] Continuing the exploration of Miller's war photography, in chapters seven and eight Melody Davis and Viola Rühse pay particular attention to Miller's subversive images of war with emphasis on David E. Scherman's provocative portrait of Miller in Adolf Hitler's bathtub taken in May 1945. In "Revisiting the Enemy", an updated version of her 1997 essay "Lee Miller: Bathing with the Enemy",[28] Davis provides a thoughtful Freudian analysis of this iconic image relating Miller's war experience back to her troubled childhood when as a seven-year-old she was sexually assaulted. With reference to Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection, Davis explores the concept of the body and (physical, psychological, and sexual) trauma in relation to Miller's personal experiences and considers the decision by Miller and Scherman to use "a simple container [a bathtub] for a surreal echo of the horrors of the Holocaust".

Like Davis, in "At the Frontline: Lee Miller as a Surrealist War Correspondent", Rühse examines the bathtub portrait while providing a broader discussion of Miller's role as a war correspondent and the only woman during the war to reach the frontline. Making comparisons with the work of other war photographers such as Gerda Taro and Margaret Bourke-White, Rühse explores gender conventions within Miller's work, considers how Miller challenges and transgresses the boundaries set for her as a woman in the traditionally male domain of war, and looks at portraits of "Miller the war correspondent" as she travelled across Europe with the US armed forces. While Rühse's essay raises questions about the role of women in the masculine sphere, we can also align this struggle with the efforts of women artists to be recognised within the male dominated world of Surrealism.

As we move into the postwar period, we see a shift in Miller's career when her passion for food and cookery replaces photography. Miller's close friend Bettina McNulty writes, "Lee chose cooking as much for therapeutic

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[26] Julian Trevelyan, *Indigo Days: Art and Memoirs of Julian Trevelyan* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1996), 80.

[27] Annalisa Zox-Weaver, *Women Modernists and Fascism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 177.

[28] Melody Davis, "Lee Miller: Bathing with the Enemy", *The History of Photography* 21, no. 2 (Winter 1997): 314-318.

reasons, gaining a real sense of escape in her newly invented career. She felt compelled to put her wartime experiences behind her and had a self-imposed censorship on discussion about her work during the war".[29] In chapter nine, "Lee Miller's Entertaining Freezer: Surrealist Cuisine for the Modern Woman", Lottie Whelan argues that Miller's turn to domestic art was a clear continuation of her avant-garde artistic career; allowing her to explore the themes she had developed during her years as a photographer in a radically different medium. It also situates her in a lineage of women artists who subverted conceptions of the kitchen as a site of women's domestic drudgery—from fellow Surrealists such as Leonora Carrington and Meret Oppenheim, to later feminist artists like Martha Rosler and Bobby Baker. Exploring parallels between Leonora Carrington and Miller, Whalen's essay draws out the ways both women collapsed boundaries between art and the everyday, the domestic and the art-world, through kitchen-based experiments with food. The rituals of cooking also became a healing practice, a refuge for two visionary Surrealist artists who had each suffered psychological trauma and misogyny at the hands of their male counterparts. Whalen also demonstrates how Miller's culinary art practice differs from Carrington's. Where Carrington's kitchen functioned as an "alchemical" space of magic and the occult, Miller's love of new kitchen gadgets (such as the freezer and – her personal favourite – the blender) speak to the fast-paced language of modernity, the city, and photography; as in her photographic art, Miller's culinary artworks were technologically-mediated, thoroughly modern creations. Significant, too, is the degree to which they aligned with her efforts, as a photographer, to capture and make visible the realities of modern women's lives in war time, in her own distinct Surrealist style. Continuing her understanding and appreciation of the modern working woman, Miller wanted to write a cookbook to help them be creative without expending too much time and energy: it would "redefine dinner party preparations" for those who find "entertaining in 'haute' style past our weekday energy levels". Miller's culinary art practice represents not only a significant phase in her own career (one which helps further our understanding of her earlier work), but also a fascinating Surrealist contribution to twentieth century feminist art's efforts to break boundaries between art and the domestic practices of everyday life.

Following on from Whalen's essay, food is again the subject as Morwenna Kearsley closes this volume with a fictional Surrealist encounter with Miller—an imaginary dinner date between author and subject.

[29] Bettina McNulty, "The Confessions of a Compulsive Cook", in Bouhassane, *A Life with Food*, 15.

According to Bettina McNulty, Miller was "never a surreal icon in dress or in behaviour, only sometimes in her forthright, original conversation. She had the confidence and good sense to let her surreal inclinations pop up naturally as they chose. She was a practical and clear-thinking night nurse with the same combination of rationality and wild leap of imagination found in Marcel Duchamp".[30] Thus, Kearsley's contribution is an intriguing and fitting epilogue to this new volume of essays on Miller's Surrealism.

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CHAPTER ONE

LEE MILLER'S *LE BAISER*

ELEANOR CLAYTON

> A beautiful wax hand, like a manicurist's window standing up from the wrist, vertically, and on it I'd like a bracelet made of false teeth mounted in particularly false pink-coloured gums.[1]

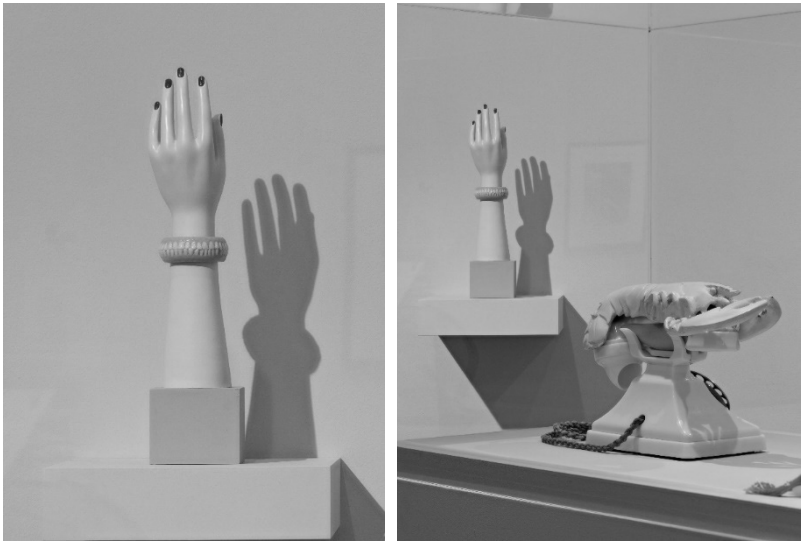

Fig. 1-1 and 1-2: Reconstruction of Lee Miller's *Le Baiser* installed at The Hepworth Wakefield alongside Salvador Dali's *Lobster Telephone* (1938), as part of *Lee Miller: Surrealism in Britain*, 2018. Photograph: Lewis Ronald.

[1] Lee Miller to Roland Penrose, 7 November 1937, Lee Miller Archives held at Farley Farm, Sussex.

Although for much of the twentieth century Lee Miller was best known as muse and lover to Surrealist Man Ray, in recent decades her own photographic practice has been celebrated. Rarely however is her sculpture given attention, scarcely featured in exhibitions or mentioned in any depth within critical writing on her work. This may be because the one known sculpture attributed to Miller is now lost, and she did not even make it. The sculpture *Le Baiser*, 1937, as described by Miller above, featured in the exhibition *Surrealist Objects and Poems* that was held at the London Gallery in 1937. This essay will outline the conditions and influences which led conception of the sculpture, how it was made, and the context in which it was exhibited. It will metaphorically look at the sculpture from all angles, using an examination of materials and sculptural thinking to reveal the broader cultural landscapes and artistic inspirations that led to its creation. Encompassing collage, consumerism, Surrealism, feminism, and proto-pop art, exploring the hermeneutic possibilities of this singular sculpture will reach through time and geography, from New York to Paris, and the early days of the ICA in London. Further, taking a holistic and in-depth look at this one work I propose to situate Miller within the field of modern sculpture.

Le Baiser is comprised of a mannequin's hand, the sort normally used to display watches or jewellery in a shop window, mounted on a square block. The nails are painted red, and a set of false teeth are wrapped around its delicate wrist in the place of the expected wares. Conceived of as an assemblage of mass-produced objects, Miller directed its creation by letter in November 1937 to artist, collector and exhibition organiser Roland Penrose, with whom she had met and begun a relationship earlier that year. She wrote, "I'd like to have an object in the Surrealist show if possible […] you could make it for me as it is very simple. It is a beautiful wax hand, like [one in] a manicurist's window standing up from the wrist, vertically, and on it I'd like a bracelet made of false teeth mounted in particularly false pink-coloured gums... I had thought of making the fingernails over with false eyes, but that would be too much work".[2] The manipulation of these mundane elements into a complex piece of surreal sculpture shows Miller's appetite for finding the unusual and strange in everyday settings, as Penrose had remarked in an earlier letter, "your way of seeing things when we are out together is a thing I miss all the time".[3] Miller's material specifications; the manicurists' wax hand with painted nails, the false teeth and false eyes,

[2] Letter from Miller to Penrose, 7 November 1937, Lee Miller Archives.
[3] Letter from Penrose to Miller, 27 October 1937, Roland Penrose Archive, National Galleries of Modern Art Scotland.

speak to her familiarity with the world of fashion and its attendant trappings of cosmetic enhancement.

Miller had been living in Paris in 1925, the year that the first exhibition of surrealist art was held at Galerie Pierre,[4] studying experimental stage design for several months under artist and stage designer Ladislas Medgyès. She returned to Paris in 1929 to study photography having worked in the intervening years as a model in New York, prominently for *Vogue* magazine. At *Vogue*, Miller was shot by photographers such as Edward Steichen, who moved in modern art circles and exhibited fine art photography while also undertaking commissions for fashion magazines. The staging of fashion shoots offered an alternative application of the *mis-en-scene* of theatre design, with the photographer taking the place of the theatrical director, and Miller became interested in pursuing a career in photography herself. No doubt through her contacts at *Vogue*, she became aware of Man Ray who, at the forefront of the Surrealist movement, contributed to all but one of the twelve issues of the group's journal, *La Revolution Surrealiste*, between 1925 and 1929. He was also known for his commercial work as a fashion and society photographer, both in Paris and New York where he had lived until 1921. This combination made him an ideal mentor for Miller who, while experiencing the processes of fashion photography first-hand, had also studied at the Clarence White School of Photography in New York where a pictorialist approach promoted the independent art of the photographic image.

Miller made contact with Man Ray in Paris, and they began a romantic relationship while she worked as his studio assistant, looking after his portraiture clients, developing photographs, and working with him on commissions. In the autumn of 1929 Miller also began working at French *Vogue* (known as *Frogue*), first as a model and then as photographic assistant for George Hoyningen-Huene, another photographer who traversed the fields of fashion and fine art photography. By 1930 Miller was taking on enough work, both through *Frogue* and through jobs referred to her by Man Ray, to rent her own studio in Montparnasse.[5] A conjunction of commercial jobs led to the creation of her startling diptych *Severed Breast from Radical Surgery in a Place Setting 1* and *Severed Breast from Radical*

[4] 'L'exposition de la peinture Surréaliste' was held at Galerie Pierre in November 1925, showing the work of Arp, de Chirico, Ernst, Klee, Masson, Miró, Picasso, Man Ray and Pierre Roy.

[5] *Roland Penrose and Lee Miller: The Surrealist and Photographer* (Edinburgh: National Galleries of Scotland, 2006), 170.

Surgery in a Place Setting 2 (both c. 1929).[6] Miller had been appointed to photographically document operations at the medical school of the University of Paris, and after observing a mastectomy she obtained the surgical remains which she took to the *Frogue* studio to stage this unusually macabre photoshoot. As the titles suggest, the breast is presented as a meal on a china plate with cutlery and a chequered cloth place setting reminiscent of a Parisian bistro, or bourgeois home. In the first image the breast is turned towards the viewer so the nipple – a prominent identifier of its original state – is visible. The second setting presents the breast from the fleshy severed end, drawing a nauseating visual equivalence with a minced meat dinner. Considering Miller's experience in the modelling industry, the analogous objectification of the female body is unavoidable, the breast literally treated as a piece of meat. This objectification was not restricted to the fashion industry. Fragmented female bodies had appeared regularly within the art of the (largely male) Surrealist group in the 1920s, depersonalised - frequently depicted without faces – so that the female muse offered prominent symbolic female representation while erasing the individual identity of the women depicted. Though Miller equally offers an impersonal sexual object in her diptych, the unpleasantness of this fragmentation, of objectification, is made viscerally clear.

This work was made around the time that Miller featured in Jean Cocteau's experimental film, *Le Sang d'un Poète* [The Blood of a Poet], 1930. In the opening section the protagonist, a young male artist, finds that his drawing of a mouth becomes independently animated. In attempting to erase it, the moving mouth is transferred onto his hand. He then places his hand over the mouth of a classical marble statue in his studio, played by Miller, thereby bringing the statue to life. The artist is the frenetic agent in the scene, his dynamism counterpointed by Miller's frozen statue, who nonetheless, once awakened, compels the artist to enter an alternate world through a mirror. The film's narrative reinforces the surrealist tropes of the female body as elegantly passive material, in this case static until activated by male creativity, its only function as inspiring muse. Miller recalled the parallel evident in the experience of making the film. As the statue is conceived of as armless, Miller's own arms were bound tightly and painfully by her sides, and she recalled, "my 'armor' […] didn't fit very well: they plastered the joints with butter and flour that turned rancid and

[6] The Miller Archives have significant charges for reproducing images in publications but have made a huge amount of Miller's images available online. *Severed Breast from Radical Surgery in a Place Setting 2* can be seen here: https://www.leemiller.co.uk/media/_WOvpFn6NpDzK-RK7ffkAg..a.

stank".[7] Her personal discomfort was ignored by Cocteau, for whom Miller's body was simply material used to deliver his artistic vision.

As a fragment of a female body *Le Baiser* recalls Miller's *Severed Breast* diptych, and its construction from fashion-related objects similarly references her experiences as both a model at *Vogue* and photographer's assistant at *Frogue* – the professional transition from object to agent. *Le Baiser* also relates to this period of Miller's career by reinstating a missing arm of her animated statue in *Le Sang d'un Poète*. Her emphasis on the "particularly false" quality of the sculpture's components lampoons this objectification and priority given to feminine appearance alone, the one-dimensional female muse revealed as an inauthentic illusion. The false teeth ensnaring the mannequin's wrist brings to the fore male subjugation of the fragmented, objectified female body, pain and possession bound in one. Penrose makes this gendered reading of the components of *Le Baiser* clear in a letter to Miller around the time of its creation, writing, "I shall love to choose a hand as nearly like yours as possible and decorate it with teeth as nearly like mine as possible".[8] Penrose had given Miller a pair of golden handcuffs made by Cartier the year this work was made, and their mutual interest in sadomasochism is suggested in their contemporaneous letters, one exchange in particular discussing reading de Sade, Miller bemoaning possible censorship in her copy. Penrose writes on 29 December 1937, "you ask about Sade as far as I can remember the best bit in the book is the bit in the Monastery where the old monks surpass each other in refinement in their attentions to the girls they have caught but I expect you are right about your copy being cut there was a long juicy piece in the castle which was very good".[9] This indicates a nuance in the power dynamics at play in *Le Baiser*, Miller an active agent in her metaphorical subjugation. As "director" of both the construction of *Le Baiser* and the staging of the *Severed Breast* diptych she performs the roles of sadist and masochist, objectifier and objectified, concurrently.[10]

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[7] Quoted in Carolyn Burke, *Lee Miller: On Both Sides of the Camera* (London: Bloomsbury, 2005), 104.

[8] Letter from Penrose to Miller, 14 November 1937, Roland Penrose Archive.

[9] Letter from Penrose to Miller, 29 December 1937, 'Photocopies of correspondence', 1937–38, restricted access, Roland Penrose Archive, RPA (GMA A35/1/1/RPA 700), quoted in Patricia Allmer, *Lee Miller: Photography, Surrealism and Beyond* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 45.

[10] For more on the *Severed Breast* diptych and Miller's interest in sadomasochism see "Severed Breast from Radical Surgery in a Place Setting" in Allmer, *Lee Miller*, 28-58.

Shortly after the cinematic release of *Le Sang d'un Poète*, Salvador Dali published a seminal text, "Objets Surrealists" [Surrealist Objects] in the third issue of *Le Surrealisme au service de la Revolution* in 1931.[11] The essay proposed six types of Surrealist object: the object functioning symbolically, transubstantiated objects, objects to project, wrapped objects, machine objects and moulded objects. *Le Baiser* can be seen as an example of the first category, an Object Functioning Symbolically, for which Dali provides the most expansive explanation:

> These objects, lending themselves to a minimum of mechanical functioning, are based on phantasms and representations likely to be proved by the realisation of unconscious acts.
> These are acts of the kind that you cannot understand the pleasure derived from their realisation, or which are accounted for my erroneous theories devised by censorship and repression. In all analysed cases, these acts correspond to distinctly characterised erotic desires and fantasies.
> The embodiment of these desires, their way of being objectified by substitution and metaphor, their symbolic realisation, all these constitute a typical process of sexual perversion, which resemble in every respect the process involved in the poetic act. […] The Objects Functioning Symbolically allow no leeway to formal concerns. They depend solely on everyone's loving imagination and are extra-sculptural.[12]

Dali proposes that these types of artworks operate by repurposing or reframing common items to delve into their psychoanalytic associations, juxtaposing or positioning them in a particular manner to draw out uncanny, and particularly sexual or fetishistic, associations. Miller's *Severed Breast* diptych pre-empts this categorisation, as Patricia Allmer has noted, the photographs "constitute, *avant la lettre*, a disturbing and powerfully polysemous surrealist object".[13]

Following his definition of this artistic genre in his text, Dali discusses an object with points of connection to *Le Baiser* in his subsequent analysis of Surreal Objects by various artists. Made by Valentine Hugo, the only female artist featured, the object is described as "Gloved Hand and Red Hand".[14] As in *Le Baiser*, the hands depicted in the work are fragments, detached from their bodies. A shiny red hand with fur cuff is upright, prising

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[11] Salvador Dali, "Objets Surrealistes" *Le Surrealisme au service de la Revolution* 3 (December 1931) Paris: Editions Jean-Michel Place, 16-17.
[12] H. Finkelstein (ed. And translated) The Collected Writings of Salvador Dali (Cambridge University Press), 232
[13] Allmer, *Lee Miller*, 55.
[14] Finkelstein, *Collected Writings of Salvador Dali*, 232.

into the opening of the white-gloved hand which holds a die, relating to the background of a green roulette baize. Like *Le Baiser*, these hands offer a haptic connection to the viewer while simultaneously being distanced by inauthenticity, in this case concealed by fabric, the real skin only suggested. Both red hand and gloved hand are bound by a taut web of delicate white thread, echoing the erotic restraint of *Le Baiser's* false teeth bracelet-cum-handcuff, the desire to touch tantalisingly prohibited.

Such was the growing enthusiasm for this form of artwork among the Surrealists over the next years that an exhibition of Surreal Objects, *Exposition des Objets*, was held at the Charles Ratton Gallery, Paris, in May 1936, and a second, titled *Surreal Objects and Poems*, was proposed for the London Gallery in November 1937 by Penrose and Belgian Surrealist E.L.T Mesens. Penrose had been instrumental in fostering a network of Surrealist activity in Britain having lived in Paris himself from 1922, also meeting Man Ray and marrying Surrealist poet Valentine Boue. Meeting Max Ernst in 1928 led to his further integration into Surrealist circles, and he recalled, "Breton, Éluard, Tzara, Tanguy, Masson, Miro, Man Ray, Bunuel, Dali, initially names that intrigued me from what I could read and see of their work, became through Max live members of a turbulent group who were to become my friends".[15] Ernst and Penrose appeared together in the 1930 Surrealist film *L'Age d'Or* [The Golden Age], directed by Luis Buñuel the same year that Cocteau had featured Miller in *Le Sang d'un Poète*, and financed by the same individual, Viscount Charles de Noailles. In 1936 Penrose had organised, with critic and writer Herbert Read, the International Surrealism exhibition at the Burlington Galleries in London, which attracted over 20,000 visitors thereby introducing the movement to a broad public.[16] The following year, Penrose met Miller at a party in Paris, and they spent time with a loose group of Surrealist friends including Man Ray, Eileen Agar, Ernst, Leonora Carrington, Picasso and Mesens, in both Devonshire, England, and Mougins in the South of France.

At Mougins, Miller and Penrose began making postcard collages together that, although two-dimensional, functioned in a manner akin to the Surreal Object. Collage had been central to Surrealist art from its inception. In the 1924 Surrealist Manifesto Breton had referenced Picasso's cubist collages incorporating newsprint and "pieces of paper" as proto-Surrealist works, claiming "it is even permissible to entitle 'Poem' what we get from the most random assemblage possible of headlines and scraps of headlines cut out of the newspapers".[17] A notable collage Miller made in 1937,

[15] Finkelstein, *Collected Writings of Salvador Dali*, 38.
[16] Michel Remy *Surrealism in Britain* (London: Lund Humphries, 1999), 78.
[17] Breton *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, 41.

Untitled Collage incorporates a postcard of the Côte d'Azur with a view of the coast towards Cannes, the nearest town to Mougins, alongside fragments of her own photography.[18] The jagged triangular tips of land into the sea and peaks of the hills in the postcard are accentuated by scraps of photographs over- and under-laid, cut to echo these points, while the photographs represent a group of female Surrealists. Agar, depicted in shadowy profile against Brighton Pavilion in a photo taken earlier that year, is wearing the iconic "Mad Cap" hat designed by Elsa Schiaparelli, a fashion designer who collaborated with Surrealists such as Dali as well as pioneering her own Surrealist-fashion hybrid designs. The outline of Agar's shadow is mirrored in a white paper silhouette. A portrait in profile of fellow Surrealist photographer Dora Maar has the face cut out, leaving only the hair and a rough profile given by the back edge of Agar's silhouette. Through literal gaps in the images, or shown in shadow, these female figures are presented as absences while being the focal point of the image, perhaps a further commentary on the surrealist trope of the female muse as a prominent erasure.

Miller herself is also alluded to elliptically, through a snippet of patterned fabric taken from a photograph of her on the beach by Penrose. The cut-out segment of her lap is collaged to the bottom of the land-mass depicted in the postcard to form a figure, the coastline as torso supporting the multiple heads of Agar, and Maar. A fragmented hand appears again, its disembodied, unnaturally splayed fingers recalling Miller's photograph, *Exploding Hand*, 1930, emerging from the bottom of Maar's hair and reaching out towards the viewer. Just as poetry can be created through the juxtaposition of newspaper print, so Miller's collage offers a new lexicon through which meaning is created from its component parts. Each fragment signifies particular people, places and moments in time, as well as generalised symbols such as the female muse, the generic seascape, packaged up and mass produced in post-card form.[19] Working in sculptural form with *Le Baiser*, Miller's process of creative collision seen in her collage is compounded by the use of found objects that bring the experience and associations of the real world – consumerism, cosmetic enhancement, physical intimacy and gender power dynamics - into the three-dimensional image.

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[18] Lee Miller Archives, www.leemiller.co.uk/media/xMoayxNlQk6V8MzMQm2NQ..a?ts=MlIUDzix4ffbvEmeE71Lc72w GY0R3vAl824CjFUTZRk.a.

[19] For further detailed analysis of this work see "Shadows of herself: Miller, Picasso, and Collage" in Allmer, *Lee Miller*, 89-119.

Postcard collages that Penrose had made alongside Miller in Mougins accompanied the sculptural works that were included in *Surreal Objects and Poems* later that year. Penrose wrote about the plans for the exhibition in advance to Miller, describing the "Surrealist object show which is to open at the London Gallery on the 24th [November], if only you were here your bright ideas for the object show would be tremendously useful and we should have great fun making them".[20] In his "Foreword" to the exhibition catalogue, Read emphasises the importance of juxtaposition, and particularly chance, in the formation of Surreal Objects writing, "Man is not the only artist. Besides Nature … there is Chance… chances which bring unexpected things into unexpected places, give unexpected shapes to familiar objects, and give us unexpected glimpses into unfamiliar places. The general effect of such chances is to invest the object with a spirit, a life of its own; and from this point of view Surrealism may be regarded as a return to the animism of our savage ancestors". He ends with the instruction, "enter and contemplate with wonder the objects which civilization has rejected, but which the savage and the Surrealist still worship".[21] Like Dali's essay, the exhibition divided the objects into a taxonomy of sub-categories apportioned out in the catalogue: Surrealist Objects, Found Objects Interpreted, Objects Collages, Oneiric Objects, Objects for everyday use, Perturbed Objects and Constructed Objects, as well as Collages and Photo-Collages. In many of these categories, the presence of chance could be queried because the artists selected their objects, and juxtapositions of objects, with deliberation. However, by using "familiar objects", the viewers' unknown associations were activated, bringing an uncontrolled and unpredictable element into the work.

Perhaps plausibly fitting into many of these categories, *Le Baiser* is included in the catalogue within the first. The title of the sculpture was suggested by Penrose who wrote, "You must let me know at once what to call it in the catalogue. I had thought of entering it as 'Le baiser' by Lee Miller".[22] The English translation, *The Kiss*, is given in the catalogue, the sentimentality of the title subverted by the sinister bite of the false teeth. Although Miller had given precise written instructions, in the event "chance" played a further role in its final state. Having agreed to make the simpler option she had described without false eyes on the nails, Penrose still found it hard to meet her specifications and had to adapt the brief, writing, "to begin with there are no wax hands of the right type in London,

[20] Letter from Penrose to Miller, 27 October 1937, Roland Penrose Archive.
[21] Read 'Foreword' in *Surrealist Objects and Poems* exhibition catalogue (London Gallery, 1937).
[22] Letter from Penrose to Miller, 14 November 1937, Roland Penrose Archive.

I found that out after visiting a dozen or more shops, so I bought a wood one which has a really good shape and I painted it with the greatest care inspired by your hands which I can still see with some accuracy; but that was only half the job. The second half was for the teeth – finally after several false trails I found two old men, in white coats sitting in an attic making the most rosy pearly fake jaws I've ever seen".[23] Penrose also asks Miller's opinion on an object he is making for the show, later titled *The Dew Machine*, "I am working on my cutie [mannequin] from the Caledonian market – painting her cheeks, making up her eyes as whorishly as the girl we painted together in Cornwall. She is going to look like this [drawn picture of upside-down head] when finished. I have ordered the most beautiful blond wig for her which will be dyed bright blue as it arrives in the plate so as to look like water. I am still not quite sure what to put into the cup formed by her neck. I had thought of a little table and chair, very small and drawing room like. But you may as usual have a much brighter idea".[24] Miller suggested several options of additional found objects that could be placed under the head to create intriguing associations, including a "lens-like hemisphere of glass" to "magnify or distort small objects underneath", or "a hand or arm reaching up from inside the head".[25]

While Penrose intervened in the creation of his sculpture in a painterly manner – painting the face and dying the hair of his mannequin - Miller, by contrast, attempted to approach the construction of sculpture as she would a set or photographic image, even though Penrose's painterly approach pervaded the final production of *Le Baiser*. Her approach shares central characteristics with the readymade, a term invented by Marcel Duchamp to describe assemblage sculptures he had begun making in 1913 that were comprised of mass-produced, unexceptional objects. Miller would have been aware of Duchamp's work, not least because of his closeness to Man Ray, who he had met in 1915 when they both lived in New York and with whom he had worked alongside, co-founding the artistic society the Société Anonyme, Inc, in 1920, and both moving to Paris shorty after.[26] For Duchamp the readymades were an antidote to what he called "retinal art", raising questions over the importance of materials, artisanal creation or the priority of artistic concept. He noted that the objects he chose were often "based on a reaction of visual indifference, with at the same time a total

[23] Letter from Penrose to Miller, 21 November 1937, Roland Penrose Archive.
[24] Letter from Penrose to Miller, 6 October 1937, Roland Penrose Archive.
[25] Letter from Miller to Penrose, 7 November 1937, Lee Miller Archives.
[26] For more on Duchamp and Man Ray's collaborations see Francis M. Naumann, *New York Dada 1915-23* (New York, Harry N. Abrams Inc., Publishers, 1994), 80 – 93.

absence of good or bad taste",[27] and deliberately rejected traditional artistic frameworks, instructing in 1916, "Don't try too hard to understand it in the Romantic or Impressionist or Cubist sense".[28] *Le Baiser* similarly comprises mundane objects that would be normally observed in passing without causing remark. Like many of Duchamp's readymades, the content of *Le Baiser* lies in the juxtaposition of elements both containing instinctively understood content, in this case an additional layer of potency in the bodily and sexual associations aroused by the combination.

Although *Le Baiser* is now lost, it can be seen in installation photographs of the exhibition reaching up towards one of Penrose's postcard collages. Mesens helped to install the show, as Penrose wrote to Miller, "together we hung everything and put everything in place, changing it all from a left luggage office to a very intriguing show".[29] Works were placed closely together on the walls and shelves giving the exhibition a domestic character, particularly when this mode of display was combined with the many household objects that were incorporated into the artworks. Just as Miller juxtaposed found objects to create new meaning, the installation of the exhibition brought objects together in a visual poem of its own. Penrose was pleased with the outcome, and wrote to Miller, "The show looks really rather good and a lot of people have been to see it in the last two days. Your hand with the teeth bracelet is lovely, I am sending you a photo of it next to an object of mine, an object of Eileen and an object of Max […] The press has been taking a lot of interest and reproduced a great many photos of various objects. I enclose an example. In fact the whole thing is creating a great deal more of a stir than I had expected".[30] A report in *The Sketch* confirmed, "my first midnight private view – the Surrealists at the London Gallery… Some of the artists present seemed more Surrealist than the exhibits. I was one of the 'perturbed objects' myself, because when we arrived at the gallery we couldn't get up the stairs, till, suddenly, we found ourselves absorbed up them and filtered round the rooms without having to

[27] "Apropos of 'Readymades'" a talk delivered by Duchamp at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, 19 October 1961 (published in Art and Artists I, no 4 [July 1966], 47), quoted in Francis M. Naumann, *New York Dada 1915-23* (New York, Harry N. Abrams Inc., Publishers, 1994), 39.

[28] Letter from Duchamp to his sister Suzanne Duchamp [Desmares], "Around the 15th of January [1916]" (Papers of Jean Crotti and Suzanne Duchamp, AAA; published in Francis M. Naumann, "Affectuesement, Marcel: Tel Letters from Marcel Duchamp to Suzanne Duchamp and Jean Crittu" AAAJ 22, no. 3 [1982], 5, quoted in Naumann, *New York Dada*, 40.

[29] Letter from Penrose to Miller, 26 November 1937, Roland Penrose Archive.

[30] Letter from Penrose to Miller 26 November 1937, Roland Penrose Archive.

walk. The crowd absolutely filled the whole building".[31] News of the show even reached Miller's circle in Cairo, and she writes to Penrose, "I make all my friends read the Surrealist books and they still don't believe it's true… an English woman (whom I adore otherwise) said, 'did you see the God damnedness pictures of a so-called art exhibition in London, appearing in the Tatler'… and I said yes, I have piece of sculpture in the show, and you should have seen her face".[32]

The exhibition received some positive reviews, including in *The Sunday Times* where Eric Newton wrote, referencing *Le Baiser* among others, of "the precious spirit of nonsense without which life would be intolerably dull. There is refreshment in the sublime inconsequence of such juxtapositions. Nails in an iron, cups made of fur, bracelets made of false teeth are charming just because they are a release from the grey common sense of functionalism".[33] A political statement could be seen in the subversion of familiar objects running throughout the exhibition, as a reviewer in *The Times* made clear. "Some of the objects are described as 'found', some as 'interpreted', some as 'perturbed', and some as 'constructed', but they are all examples of ingenuity, whether in the construction or in the naming. Without being unduly solemn it may be said that there is a moral in the exhibition. The poems included in the catalogue make it evident that the surrealist movement is an exasperated reaction of artists from a world in disorder".[34] The Surrealist group in Britain was engaged, as many avant-garde artistic groups of the time were, in the fight against the Fascist ideology that was spreading across Europe. In May 1938, in protest against the British government's position of non-intervention in the Spanish Civil War, Penrose led the British Surrealists in a march on Hyde Park mockingly dressed as British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain. The *London Bulletin*, the journal associated with the London Gallery which began in 1938 and featured Miller's photographs, opened its June 1940 issue with a page declaring in bold text, "FIGHT HITLER AND HIS IDEOLOGY WHERE IT APPEARS".[35]

Seeing the unusual and poetic possibilities in mundane and ubiquitous objects can be seen throughout Miller's work, but as political commentary this approach is most pronounced in her war photography. At the outbreak

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[31] *The Sketch* 9th December 1937, Tate Archive.
[32] Letter from Miller to Penrose 28 December 1937, Lee Miller Archives.
[33] Eric Newton, "Some Current Mannerisms: Surrealism and the R. B. A", *Sunday Times*, 28 November 1937, 7.
[34] 'Surrealism in Stone and Print: "Nuexpected" Glimpses', *The Times*, 1 December 1937, 11.
[35] *London Bulletin*, nos 18-20 (June 1940), 1.

of war in 1939, instead of returning to the United States as American nationals had been encouraged to, Miller, who had moved to London only months before war was declared, decided to remain there, and took on photography assignments for British *Vogue*. Some of her fashion features draw close visual parallels to *Le Baiser*, like *Hands for the Job* 1942, in which Miller photographed the hands of society women engaged in war work (fig. 2-5). She makes mannequins of their hands by lighting them brightly while their arms are cloaked in darkness, the "visually amputated" hands posed with props indicating their jobs, for example, Lady Dashwood's hands shown lightly holding a piece of metal work used to make munitions.[36] While the appearance of fragmented bodies may be predictable in her fashion work, in some of her images of bomb-damaged London, published first in British *Vogue* in November 1940 and gathered in the book *Grim Glory: Pictures of Britain Under Fire* 1941, this imagery symbolises the trauma of war. The iconic *Revenge on* Culture, 1940, shows a classical statue decapitated by bomb damage, its torso, arm and hand severed from its head by a thick, black line of shadow that intersects the image. When Miller became an official war photographer in 1942, this time for American *Vogue*, echoes of *Le Baiser* also appear in the surreal scenes of conflict that she captured. Multiple disembodied hands in strange formations dominate the photograph, *US Army Nurse Drying Sterilised Rubber Gloves Oxford* 1943, the inclusion of rubber offering a fetishistic effect parallel to *Le Baiser*'s underlying sadomasochism. The apogee of this returning trope is recorded in written form in 1944, Miller having found herself at the siege of German-held Port St. Malo by American forces. In an article written for *Vogue* published in October 1944, Miller recalls the cacophony of exploding shells and gunfire, the scrabble and chaos of the skirmish, and while sheltering stumbles across "a dead, detached hand".[37] As with the *Severed Breast* diptych, Miller does not shy away from the horror of amputation, continuing, "I picked up the hand and hurled it across the street and ran back the way I'd come, bruising my feet and crashing in the unsteady piles of stone and slipping in blood. Christ, it was awful".[38]

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[36] As described by Dr. Hilary Floe, "You Will Not Be Able to Ignore It" in Eleanor Clayton (Ed.) *Lee Miller and Surrealism in Britain* (Farnham: Lund Humphries, 2018), 101. Floe notes that this disembodied effect is present in Miller's photographs, yet in the final published images 'the impression of disembodied hands is lost through the subtle visibility of an arm and torso in silhouette,' suggesting that Miller created independent fine art images distinct though deriving from the commissioned commercial photoshoot.

[37] Lee Miller, "St. Malo", *Vogue* (October 1944), 133.

[38] Miller, "St Malo", 134.

Back in 1937 at the London Gallery, the disembodied hand was in apposite company among other mannequins – not only Penrose's *The Dew Machine* but also a commercial replica of the *Venus de Milo*, two busts by Agar titled *Angel of Anarchy* and *Rococo Cocotte*, and *The Future of Statues* by Rene Magritte. The language of retail display was also evoked, causing *The Manchester Guardian* to comment "the lovely cardboard ladies - or portions of them - who display dresses in shop windows have provided a good deal of raw material for the Surrealist mind to work on".[39] By "portion" they are no doubt referring to Miller's fragmented mannequin, and this use of consumer furniture in a fine art setting foreshadowed what would become Pop art two decades later. Miller was witness to the early phases of this movement as it emerged from the Institute of Contemporary Art following its founding in London in 1946. Penrose was one of the founders of the ICA, and Miller lent works from her fine art collection to several of the early exhibitions, worked as a member of the Fundraising Committee, and assisted in the production of catalogues.[40] In 1953 Penrose curated an ambitious exhibition, *The Wonder and Horror of the Human Head: an Anthology*, which aimed to present the many ways in which the human head has been deployed by artists from classical sculpture to contemporary practices 'to charm and to terrify.'[41] He dedicated the accompanying scholarly catalogue to Miller, "To my Wife without whose help this essay could not have been written".[42]

Miller also contributed a significant section of this exhibition that was described in the catalogue as a "scrapbook", as Penrose elaborated in his Foreword, "in commercial advertising, the illustrated magazine, and the picture postcard, many of the most ancient symbols reappear in a modern guise, and this aspect of the subject is shown in the scrapbook compiled by

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[39] "Our London Correspondent", *The Manchester Guardian*, 25 November 1937. Roland Penrose Archive. I am grateful to Dr. Rachel Stratton for this reference.
[40] Miller is listed as a lender for the first two exhibitions, *40 Years of Modern Art: 1907 – 1947, A Selection from British Collections* (10 February – 6 March 1948) and *40,000 Years of Modern Art: A Comparison of Primitive and Modern* (20 December 1948 – 29 January 1949 in Anne Massey (Ed.) *Institute of Contemporary Arts 1946 – 1968* p.20 and p. 30 respectively. She is listed as a member of the Fundraising Committee in 1950, 50. *Institute of Contemporary Arts 1946 – 1968* (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 2014).
[41] Herbert Read, Foreword, *Wonder and Horror of the Human Head: An Anthology*, Exh. Cat., Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, 6 March – 19 April 1953.
[42] Roland Penrose *The Wonder and Horror of the Human Head: An Anthology* (Lund Humphries, 1953), 6.

Lee Miller".[43] Several rotating stands of the kind used to sell postcards or greeting cards were pasted with multiple images of heads taken from across mass media; advertising, fashion, fine art, postcards, ethnographic journals, *National Geographic* among others.[44] The "scrapbook" traversed in one installation the "Long Front of Culture" that Lawrence Alloway would claim in 1959 as the landscape in which Pop[ular] Art had emerged, noting "mass production techniques, applied to accurately repeatable words, pictures, and music, have resulted in an expendable multitude of signs and symbols".[45] Miller's installation should be seen in the context of the activities of The Independent Group (IG) who had begun meeting at the ICA in 1951, contributing to several exhibitions and programmes of talks. Julian Myers notes, "the abbreviated 'pop art' was coined by John McHale in IG meetings, and first appeared in print in 1956 in the architects Alison and Peter Smithson's article "But Today We Collect Ads" *Ark*, no.18, November 1956".[46] One of the IG members, Eduardo Paolozzi, gave his now legendary lecture *Bunk!* in early 1952 featuring projected images collaged from cut-outs of American glossy colour magazines, described as "the first works of Pop Art".[47] Miller's "scrapbook" exhibited the following year presages the emergence of Pop Art as concertedly – if not more so – than *Bunk!* by presenting mass media within an installation, staged in an exhibition rather than lecture, not only alongside fine art but incorporating mass media with fine art within an ambitious Gesamtkunstwerk. That Miller would be at the forefront of such a movement is unsurprising when considering the obvious affinities of Pop Art evident in the construction of *Le Baiser* some fifteen years earlier.

Le Baiser was lost following *Surreal Objects and Poems*. 80 years later, when planning an exhibition on Miller's role in Surrealism's presence in Britain, I traced her often overlooked presence in exhibitions in this country and discovered this elusive work, existing now only in letters. The Miller

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[43] Roland Penrose, Forward, *Wonder and Horror of the Human Head: An Anthology*, Exh. Cat. Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, 6 March – 19 April 1953.
[44] For detailed analysis of the various components of Miller's "scrapbook", see Patricia Allmer 'Kaleidoscopic Narratives: Miller's Scrapbooks in Wonder and Horror of the Human Head' in *Lee Miller and Surrealism in Britain*, 117 – 139.
[45] Lawrence Alloway, "The Long Front of Culture", *Cambridge Opinion*, no.17, 1959, 33.
[46] Julian Myers, "Living in the Long Front", in Tate Papers, no.16, Autumn 2011, https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/16/living-in-the-long-front, fn 5.
[47] Tilman Osterwold *Pop Art* (Taschen, 2003), 64.

Archives agreed for the curatorial team to take Penrose's role in carrying out Miller's instructions and construct the sculpture once more. It was exhibited at The Hepworth Wakefield in *Lee Miller and Surrealism in Britain*, 22 June – 7 October 2018, alongside other Surreal Objects of the 1930s. In this context, in a gallery adjacent to Barbara Hepworth's totemic standing sculptural forms and abstract figures, *Le Baiser* stood out as a singular sculpture. In creating the concept of this powerfully feminist, proto-Pop, surrealist readymade, Miller sculpturally synthesised many of the most significant movements and ideologies of twentieth century western art.

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CHAPTER TWO

ART AND FASHION: LEE MILLER'S SURREALISM IN *VOGUE*

LYNN HILDITCH

According to Ami Bouhassane, Lee Miller's wartime contribution to *Vogue* as one of the fashion magazine's most valued photographers was "prolific" and saw her "drawing on all of her previous experience, her imagination and her Surrealist roots for new ideas for presenting garments, hats and hairstyles".[1] In July 1945, Harry Yoxall, the Managing Director of Condé Nast Publications in the UK and founder of British *Vogue* magazine, celebrated Miller's wartime contribution to the magazine at a gala lunch thrown in her honour. Her war work, he acknowledged, had embodied "the quintessence of what we have been trying to make of *Vogue* during the last five years: a picture of the world at war, an encouragement to our readers to play their part, with no flinching from death and destruction: but with a realisation that these are not all, that taste and beauty represent permanent values".[2] Yoxall had obtained a work permit for Miller in 1939, when many of *Vogue's* photographers had left to join the war effort. The magazine's founder, Condé Nast, cabled to say he was thrilled the magazine would be able to utilise Miller's "intelligence, fundamental good taste [and] art values".[3] Prior to the war (from 1929 to 1932), Miller had lived with Surrealist artist Man Ray in Paris as his lover, muse and artistic collaborator,

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[1] Ami Bouhassane, Robin Muir and Amber Butchart, *Lee Miller: Fashion in Wartime Britain* (Muddles Green, East Sussex: Lee Miller Archives Publishing, 2021), 13.

[2] Harry Yoxall quoted in Becky E. Conekin, *Lee Miller in Fashion* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2013), 173.

[3] Becky E. Conekin, "'Magazines are essentially about the here and now. And this was wartime': British Vogue's Responses to the Second World War", in Philippa Levine and Susan R. Grayzel, eds. *Gender, Labour, War and Empire: Essays on Modern Britain* (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 125.

establishing herself as a formidable artistic force within the Parisian Surrealist circle, as well as one of *Vogue*'s most sought after fashion models. With her fashionably bobbed blonde hair and tall, willowy figure, Miller's appearance made her the ideal object of desire for the Surrealists and fashion magazines alike. However, when a journal labelled her in 1932 as "one of the most photographed girls in Manhattan", her response was quite defiant: "I'd rather take a picture than be one".[4] This chapter, therefore, will discuss how Lee Miller's transition from fashion model to fashion photographer with a distinctly Surrealist vision saw her apply her "Surrealist eye" to *Vogue*'s early wartime fashion features which, according to Robin Muir, saw Miller striving to "punctuate her fashion work with graphic flourishes, which had as their starting point her affinity with interwar Surrealism".[5]

Prior to meeting Man Ray in 1929, Miller had been a student of lighting, costume, and theatre design at the École Medgyès pour la Technique du Théâtre in Paris in 1925, studying with the revolutionary Hungarian artist Ladislas Medgyès. *The Vassar Miscellany News*, a local newspaper published in Miller's home town of Poughkeepsie, New York, reported in October 1927 of a lecture visit to the college by Medgyès: "Mr Medgyès is of the radical wing in European theatres, working away from realism, towards a stage which eliminates cumbersome machinery, relying for its effects upon the architectural planes, linear simplification, and strong colour masses".[6] Medgyès' reputation as an avant-garde innovator was due, in part, to his paintings that combined intense colour and strong abstract pattern reminiscent of German Expressionism. Another of Miller's teachers at École Medgyès was the influential Jacques Copeau, an experimental actor, director, and playwright who had previously staged anti-realist dramas at his theatre, Le Vieux Colombier in Paris, where he used the play of coloured lights to sculpt a bare stage.[7] Michel Saint-Denis notes that Copeau's aim was to create "a new kind of stage space, a space cleared of falseness and unnecessary decoration. To achieve this he created a bare stage, 'le tréteau nu': The whole stage was an acting area, in contrast to that "box of illusions" – the proscenium stage".[8] In Spring 1926, Miller returned to the US where she enrolled as a student on the Dramatic Production (DP) course studying

[4] Lee Miller quoted in Becky E. Conekin, *Lee Miller in Fashion* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2013), 58.
[5] Bouhassane, Muir and Butchart, *Fashion in Wartime Britain*, 35.
[6] "Medgyès to Comment on European Stage Design", *The Vassar Miscellany News*, Vol. XII, No. 6, 19 October 1927, 1.
[7] Burke, *Lee Miller*, 41.
[8] Michel Saint-Denis, *Training for the Theatre: Premises and Promises* (London: Heineman, 1982), 27.

Experimental Theatre at Vassar College in her hometown of Poughkeepsie where, according to *The Vassar Miscellany News* (October 1944), "she used new theories of stage decoration and lighting acquired in Paris".[9] Miller's teacher at Vassar was the theatrical producer Hallie Flanagan who in November 1927 produced her inaugural piece of experimental theatre at Vassar, Anton Chekov's "The Marriage Proposal". In this ground-breaking production the actors performed the one-act play three times in a single evening: first in a realist style, second, in an expressionist style and, third, using constructivist techniques (fig. 2-1). The production received rave reviews including one in *The New York Times Magazine* which noted that Flanagan's Chekhov experiment had "made an impression on the great world of the theatre".[10] Having close contact with Medgyès, Copeau and Flanagan and experienced their avant-garde approaches to the theatre, Miller was stimulated to pursue an artistic career and it is clear to see how their experimental use of lighting against blank backdrops and curved or geometric forms in their set design had a substantial impact on Miller's early fashion photography (figs. 2-2 and 2-3).

In a postwar interview Miller admitted that she had originally aspired to be an artist, "a painter that is, and I went to Italy one summer to study. I saw every ruin and picture in the country".[11] In October 1926, she enrolled on the Life Drawing and Painting for Women course at the Art Students' League in New York, a school known for its young European tutors with a distinctly modern perspective on art and design. According to Calvocoressi, "In terms of composition, lighting and choice of subject, her photographs powerfully suggest someone who looked and thought instinctively as a painter—a painter of strong frontal images like Magritte".[12] Afterwards, she travelled to Florence with a commission from a New York fashion house to make sketches of fashion accessories from Renaissance paintings. Haworth-Booth writes, "Some drawings by Lee…show that she possessed facility in the kind of rapid draftsmanship often used by designers for the theatre".[13] However, it was much quicker to capture minute fashion detail using a

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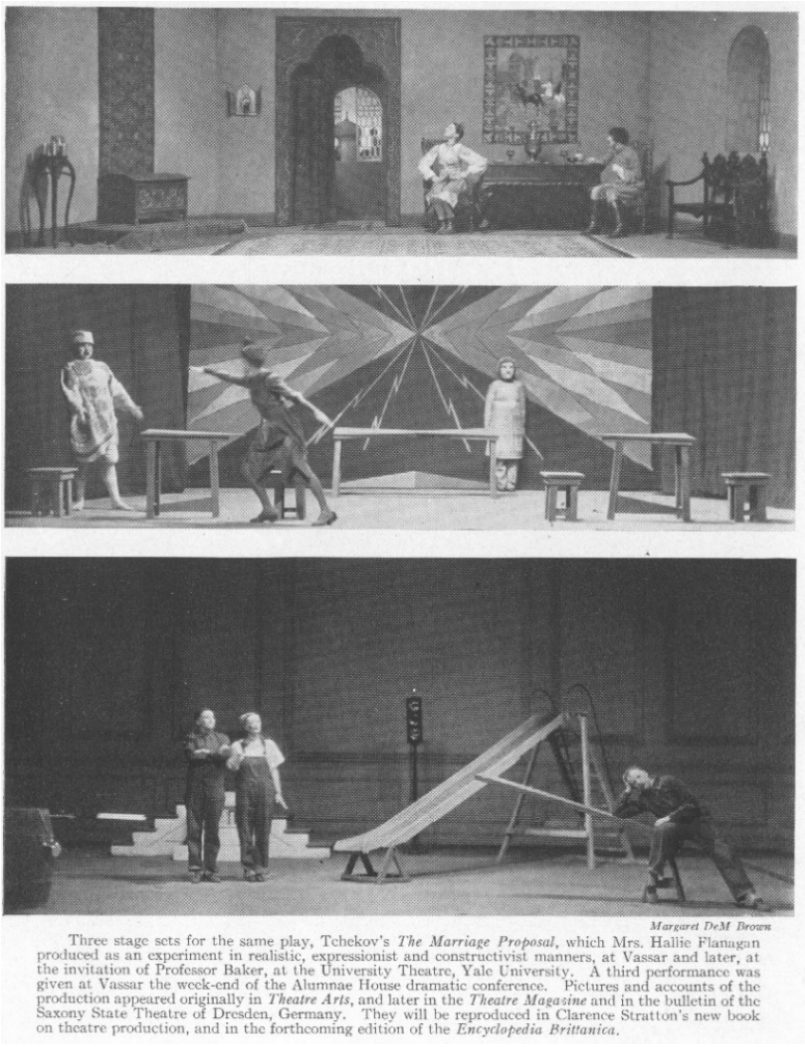
[9] Carol Cole, "Lee Miller, French Screen Star, Has Varied Career with Many Adventures", *The Vassar Miscellany News*, Vol. XXIX, No. 5, 4 October 1944.
[10] Quoted in "The Experimental Theatre of Vassar College", *Vassar Encyclopedia*, http://www.vassar.edu/vcencyclopedia/curriculum/The%20Experimental%20Theatre%20of%20Vassar%20College.html.
[11] Lee Miller quoted in Richard Calvocoressi, *Lee Miller: Portraits from a Life* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2002), 8.
[12] Calvocoressi, 8.
[13] Mark Haworth-Booth, *The Art of Lee Miller* (London: V&A Publications, 2007), 20.



Margaret DeM Brown

Three stage sets for the same play, Tchekov's *The Marriage Proposal*, which Mrs. Hallie Flanagan produced as an experiment in realistic, expressionist and constructivist manners, at Vassar and later, at the invitation of Professor Baker, at the University Theatre, Yale University. A third performance was given at Vassar the week-end of the Alumnae House dramatic conference. Pictures and accounts of the production appeared originally in *Theatre Arts*, and later in the *Theatre Magazine* and in the bulletin of the Saxony State Theatre of Dresden, Germany. They will be reproduced in Clarence Stratton's new book on theatre production, and in the forthcoming edition of the *Encyclopedia Brittanica*.

Fig. 2-1: Margaret DeMott Brown, *Vassar Emperimental Theatre, The Marriage Proposal, november 1927*. Public Domain, via Wikimedia Commons.

camera and she quickly moved from drawing to photography. As Antony Penrose notes, "Taking close-ups in poor light with low-speed film must be about the most difficult starting point from which to explore a technique,

but it was entirely characteristic of Lee to want to begin in the middle of a new skill".[14] In the summer of 1929, she returned to Paris "fed up to the teeth with painting… All the paintings had been painted as far as I was concerned, and I became a photographer".[15]

Calvocoressi acknowledges the influence of *Vogue's* master photographers Edward Steichen, Arnold Genthe, Nickolas Muray and George Hoyningen-Huene on Miller's photographic career as a model for the publication from 1927, and writes that, "While in Paris [Miller] worked as an assistant [and model] to George Hoyningen-Huene, director of *Vogue's* Paris studio, who practiced a more theatrical type of portraiture and fashion photography and from whom she picked up useful hints on lighting".[16] Hoyningen-Huene's distinct lighting techniques, set design, and his use of props is visible throughout Miller's early wartime fashion photographs for *Vogue*. Therefore, Miller was building upon her existing knowledge of theatre design acquired from Copeau, Medgyès and Flanagan, and through Hoyningen-Huene's guidance, enhancing her understanding of technical studio work through her own application of light onto plain backdrops. An example can be seen in her photographs from the *London Collection* taken in 1942. In one photograph, Miller experiments with multiple lights to project shadows onto the white wall behind her model, standing in side profile in a dynamic hands-on-hips pose, adding an element of drama to a standard fashion image (fig. 2-2). As Burke writes, "For the first time in her irregular education[17], she was absorbing what Medgyès called *métier*—a professional attitude towards one's craft—and learning to focus her eye while awakening to the promise of a larger life through art".[18] Likewise, in *Two of a kind – Two turns into Three,* taken at the London *Vogue* studio and published in British *Vogue* in March 1942, Miller experiments with chiaroscuro lighting to create a surreal composition with three models. Her inclusion of a ship-shaped weathervane as a prop inevitably serves as a shadowy piece of haute couture headwear for one of the models (fig. 2-3). The white contrasting geometric curves and cube shapes of the set design is reminiscent of a Flanagan theatrical performance. Condé Nast recognised and acknowledged the innovative use of lighting and design in Miller's fashion photography

[14] Antony Penrose, *The Lives of Lee Miller* (London and New York: Thames and Hudson, 1985), 22.
[15] Mario Amaya, "My Man Ray: An Interview with Lee Miller Penrose", *Art in America* (New York, May-June 1976), Vol. 63, no. 3, 55.
[16] Calvocoressi, *Portraits from a Life*, 16.
[17] Miller left school without completing a formal education having been expelled from several schools in Poughkeepsie.
[18] Carolyn Burke quoted in Haworth-Booth, *The Art of Lee Miller*, 18.

Fig. 2-2: Lee Miller, *London Collection [Model: Meredith], Vogue Studio, London, England*, 1941 [3659-13]. © Lee Miller Archives, England 2022. All rights reserved. leemiller.co.uk.

Fig. 2-3: Lee Miller, *TWO OF A KIND - TWO TURNS INTO THREE, dresses, Vogue Studio, London, England*, 1942 [4240-10]. © Lee Miller Archives, England 2022. All rights reserved. leemiller.co.uk.

in a letter written to Miller on 17 August 1942, only a month before his death. He wrote, "The photographs are much more alive now, the backgrounds more interesting, the lighting more dramatic and real. You managed to handle some of the deadliest studio situations in the manner of a spontaneous outdoor snapshot".[19]

Miller's initial pursuit into fashion photography in Paris in the early thirties, followed by a brief period as owner of her own commercial studio in New York from November 1933 to August 1934, was developed under the influence of fellow émigré Man Ray, an artist who moved effortlessly between painting, object-making, film and photography, and who "taught her everything in her first year [1929], in Miller's words, '…fashion pictures…portrait…the whole technique of what he did'".[20] Miller not only shared Man's fashion assignments but often gave him credit for much of her work due to their artistic similarity. As Miller exclaimed, "There are so many of them [photographs] which are attributed to Man, on which I helped, including the superb nude, *Primat de la Matière de la Pensèe*. I do not know if it was I who made them… But that's of no importance…we were nearly the same person at work".[21] Working closely with Man Ray resulted in Miller's rediscovery of the Sabattier process, a photographic technique first used in the 1840s, which Man further developed and renamed "solarisation". Solarisation became a signature of the Man Ray-Lee Miller partnership and both artists continued to use it in their professional careers. Solarisation occurs when a negative is momentarily exposed to light during the fixing stage of the photographic process. The result is the appearance of a dark border line, known as the Mackie line (named after Alexander Mackie), around the subject giving the image the look of a pencil drawing with a surreal appearance. Mark Haworth-Booth writes that the use of solarisation, as used by Man Ray and Miller, turned photographs "into a perfect surrealist medium in which positive and negative occur simultaneously, as in a dream".[22] Miller later incorporated this technique into her portraiture and commercial work in her New York studio and by the 1940s she had mastered and was experimenting with the technique in her fashion photographs for *Vogue*. Some of Miller's most notable solarised images appeared in a hair feature titled "Neat Heads", published in British *Vogue* in February 1942, and in a series of highly stylised solarised photographs of

[19] Condé Nast quoted in Antony Penrose, *The Lives of Lee Miller* (London and New York: Thames and Hudson, 1985), 113.
[20] Calvocoressi, 7.
[21] Lee Miller quoted in Whitney Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealism Movement* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1985), 39.
[22] Haworth-Booth, *The Art of Lee Miller*, 30.

corsetry taken in the same year (fig. 2-4).[23] In the corsetry photographs, Miller's use of solarisation effectively emphasises the contours of the body and illuminates the sheen of the stretch fabric creating what art critic Mario Amaya described as "an almost neon effect of an outline around the figure".[24] Although there is no evidence that the corsetry photographs were used by *Vogue*, they clearly demonstrate Miller's enthusiasm for experimenting with techniques she had developed through working alongside Man Ray and others, drawing upon both her theatre design and surrealist background to create new and exciting fashion images.

Fig. 2-4: Lee Miller, *Corsetry, Solarised Photographs, Vogue Studio, London, England*, 1942 [LMA F0015].

In Miller's fashion photographs of the early 1940s there is a distinct Surrealism reminiscent of some of her photographs taken in Paris and New

[23] According to the Lee Miller Archives, the solarized corsetry photographs were not published in *Vogue* at the time. Alternatively, *Vogue* published a series of drawings rather than the images. Bouhassane, Muir and Butchart, *Fashion in Wartime Britain*, 158.
[24] Amaya, 56.

York. Miller's uses the Surrealist practice of fragmentation—isolating heads, hands, and feet—to sell the latest lines in hats, gloves, stockings, and shoes. Clear comparisons can be made between Miller's *Neat Heads* photographs of British broadcaster Elizabeth Cowell, *Vogue* feature writer and historian Lesley Blanch and actress Deborah Kerr, and her 1933 portrait of Broadway actress Mary Taylor whose "floating head" was fragmented against a black background. Miller again photographed heads transposed onto surrealist-style playing cards in "Hats Follow Suit", British *Vogue*, September 1942, and fragmented her models from the eyes upwards in "Dreaming of These", British *Vogue*, August 1942. Likewise, there are similarities between Miller's fashion photographs *Untitled [Woman with Hand on Head]* and *Untitled [Exploding Hand]* taken in Paris circa 1931 and "Hand on the Job", a fashion feature for British *Vogue* published in February 1942 (fig. 2-5). A note accompanying *Woman with Hand on Head* on the Lee Miller Archives website states "a possibility the pose is deliberately contrived to show the elaborate manicure, but the purpose of the picture becomes irrelevant in the face of the strong, enigmatic composition".[25] In comparison, Miller's photograph *Hands for the Job* shows the perfectly manicured hands of Lady Dashwood (former Canadian socialite Helen Moira Eaton) who was volunteering in a munitions factory to support the war effort. Like the Taylor portrait, Miller has used a dark background combined with the black sleeves of Lady's Dashwood's outfit to isolate the hands, fragmenting them as they dance upon the worktop carefully caressing one of the metal components of the munitions-making process. In her 2003 essay "Hands On Surrealism", Kirsten H. Powell explains that "by reminding us of the individual's hand, Breton, Man Ray, Tabard and many others also remind us of the individual's presence in a world that can be at once erotic, uncanny, dream-like, primitive, mechanistic and, above all, modern".[26] Therefore, by using her "Surrealist eye", honed through her relationship with Man Ray, Miller reveals how hands can be used as strange, mysterious objects recalling the flaming red gloved hand from André Breton's 1928 novel *Nadja* while integrating a sense of the uncanny into her fashion photography.

[25] Lee Miller Archives, https://www.leemiller.co.uk/media/There-is-a-possibility-the-pose-is-deliberately-contrived-to-show-the-elaborate-manicure-but-the-purpose-of-the-picture/HtjvadT1hNj5OCs2rV6bEQ..a?ts=c_vHJFic8JO8COxw3XZ 4ig..a.

[26] Kirsten H. Howell, "Hands-On Surrealism", *Art History*, 22 December 2003, 531.

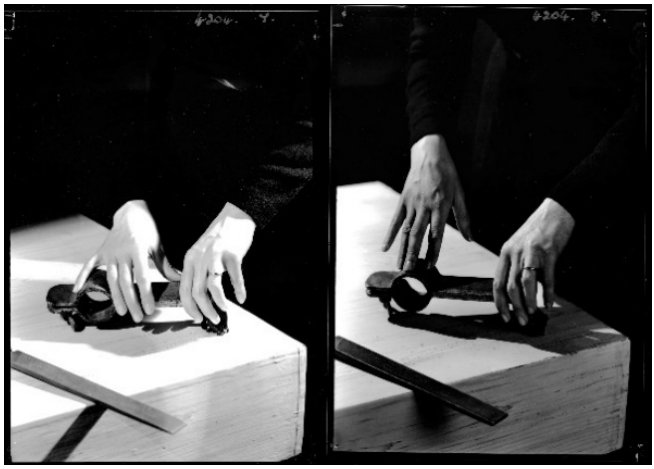


Fig. 2-5: Lee Miller, *Hands for the Job, Vogue Studio, London, England*, 1942 [4204-8]. © Lee Miller Archives, England 2022. All rights reserved. leemiller.co.uk.

In October 1940, the British government levied a Purchase Tax on all clothing except utility wear, and in June 1941 a clothes rationing scheme was introduced. With *Vogue's* new "beauty and duty" philosophy in mind, Calvocoressi writes that from the early 1940s, "[Miller's] photographs of anonymous models in functional outfits began to appear in the magazine [*Vogue*], illustrating features with titles such as 'Fashion for Factories' and 'Smart Fashions for Limited Incomes', and reflecting the increasingly austere times". [27] The new wartime styles were far removed from the extravagant designer wear modelled by Miller herself during the 1920s and 1930s, so to make the economical garments appear more appealing to the female audience, Miller was commissioned by *Vogue* to photograph several famous sportswomen, actresses and dancers wearing the less glamorous, more affordable outfits. Using celebrities and socialites in fashion images was an attempt by the magazine to inject a sense of quality and refinement into the products, to encourage its readers to remain loyal and continue buying during the war years. As Condé Nast wrote to Miller in 1942, "In spite of the rather severe handicap of poorer models and wartime merchandise, some of your pages compare favourably with the work of our American photographers who have considerably larger resources and easier

[27] Calvocoressi, *Portraits from a Life*, 52.

problems".[28] In a photo-essay titled "The Taking of a Fashion Magazine Photograph" written by Anne Scott-James and published in *Picture Post* on 26 October 1940, Miller is shown at work on a fashion shoot creating a Hoyningen-Huene-inspired theatrical set to project an element of glamour during times of austerity. The caption beneath one photograph reads:

> While the model [Jacqueline Craven] dresses and makes up her face, photographer Lee Miller contemplates the set which she and her assistant have built up. It's a button satin bedhead which arrived at the studio shrouded in cellophane. Against it model and dinner gown will register glamour.[29]

Miller's careful selection of props for use in her fashion photography helped to allude a sense of glamour, exoticism, and an element of the bizarre: "…a (scaled down) stuffed giraffe from Heals department store; lengths of ships rope and tennis netting; plaster heads; a flotilla of yachts in Hamley's toy shop; a dressmaker's mannequins, a homespun backdrop of collages newspapers, an inflatable fish, suits of armour".[30] By incorporating these unusual props, Miller is drawing upon the idea of the *objet trouvé*, or found object, the Surrealist practice of discovering, often subconsciously, an intriguing object and transforming it into an artistic subject. This practice, first noted by Breton in *Nadja*, is applied by Miller in her photographs to create a curious, often ironically amusing, and strange world. Again, her use of mythical or classical statues, vases and urns can be linked back to her time modelling for Hoyningen-Huene who, according to Robin Muir, "would arrange plaster urns to underscore the Hellenic classicism he sought" making a direct link to the past. The portrait Muir refers to is *Self-Portrait with Sphinxes* taken at the *Vogue* studio in 1940. Photographed with two Egyptian Sphinx, Miller transforms herself into an *objet d'art* engaging in a surreal *ménage a tois* with the classical figures (see fig. 5-1). Miller's approach might be compared to Ansel Adams' methodology of portraiture and figure study: "I photograph heads as I would photograph sculpture…the head or the figure is clearly presented as an *object*. The edge, mass, texture of the skin and general architecture of the face and form is revealed with great intensity…The expression—many possible expressions—are

[28] Condé Nast quoted in a letter to Miller dated 17 August 1942, Lee Miller Archives, Farley Farm, Chiddingly, East Sussex, UK.
[29] Anne Scott-James, "The Taking of a Fashion Photograph", *Picture Post*, 26 October 1940, 22.
[30] Bouhassane, Muir and Butchart, *Fashion in Wartime Britain*, 26.

implied".[31] Here, Miller appears to be comparing herself to the mythical Sphinx—known to the ancient Greeks as having the head of a woman, the body of a lion and the wings of a bird—the sublime, humanlike faces seeming to resemble Miller's own classically beautiful looks suggesting a similarity between ancient and modern ideals of beauty.

Fig. 2-6: Lee Miller, *Fire Masks*, Downshire Hill, London, England, 1941 [3840-8].

In contrast to Miller's photographs of low-cost fashion, *Fire Masks*, published in the photo-essay "British Women Under Fire" and published in American *Vogue* on 15 July 1941, encompasses Miller's juxtaposition of fashion and war, thus transporting it into the realms of a Surrealist icon (fig. 2-6). *Fire Masks* was taken outside the *Vogue* studio on the steps of Roland Penrose's air-raid shelter at 21 Downshire Hill, London, the home Miller shared with Penrose throughout the war. Miller photographs two models wearing protective face masks which, according to American *Vogue's* editor Edna Woolman Chase, effectively demonstrates how the average British housewife "…is mobilised to fight against fire, and—if necessary—against gas".[32] In the photo-essay the image was captioned, "Mask and eye shield

[31] Ansel Adams quoted in Nancy Newhall, *Ansel Adams: A Biography. Vol. I, The Eloquent Light* (San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1964), 106.
[32] Edna Woolman Chase, ed., "British Women Under Fire", American *Vogue*, 15 July 1941, 61.

worn by British women as protection from incendiary bombs".[33] As Woolman Chase continues in the article's accompanying narrative, "Along with the men, they [women] work as incendiary- bomb spotters—handling, not the simple magnesium flares used earlier in the war, but incendiaries barbed with a delayed-action high explosive. In the A.F.S. (Auxiliary Fire Service), women drive the fire engines and work, with pickaxes and shovels in demolition squads".[34] Women, therefore, according to *Vogue*, are more than just pretty faces and fully capable of working in the most dangerous of situations in the absence of, or alongside, their male counterparts.

Miller has photographed the models with their faces turned towards the camera. However, the large protective objects obscure their features and conceal an element of their femininity and identity (the entire face of the model to the left of the photograph and the eyes of the second). Again, there is something artistically unconventional and challenging in this visual representation of women, particularly as a female photographer took the image. The model to the left of the shot wears a protective helmet, while the model to the right has her hair combed back; visual markers that further conceal their femininity and identity giving them a distinctly androgynous appearance and the means to a deeper creative purpose. The avant-garde use of masks and costume, often to conceal, change or signify identity in specific roles, has been practiced throughout art history dating back to prehistoric times, and was frequently used by the Surrealists. Whitney Chadwick describes how Man Ray's own use of masks pointed in two directions, "toward the European tradition of the death mask with its closed eyes and simplified shapes, and towards modernism's appropriation of the sub-Saharan masks as 'fetish', embodying human terror in the face of natural forces, mediating between the powers of the living and those of the dead".[35] Man Ray's *Noire et Blanche*, for example, published as a fashion image in French *Vogue* in May 1926, juxtaposes the pale mask-like face of his former muse Kiki de Montparnasse alongside the dark face of an African baule-style mask. Wendy A. Grossman and Steven Manford claim that *Noire et Blanche* contained more of a "fashion aesthetic" which "Breton and the Surrealists distained and condemned" due to the "commercialisation and trivialising of their cultural and political ideals in the appropriation of

[33] Woolman Chase, 61.
[34] Woolman Chase, 61.
[35] Whitney Chadwick, "Fetishizing Fashion/Fetishizing Culture: Man Ray's *Noire et Blanche*" in Naomi Sawelson-Gorse, ed., *Women in Dada: Essays on Sex, Gender and Identity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 317.

Surrealist style in popular venues such as fashion journals".[36] Nonetheless, as with *Fire Masks*, Man Ray's photograph has in more recent years become "a modernist icon with a celebrity status rare for a photograph".[37]

The significance of masks and costume within the Surrealist circle (and in Dadaism before it) can be compared with the role of combat dress, including gas masks and battle fatigues, worn during wartime. In both instances, a relationship develops between "action" and "costume/dress". The masks in Miller's photographs, whilst also bizarre, are designed to provide a feeling of safety, protection, and control in the event of an attack. They are, therefore, providing a certain power to the wearer. Burke describes the two models as looking as though they are "masked for a macabre costume party".[38] More accurately perhaps, the models have taken part in a kind of masquerade, adopting a disguise to conceal their identity. Therefore, the photograph of the models in protective masks produces a hybrid of art and documentation; art because it is reminiscent of the work of the Surrealists (and Dadaists) who used masks as an essential part of their creativity and artistic practice, and documentation, because the photograph is an historical record of the protective eyewear used by the British public during the war. Calvocoressi further confirms the photograph's worth as an example of surreal documentary by comparing *Fire Masks* to other Surrealist artworks. He writes, "The masks were designed to afford protection but here they have a surreal quality, recalling Magritte's paintings of figures with concealed faces or Henry Moore's lead *Helmet* which [Roland] Penrose had acquired in 1940".[39] There are additional similarities with the American artist Curtis Moffat's photographs of African masks, and Moffat, like Miller, had collaborated with Man Ray in Paris during the 1920s producing portraits and abstract photograms (rayographs). In *Fire Masks*, therefore, Miller again demonstrates her knowledge and experience of art through her artistic visual references to the work of other modern artists. Moreover, Miller's war photographs often remind the viewer of the inevitable relationship between the use of costume and masks in theatrical and creative work and the necessity for protective masks and specific uniforms or battle attire used by civilians and the armed forces during the Second World War. It is also worth mentioning the importance of masks in the work of Miller's mentor Jacques Copeau who used masked improvisation to develop spontaneity and inventiveness at the Théâtre du Vieux Colombier.

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[36] Wendy A. Grossman and Steven Manford, "Unmasking Man Ray's Noir et Blanch", *American Art*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (Summer 2006), 141.
[37] Grossman and Manford, 134.
[38] Burke, 206.
[39] Calvocoressi, *Portraits from a Life*, 52.

As Marie-Hélène Dasté notes, "The mask demands both a simplification and an extension of gesture; something forces you to go the limit of a feeling being expressed".[40] Miller's suggestion of a connection between Surrealism and war therefore reveals her modernist approach to photography, which is demonstrated throughout her fashion assignments during the war years.

Conclusion

As one of *Vogue's* most valued staff photographers, Lee Miller used her knowledge and experience of photography, enhanced during the 1920s in Paris with Man Ray and the Parisian Surrealist circle, to create fashion photographs that combine artistic and documentary features with creative and often bizarre composition and form including the Surrealist practices of fragmentation, juxtaposition, and the addition of surreal objects. Miller's photographs demonstrate an ability to visualise a scene using her Surrealist eye to turn a mediocre subject or scene into a marvellous hybrid of Surrealism and fashion. Her innovative use of experimental lighting and stage design origining from her association with the master photographers at *Vogue* both as model and student, especially Edward Steichen and George Hoyningen-Huene, and her mentors at École Medgyès pour la Technique du Théâtre, the Art Students' League and Vassar College, are evidence that she was a photographer with a Surrealist mentality whose art mediated what it is to look and be looked at. She became, as Becky E. Conekin describes her, a "quintessential modern woman" both "photographer and model, artist and muse".[41] Miller was one of the first *Vogue* photographers to bring fashion out of the studio following Condé Nast's death and her photographs taken during and after the liberation of Paris effectively illustrate Miller's love for creative juxtapositions through her combination of glamour and war, art and reportage, while at the same time transforming and challenging the traditional *Vogue* philosophy of high fashion. It is also important to note that Miller was given substantial leeway by the magazine's editors, particularly Audrey Withers at British *Vogue*, to use the magazine as a platform to inform its predominantly female civilian readers of the realities (and surrealities) of the war via the everyday normality of domesticity and fashion, later merging the harsh realities of war, as captured in her fashion

[40] Marie-Hélène Dasté quoted in John Rudlin and Norman Paul, trans. & eds., *Copeau: Texts on Theatre* (London: Routledge, 1990), 237.
[41] Becky E. Conekin, "Lee Miller and the Limits of Post-war British Modernity: Femininity, Fashion, and the Problem of Biography" in Christopher Breward and Caroline Evans eds., *Fashion and Modernity* (New York and Oxford: Berg, 2005), 41.

photographs taken during the Paris liberation, with advertisements for the latest lipstick and hair accessories. As the playwright David Hare notes, "Photography is now used by editors to seal off the rich and famous, to deny us access, not to grant it. But this young art form was, for a period in the middle of the last century, the means by which the world looked new and strange. The men in the Surrealist movement talked their philosophy, but a woman lived it".[42]

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[42] David Hare, "Lee Miller: Perhaps You Haven't Noticed", in Richard Calvocoressi and David Hare, *Lee Miller Portraits* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 2005), 21.

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CHAPTER THREE

INTIMATE PORTRAITS, SURREAL EXPERIMENTS: LEE MILLER AND BARBARA KER-SEYMER

ELEANOR JONES

Introduction

In 1932, a photograph by Lee Miller (1907-1977) appeared in *Modern Photography*, an annual issued by the illustrated magazine *The Studio*. The publication showcased a "selection of prints by the leading photographers of the world" and included diverse pictures representing "the quickly moving pageant of contemporary life", from portraiture and press shots to abstract experiments.[1] Miller's work, known today as *Untitled (Sculpture in Window, Paris)*, captures classical statuary on display behind a glass pane; a replica of *Discophorus* by the Greek sculptor Polyclitus towers over a collection of smaller figurines, as the buildings across the street create shadowy patterns in the window's reflection. Miller took the image on a January afternoon in 1930, by which point she had been settled in the French capital for around six months. During this time, Miller had established herself in Europe as a woman of distinction, having commenced work – first as a model, then as a photographic assistant – at French *Vogue*, and honed her craft in collaboration with her partner and American compatriot Man Ray (1890-1976). Taken from the street with a Rolleiflex camera, the picture aligns Miller with the likes of Eugène Atget (1857-1927), whose early photographs of Parisian storefronts and mannequin displays resonated with the Surrealists for their apparent transformation of "the normal planes

[1] C. G. Holme, ed., *Modern Photography: The Studio Annual* (London and New York: The Studio Ltd, 1932), 7-8.

of reality".[2] Akin to Atget's work, *Sculpture in Window* demonstrates Miller's ease as a *flâneuse* and her eye for visual incongruities found in the everyday. Characteristically, she has distilled a variety of themes significant to her oeuvre into a single picture: while evoking the vogue for classicism in European art and design at this time, the image also anticipates the starring role Miller would play in Jean Cocteau's experimental film *Le Sang d'un Poète* later the same year, in which she is transformed into a classical statue. As Becky Conekin has noted, "[i]n the film Miller was, as so often during the late 1920s and early 1930s, simultaneously active and passive, subject and object".[3] In this way, the photograph provides a counterpart to her role as a model and muse and offers a rare female perspective on the male nude as a source of artistic inspiration, as well as an object to be looked at and consumed. Alongside the photograph by Miller, *Modern Photography* celebrated works by other notable women photographers of the time, including Florence Henri (1893-1982), Trude Fleischmann (1895-1990), Sonya Noskowiak (1900-1975) and Barbara Ker-Seymer (1905-1993). Ker-Seymer, an overlooked figure in photographic history, was a London-based fashion photographer and studio portraitist who worked on contract for British *Harper's Bazaar* throughout the 1930s. Her contribution to *Modern Photography* is a portrait of a man possibly identifiable as the Ghanaian actor and artist model Harry Quashi, who is portrayed in other images from the period by Ker-Seymer's friend and fellow artist, the surrealist John Banting (1902-1971). The tightly cropped close-up is printed in negative, an effect that serves to render the subject as if cast in bronze. As will be explored later in this article, negative printing is one example of many experimentations practised in the interwar period by figures including Man Ray, László Moholy-Nagy (1895-1946) and Humphrey Jennings (1907-1950). Ker-Seymer's portrait is significant as an early British example of this technique.[4] Despite being contemporaries with overlapping social circles and aesthetic interests, Lee Miller and Barbara Ker-Seymer are rarely mentioned together. Indeed, while Miller's reputation has been subject to ongoing recuperation since her death in 1977, Ker-Seymer's legacy is much less well-known. This does, however, look set to change; an increased interest in Ker-Seymer's work is demonstrated by her inclusion in gallery displays and exhibitions such as *Spaces of Black Modernism:*

[2] John Fuller, "Atget and Man Ray in the Context of Surrealism," *Art Journal* 36, no. 2 (1976): 135.
[3] Becky Conekin, *Lee Miller in Fashion* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2013), 53.
[4] See David Mellor, ed., "London-Berlin-London: a cultural history," in *Germany: The New Photography 1927-33* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1978), 113-132 (115).

London 1919–39 (2015) and *Queer British Art* (2017) at Tate Britain, and *The Enigma of the Hour: 100 Years of Psychoanalytic Thought* (2019) at the Freud Museum, London. This essay contributes to this growing conversation by placing her work in dialogue with Miller's, and it examines their intersecting paths, as the two women's forays into fashion photography, commercial studio portraiture and intimate snap-shooting went hand-in-hand with innovative approaches to lighting, printing, and textures.

My line of inquiry takes precedent from the 2018 exhibition *Lee Miller and Surrealism in Britain* held at the Hepworth Wakefield, which sought to establish Miller as "an integrated part of a creative network" of Surrealist artists active in Britain.[5] The article broadens the associations made by the curator Eleanor Clayton to include Ker-Seymer, whose work has been historically excluded from wider narratives on British surrealism. Although Ker-Seymer was never formally attached to the Surrealist Group in Britain, she developed her practice in close proximity to key figures in the movement, including Banting, Edward Burra (1905-1976) and Len Lye (1901-1980). By investigating the affinities and dissonances between Miller and Ker-Seymer, an expanded and more nuanced understanding of Surrealism comes to light, at the same time that both photographers' reputations are enhanced. In particular, the essay argues that by placing the two women side by side, the intimate aspect of Miller's practice is underscored, pointing towards the collaborative conditions and playful exchanges that make surrealism possible. As Ian Walker has written, "collaboration, commonality and indeed anonymity were important values in Surrealist creativity, even if the major artists and writers of the group did not always act accordingly".[6] Equally, this essay provides an opportunity to reflect on the spaces made available to women surrealists, whose contributions to the visual articulation of surrealism have been traditionally understood in the limited terms of the muse.

"Accidental" Photographers

Lee Miller once remarked that she entered "photography from the back end", a typically pithy self-appraisal of the transition she made from model to photographer in the late 1920s.[7] This interpretation obscures, however,

[5] Eleanor Clayton, ed., "Introduction" in *Lee Miller and Surrealism in Britain* (London: Lund Humphries, 2018), 8-12 (8).
[6] Ian Walker, *So Exotic, So Homemade: Surrealism, Englishness and Documentary Photography* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 87.
[7] Lee Miller, interview with Nancy Osgood, "Accident Was Road to Adventure," *St. Petersburg Times*, Oct. 5, 1969.

her familiarity with camera technologies from a young age; as Miller's son Antony Penrose notes, due to her father's amateur interest in picture-taking throughout her childhood, photography was always "part of her surroundings".[8] Both Clayton and Patricia Allmer have observed a tendency in biographical narratives to frame Miller's life as a series of "accidental encounters" and haphazard chances.[9] Although this kind of mythologising – as well as "elements of self-mythologising on Miller's part" – speak to surrealism's "avowed emphasis on chance encounters, coincidences and randomness of creativity", such notions undermine the American photographer's agential power.[10]

Ker-Seymer was similarly coy about her own introduction to photography, and she too spoke of her career in terms of chance, claiming that she "became a photographer quite by accident".[11] Like Miller, Ker-Seymer's formal entry to photography came through romance, but her knowledge of and skill for the medium was not accidental. Having studied at the Chelsea Polytechnic in the early 1920s, Ker-Seymer became associated with the Bright Young Things, a coterie of aristocratic and artistic personalities including Cecil Beaton (1904-1980) and Oliver Messel (1904-1978). During this time, Ker-Seymer became romantically involved with the heiress and society portraitist Olivia Wyndham (1897-1967), who was instrumental in introducing Ker-Seymer to a distinctly queer network of artists and designers. It was through Wyndham that Ker-Seymer would eventually become a photographer, working first as a secretary and then as a photographic assistant in Wyndham's studio.

At this juncture, it is possible to trace a genealogy of influence between Miller and Ker-Seymer through their respective mentors: before setting up on her own, Wyndham had worked and exhibited with the American photographer Curtis Moffat (1887-1949), who had previously spent two years in "sustained contact with the Dada and Surrealists in the Parisian avant-garde, (principally with Man Ray, with whom he had developed 'painting with light – Rayograph compositions)".[12] Unlike Man Ray,

[8] Antony Penrose, *The Lives of Lee Miller* (1985; reis., London: Thames and Hudson, 2021), 10.
[9] Patricia Allmer, *Lee Miller: Photography, Surrealism, and Beyond* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 13.
[10] Eleanor Clayton, "Lee Miller and Surrealism in Britain," in *Lee Miller and Surrealism in Britain*, 13-76 (17).
[11] Barbara Ker-Seymer, quoted in Val Williams, *Women Photographers: The Other Observers 1900 to The Present* (London: Virago, 1986), 99.
[12] David Mellor, *Modern British Photography 1919-1930* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1980), 10.

however, Wyndham's credentials as a photographer-mentor were hindered by her alcoholism, and her skills with the camera were notoriously inconsistent; Beaton, who sat for Wyndham in 1928, acerbically stated that she "was never mistress of her camera".[13] In Ker-Seymer's words, Wyndham "was a friend rather too fond of the bottle that I used to help out. She went to New York for a visit telling me I must pretend to be her in her absence. She never came back".[14]

The queerness of Ker-Seymer's relationship with Wyndham, and her queer identity more generally, provide a significant counterpoint to Miller's biography and link with surrealism. Ker-Seymer was not a lover or muse to one of the male Surrealists, and, adjacent to that of Claude Cahun (1894-1954), her alliance with Surrealism "was unlike the paths followed by the majority of the movement's female adherents."[15] Ker-Seymer's sexual fluidity – she pursued relationships with both men and women – poses a challenge "to Surrealist hegemony and the (male) Surrealists' investment in heterosexual passion".[16] Such a challenge holds disruptive potential; that Ker-Seymer does not neatly fit into the muse category offers an exciting point of departure for forging new ways of positioning Miller.

The broad terrain of Ker-Seymer's personal and artistic relationships throughout the interwar period are mapped within correspondence and seven photograph albums now housed in Tate's archive. The albums record the shifting, porous boundaries between diverse social networks during this period, allowing us to trace the ways Ker-Seymer moved between the Bright Young Things, the fringe quarters of the Bloomsbury Group and the British Surrealists. Notably, images in her albums suggest a friendship with Roland Penrose (1900-1984), a connection which is reflected in Penrose's own diaries and appointment books, housed in the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art archives. At several dates from the mid-1930s through to 1940, Penrose and Ker-Seymer arranged to meet, whether at her studio or in other company. A cross-comparison with Ker-Seymer's letters and Penrose's 1936 appointment book shows they both attended a party at the Mount Royal hotel near Marble Arch in London, along with Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968). Their friendship is reiterated by multiple other sources: Humphrey Spender (1910-2005), also a close associate, described Penrose

[13] Cecil Beaton and Gail Buckland, *The Magic Image* (Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1975), quoted in Williams, *Women Photographers*, 99.
[14] Barbara Ker-Seymer, quoted in Roger Horrocks, *Len Lye: A Biography* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2001), 153.
[15] Whitney Chadwick, *The Militant Muse: Love, War and the Women of Surrealism* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2017), 172.
[16] Ibid.

as "friendly" with Ker-Seymer, remembering that "from time to time I met him with her".[17] According to Roger Horrocks, it was "at a party hosted by Roland Penrose" in 1936 that Ker-Seymer was first introduced to Len Lye.[18]

Alongside these British links, the albums and letters record Ker-Seymer's association with an international set of artists, writers and performers constellating around London, New York, and the sunny ports of southern France. Her portraits of Jean Cocteau (1889-1963) and the writer William B. Seabrook (1884-1945) encourage one to suspect she might have known Lee Miller personally, if only as an acquaintance. As Audrey Warne has written, "Seabrook was a key collaborator on many of Man Ray's images of bondage and the creator of his own sadomasochistic photographs, some of which were published and widely circulated in periodicals and shared among the Surrealist group's members".[19] Ker-Seymer was certainly acquainted with Man Ray, who wrote to her in August 1933, [20] The nature of their relationship is not known, although letters suggest they were in touch again in 1936. Despite these close connections, it has not been possible to prove that Miller and Ker-Seymer ever met. Nonetheless, these two women lived and worked among the same innovative artistic circles and their distinct practices were incubated in intersecting networks.

Experimental Portraits of Women

In the early 1930s, the two women established their own photographic businesses; having already enjoyed the freedom of her own studio while in Montparnasse, Miller opened the Lee Miller Studios in New York in 1932, while Ker-Seymer Photographs had opened in London one year previously. Along with the likes of Louise Dahl-Wolfe (1895-1989) and Toni Frissell (1907-1988) in America and Madame Yevonde (1893-1975) and Dorothy Wilding (1893-1976) in Britain, Miller and Ker-Seymer were part of a

[17] Humphrey Spender, interview by Cathy Courtney, 1999-2000, transcript, *Artists'* Lives, British Library (1999-2002). See: https://sounds.bl.uk/related-content/TRANSCRIPTS/021I-C0466X0101XX-ZZZZA0.pdf.
[18] Horrocks, *Len Lye*, 153.
[19] Audrey Warne, "Staging Sadomasochism: Images of Bondage in Man Ray's Surrealist Photography, 1929–1932," *Immediations*, no. 17 (2020) https://courtauld.ac.uk/research/research-resources/publications/immeditations-postgraduate-journal/immediations-online/2020-2/audrey-warne-staging-sadomasochism-images-of-bondage-in-man-rays-surrealist-photography-1929-1932/.
[20] Man Ray, postcard to Barbara Ker-Seymer, 6 August 1933. Tate Archive (TGA 974/2/2/372).

generation of women pursuing a career in studio portraiture and commercial photographic practice, a line of work that, as Val Williams has written, allowed women to achieve "both social mobility and economic self-sufficiency".[21] Speaking in 1986, Ker-Seymer remarked that studio portraiture was a "marvellous way to earn money," and recalled charging her sitters six guineas for six prints.[22] In their respective studios, Miller and Ker-Seymer produced "high-end advertising photographs" for companies such as Jaeger and Elizabeth Arden, and "portraits of society figures, as well as of performers, for commercial publications," including *Harper's Bazaar* and *Vogue*.[23]

Miller's commercial body of work demonstrates a wider variety of subjects than Ker-Seymer, who rarely photographed abstract or still life shots nor did she experiment with colour as Miller did, most notably for a cosmetics advertisement in 1933-4. One subject in common, however, was the dancer Frederick Ashton (1904-1988), who was photographed by both women around the same period. Miller's portraits were taken in her capacity as an official photographer of the cast and crew of the opera *Four Saints in Three Acts* (1933), a joint venture between Gertrude Stein (1874-1946) and Virgil Thomson (1896-1989) for which Ashton was choreographer. In Miller's photographs, Ashton is pictured carefully poised in a low-backed chair, with his hair, suit and posture immaculately placed. The portraits are not relaxed, yet their restrained elegance reflects Ashton's position as an ambitious ballet choreographer and the images portray him at a pivotal moment in his career. By comparison, Ker-Seymer photographed Ashton multiple times in both personal and professional guises; for this reason, her commissioned portraits, featured in the *Dancing Times* and reproduced in the pages of her personal albums, are less formal and suggest Ashton's ease at being photographed by a friend.

Informality and intimacy were ingredients both women felt were key to a successful portrait. As Miller asserted in 1932, a good photograph catches "a person not when he is unaware of it but when he is his most natural self."[24] Ker-Seymer spoke along similar lines when reflecting on her own style of portraiture: "I don't like posing people, I like people to sit naturally, as naturally as possible. People as they might be when you're just sitting

[21] Williams, *Women Photographers*, 90.
[22] Barbara Ker-Seymer, quoted in *Five Women Photographers*, dir. Judy Marle (Channel Four, 1986).
[23] Becky E. Conekin, 'Lee Miller: Model, Photographer, and War Correspondent in *Vogue*, 1927-1953', *Fashion Theory*, 10:1-2. 97-126 (101).
[24] Lee Miller, *Poughkeepsie Evening Star* (1 November 1932), quoted in Antony Penrose, *The Lives of Lee Miller*, 46.

talking to them".[25] While commercial work gave them financial independence, it did not foster creative expression, nor could it always accommodate feelings of frank closeness between photographer and subject. Having closed her studio in 1934 to move to Egypt with husband Aziz Eloui Bey, Miller wrote to her brother Erik in 1935, "I don't know whether you are still interested in photography – or got the same loathing for it I had had…I know how it feels to be a photographer and it's hell".[26]

This section then will focus, not on their professional bodies of work, but on Miller's and Ker-Seymer's personal portraits of women. These photographs frequently draw on the photographers' expertise in taking glamorous headshots, but are fused with their individual drives for experimentation, and express their radical attitudes towards sexuality, gender, and desire. When photographing their female friends outside of the constraints of commercial pressures, Miller and Ker-Seymer produced some of their most overtly surreal images, many of which contain ambivalences towards strict distinctions between naturalism and artificiality. The images resist easy categorisation.

In 1932, for example, Miller photographed a woman thought to be fellow surrealist and artist Meret Oppenheim (1913-1985). The work, titled *Solarised Portrait*, speaks to both Miller's understanding of the fashion image and her surrealist eye; Oppenheim's pose is one of refinement, yet the foregrounding of her hand as it lightly clasps around her neck, her fingers embedding in the material draped around her shoulders, produces an unnerving atmosphere. As noted by scholars including Sabina Stent, human hands – particularly severed or disembodied hands – were important motifs in Surrealist cultural production because of their simultaneously erotic and violent potential as instruments "of both pleasure and pain".[27] As the title suggests, *Solarised Portrait* is a notable example of Miller's use of solarisation, a technique she first encountered in 1929 after accidentally exposing partly developed negatives to light while working in the darkroom in Man Ray's Parisian studio. Although solarisation had been known since around 1860, with various photographers unintentionally "discovering" the effect throughout the medium's history, both Miller and Man Ray mastered the process in ways not seen previously, deliberately employing the technique with surreal intent. The solarisation of Oppenheim gives her an otherworldly glow, and her gleaming presence takes on supernatural qualities

[25] Ker-Seymer, *Five Women Photographers*.
[26] Lee Miller in a letter to Erik Miller, 1935, quoted in Penrose, *Lives of Lee Miller*, 58.
[27] Sabina Stent, "Women Surrealists: Sexuality, Fetish, Femininity and Female Surrealism" (PhD diss., University of Birmingham, 2011), 40.

against a backdrop of pure white. The dreaminess of the image is accentuated further by Oppenheim's languid sideways glance, her heavy eyelids suggesting the imminence of sleep. In this way, the work evokes surrealism's fascination with Sigmund Freud's theories of the unconscious, and the potentially revelatory "productivity of the unconscious, once it was freed from a psychological repression".[28]

An exploration of the boundaries between waking and dreaming states also features in photographs taken by Ker-Seymer in collaboration with John Banting. During the 1930s, the pair collaborated on photographing the psychoanalyst and editor Alix Strachey (née Sargant-Florence, 1892-1973), who in partnership with husband James Strachey (1887-1967) translated into English the works of Freud. In a photograph now in the National Portrait Gallery collection, Alix Strachey is shown lying on her back, with a black leather jacket blanketed around her chin. Unlike in Miller's photograph of Oppenheim, Strachey's eyes are wide open and gaze blankly skywards. The crown of her head is "pushed up against a transparent glass cube, to which she appears to be attached by a length of thickly twisted rope".[29] As is common in Ker-Seymer's oeuvre, this portrait combines an interest in hard, industrial and geometric forms with a visual delight in surface and texture, and the unusual composition of the photograph produces multiple possible meanings: in a recent exhibition at the Freud Museum, *The Enigma of the Hour* (2019), it was suggested that the rope in this portrait "recalls the umbilical cord, connecting the subject to a sterile and empty vessel".[30] At the same time, the transparency of the glass and the impenetrable expression on Strachey's face links to Surrealism's curiosity about the unseen and unknown "working of the unconscious, its relationship to conscious action, and the role played by dream in this nexus".[31]

Ker-Seymer's use of a glass prop juxtaposed with the human face is reminiscent of an image taken by Miller of her friend Tanja Ramm, titled *Tanja Ramm under a Bell Jar* (1930). Like Ker-Seymer's portrait of Strachey, it is a highly stylised and orchestrated work: Miller would have used her experience working for fashion magazines to direct Ramm, who

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[28] David Bate, *Photography and Surrealism: Sexuality, Colonialism and Social Dissent* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2003), 8.

[29] Jan Abram, Rachel Blass, Georg Bruns, Christine Diercks, Dee McQuillan, Nellie Thompson, Adele Tutter and Carina Weiss, *The Enigma of the Hour: Display Case Compendium*, *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 100,6 (2019): 1481-1613 (1548).

[30] Ibid.

[31] Whitney Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* (1985; reis., London: Thames & Hudson, 2021), 65.

stood behind a chest of drawers and placed her chin on a book to create the image. After placing a bell jar in front Ramm's head, Miller photographed her friend with her eyes closed and face slightly tilted. The outcome is eerie: as Carolyn Burke has described, "her head seems to float in the glass container like a specimen, something captured on an expedition".[32] Most critical readings of this photograph connect it to its visual counterpart by Man Ray, *Hommage à D.A.F. de Sade* (1930), which was published in André Breton's journal *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution*, and is near-identical but for the inclusion of a blindfold over Ramm's eyes. Some feminist scholars have interpreted this work as exemplary of Surrealism's misogynistic objectification of women, indulging in Sadean fantasies of domination and submission.[33] If we compare the work with Ker-Seymer's portrait of Strachey, however, it is possible to understand these efforts as attempts to understand, uncover and liberate unconscious thoughts and desires.

Sadomasochistic imagery can be found in the work of Ker-Seymer too. In 1930, she took a series of controversial portraits of the writer and activist Nancy Cunard who, as Ker-Seymer described, "loved being photographed".[34] Cunard's commitment to fighting racial injustice had begun around the time of her collaboration with Ker-Seymer, and the images were taken roughly four years prior to the release of Cunard's *Negro Anthology* (1934), a publication that aimed to document "the struggles and achievements, the persecutions and the revolts against them, of the Negro peoples".[35] In one outcome from the photo-session, now in Tate's archive, Cunard is shown in profile with her head angled backwards.[36] Her mouth gapes open slightly, while her shoulders are exposed bare and thick beaded necklaces are wound around her neck. Ker-Seymer printed the image in negative so that the tonal values of Cunard's body are reversed, rendering her white skin black and her black beaded necklaces white.

Ker-Seymer's portraits of Cunard are her most well-known images, however their use of the negative-printing technique is often misidentified as an example of solarisation. Although other British photographers active during the interwar years explored the Sabatier effect – for example Helen

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[32] Burke, *Lee Miller*, 112.

[33] See: Mary Ann Caws, Rudolf E. Kuenzli, and Gwen Raaberg, eds., *Surrealism and Women* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995).

[34] Ker-Seymer, *Five Women Photographers*.

[35] Nancy Cunard, "Foreword," in *Negro Anthology Made by Nancy Cunard, 1931-33, iii–iv* (London: Wishart & Co., 1934) iii.

[36] See: Barbara Ker-Seymer, *Nancy Cunard,* c. 1931, Negative print, 26.3 x 19.7 cm, *Tate Archive*, TGA 974/6/13.

Muspratt (1907-2001) and Winifred Casson (1908-1969) – Ker-Seymer did not. Unlike solarisation's hallucinatory play with light and dark, in which tonal values are subverted in part only, the negative print offers a total reversal of tones. Ker-Seymer is likely to have been inspired to experiment with this process, not by Lee Miller and Man Ray, but by László Moholy-Nagy, whose work she was familiar with through the distribution of European photobooks and art magazines in Britain and their availability in establishments such as Zwemmer's bookshop on the Charing Cross Road in London.

The colour transformation of the wound beads gives Cunard's neckwear the appearance of rope, mimicking bondage and strangulation. The shocking image, which was misguidedly intended to express cross-racial solidarity with Black communities in the American South, instead makes visible a white woman's erotic attachment to violent fantasies. By centring herself, her white body and her own psychosexual desires, Cunard obscures the very cause she hoped to support, ultimately repeating and emboldening structures of disempowerment. In the negative portrait, the backdrop is split into two definitive halves, light and dark, encouraging an interpretation of the image as hinging on a simple inversion of binaristic realities; what was white is now black, and vice-versa. Contrary to surface appearances, the image does not operate in neatly defined categories, and boundaries between eroticism and exoticism, cross-racial identification, and racist fetishism collapse.

In their experimental portraits of women, both Miller and Ker-Seymer used Surrealist themes and motifs to explore the unconscious and make visible women's fantasies, as they relate to both pleasure and violence, to provocative effect. With both women having trained in fashion photography, the images mix experimentalism with modishness. Drawing on elements of surrealism and surrealist-inspired imagery allowed Miller and Ker-Seymer to articulate a highly stylised photographic vocabulary that was radical in form and in content.

Surreal Sociability

For both Miller and Ker-Seymer, engagement with Surrealism was not isolated to the studio. This is most evident in the event known as the "sudden Surrealist invasion" of Cornwall in the summer of 1937.[37] After Miller's departure from New York to Egypt in 1934, she eventually returned to Europe where she met and commenced a lifelong relationship with Roland

[37] Michel Remy, *Surrealism in Britain* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), 111.

Penrose. Following their whirlwind romance in Paris, Penrose invited Miller, along with Man Ray, Max Ernst, Leonora Carrington, and others to spend a raucous weekend at his brother Beacus Penrose's home in the Cornish countryside. Lambe Creek still stands today, and as Antony Penrose describes, it is a "beautiful Georgian house…straight from the pages of a romantic novel," tucked on the banks of the Truro River across the water from the village of Malpas.[38]

Miller and Penrose both documented their surreal Cornish holiday and the many surviving images in the Lee Miller Archive illustrate the jubilant and creative atmosphere at Lambe Creek. The shots radiate with the warmth of summer as they present the artists lounging on striped deckchairs, donning bathing suits and short-sleeved shirts in various stages of undress. In some photographs of Miller, she appears happy to resume her role as a model; looking up from a low vantage point, Penrose captures her posing topless leaning languidly out of a first-floor window, her figure framed by billowing curtains. We are granted access to Miller's perspective from her position in the window, as she photographed "an aerial view with Paul and Nusch Éluard in deckchairs…while Penrose paints a ship's figurehead statue".[39] In this photograph by Miller, labelled *Roland Penrose, Nusch and Paul Eluard* (1937), Penrose's stance is energetic and forthright, and the image encapsulates the dynamism of the trip. Miller's documentation of art in action directly counters Penrose's images of Miller in half-nude repose and this contrast makes legible her ability to shift between these two different registers, from the photographer to the photographed and back. Such adaptability demonstrates a highly developed understanding of the intersubjective relationship between viewer and subject and would enable her remarkable development as a photojournalist in the Second World War.

Lambe Creek is the site of Miller's and Ker-Seymer's closest overlap. Through her friendship with the Penrose brothers, and Beacus in particular, Ker-Seymer made several trips to the Cornish retreat throughout the 1930s. Her albums in Tate's archive reveal excursions made at Easter and in the July of 1935, as well as at Christmas in 1938 and 1940. Roland Penrose was also present in the winter of 1938, and Ker-Seymer captures him brooding against a wall; it is difficult not to read wistful longing into the image, which was taken during a period of separation from Miller. These documents of Lambe Creek provide an alternative to Miller's experience, as Ker-Seymer's photographs generally present a more sedate environment; in her trips, which were frequently made with her lover at the time the left-wing

[38] Penrose, *The Lives of Lee Miller*, 67.
[39] Clayton, "Lee Miller and Surrealism in Britain," 42.

politician Wogan Philipps (1902-1993), there are no members of the party hanging out of windows, and no one is depicted in a state of nudity. That being said, Ker-Seymer's photographs taken in Easter 1935 are from very similar vantage points as the aerial views by Miller. In Ker-Seymer's images, we can see the same striped deckchairs and suntrap patio. From a comparison with Miller's work, we can see that she too must have pointed her camera from a first-floor window, looking down at the scene below. As Humphrey Spender once remarked, "it seemed to me that 'Bar' always stood outside the events of her life and observed things with marvellous wit and sympathy and perception, and sometimes just a touch of very enjoyable malice".[40]

Ker-Seymer's surreal humour can be found elsewhere in her personal photograph albums. A common and recurring assertion made about Ker-Seymer is that she photographed Gertrude Stein. The references to Stein in relation to Ker-Seymer are too numerous to list in total, however notable examples include Val Williams' obituary for Ker-Seymer in the *Independent*.[41] Intriguingly, the innumerable allusions to Stein sitting for Ker-Seymer contrast with a distinct lack of visual evidence of the sitting itself. One point of interest which may have contributed to the perpetuation of their link, however, can be found in one of Ker-Seymer's photograph albums, dated September 1935-1938 [TGA 974/5/5]. Like the albums mentioned previously, this collection of images pays homage to Ker-Seymer's friends and lovers, and they mark excursions made abroad. One page is adorned with a close-up of Frederick Ashton, who is posing goofily with a wide-brimmed hat. Next to this portrait, two images depicting a couple are lined up, with the corresponding annotation, "Gertrude Stein & Alice B. Toklas". Close inspection of the photographs reveals, however, that the sitters are in fact imposters. Instead, the images depict a parody, with Ashton as Stein and the ballet dancer Robert Helpmann (1909-1986) as Toklas. When critics and art historians list Ker-Seymer as photographing Gertrude Stein, the invocation is made to legitimate and validate her; the proximity Ker-Seymer has to this luminary of modernism lends weight to Ker-Seymer's own significance within the network of Europe's avant-garde. However, any photographs taken of Stein by Ker-Seymer remain obscure, and for those who look, they stumble across a joke and a game of dress-up. For both women, intimacy and friendship were vital to their practice. Some of their most memorable images were borne from the humour and playfulness that goes hand in hand with mutual enjoyment and respect. This productive

[40] Humphrey Spender, as quoted in Jane Stevenson, *Edward Burra: Twentieth-Century Eye* (London: Pimlico, 2007), 87.
[41] See: Val Williams, "Obituary," *Independent*, 22 May 1993.

intermingling of carefree sociability and artistic production could not continue in the same way after 1939, and for Ker-Seymer in particular, her photographic practice did not recover.

Conclusion

Miller's first-hand experiences of the atrocities of the Second World War contrast with Ker-Seymer's experiences in Britain, where she worked for the Larkins Studio, a company that made instructional films for the armed services. These not insignificant differences aside, the war changed both women's lives irrevocably, and there are notable similarities across their post-war careers. Indeed, a comparison between Miller and Ker-Seymer in the post-war years brings into focus what Becky Conekin has described as "the problem of telling a woman's life story when the ending is not what most of us would hope for".[42] Miller's post-war domesticity has been for some feminist art historians "deeply unsatisfying," and a feminist reading of Ker-Seymer's life as it followed a similar trajectory might also express disappointment at her eventual retreat from photography.[43]

Ker-Seymer was the first to stop her professional practice when the lease for her studio fell through in 1939. In 1945, Ker-Seymer married, and two years later gave birth to her first and only child, a son named Max—the same year, 1947, Miller and Penrose's only child Antony was born. In 1949, Ker-Seymer separated from her husband and adjusted to life as a single parent. After a trip to America in 1950, "where she was struck by a new post-war concept, the launderette", Ker-Seymer "embarked on life as a businesswoman and opened one of the first launderettes in London, at Victoria (it was not the very first, which opened in May 1949)".[44] The launderette was a success, and she opened a second premises on Horseferry Road, establishing and expanding her business known as Ker-Seymer's Westminster Launderettes. The launderette business was for Ker-Seymer another "marvellous way to make money", one that provided her with the means to support herself and her son.

Creative work for Miller and Ker-Seymer did not continue in the same way it did before the Second World War, but their associations with Surrealism did not altogether end. Rather, their affiliations evolved and adapted in the limited scope allowed for women "after the terrifying and

[42] Becky Conekin, "'She Did the Cooking with the Same Spirit as the Photography': Lee Miller's Life after Photography", *Photography and Culture*, 1:2, (2008): 145-163 (148).
[43] Ibid.
[44] Stevenson, *Edward Burra*, 325-6.

disruptive circumstances of the Second World War".[45] While Miller became known for her surreal "culinary inventions such as 'Muddles Green chicken' (which was indeed green)", Ker-Seymer's name can be found in out-of-the-way places in art history, appearing not as an artist but as a keeper and lender of objects.[46] For instance, in the 1978 catalogue for the landmark exhibition *Dada and Surrealism Revisited* held at the Hayward Gallery in London, Ker-Seymer is listed as the owner of several works of art loaned to the exhibition, by Edward Burra, John Banting and Len Lye. In the post-war years, both Miller and Ker-Seymer contributed to our received knowledge of surrealism at the same time that such narratives have occluded them. By looking at their work side-by-side, we can see that Miller and Ker-Seymer shaped and were shaped by surreal photographic practices and took the movement's spirit of experimentation in their stride.

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[45] Conekin, "Lee Miller's Life after Photography", 150.
[46] Chadwick, *Militant Muses*, 215.

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CHAPTER FOUR

"WOMEN ARE WELL-SUITED TO BEING PHOTOGRAPHERS": THE CONTEMPORALITY OF LEE MILLER'S WORK AND HER INFLUENCE ON WOMEN PHOTOGRAPHERS TODAY

MEGAN WELLINGTON-BARRATT

Max Ernst explained Surrealism as "the exploitation of the fortuitous meeting of two distant realities on an inappropriate plane".[1] Lee Miller's work and personal life crossed many boundaries and social norms for the time in which she was living, modelling, taking photographs and writing. The quote by Ernst could be a metaphor for how Miller weaved her way through situations, clashing realities that at the time, were not meant to, or had not met before. Her life's work fits into no singular box and was far reaching in subject, intent, purpose, and realisation. Reflecting upon such a rich body of work away from the common relationships Miller is often accompanied with, opens up deep thematic discussion around the impact and influence of her work in today's field. This impact could be considered subconscious, given the niche bracket in which her mixed genre and pioneering work sits. She is not the "go-to" inspiration of women photographers I mention in this chapter, nor perhaps would they state Miller as an inspiration at all. But her legacy and style of work can be both recognised, and often, underrecognised in many female photographers today. This chapter hopes to begin to address the candid and brave nature of Miller's work as a standalone artist in relationship to photography by females today. It aims to explore Miller's extraordinarily timeless gaze on

[1] Max Ernst, *Une Semaine de Bonte, ou les sept elements capitau,* in, Becky E. Conekin, "Lee Miller: Model, Photographer, and War Correspondent in Vogue, 1927-1953", *Fashion Theory*, vol. 10, no. 1-2, Routledge, 2006, 109.

subject matter of self-portraits, fabric and domestic textures, fashion, femininity, and playfulness and how she sought to continually push the boundaries of being a working woman in the first half of the twentieth century both in front and behind the camera. It will explore this through beginning to draw on theoretical, contextual, and social standpoints that have emerged since Miller's work was made. The chapter intends to extend this to the influence on contemporary female photographers rather than the widely reported critique that exists on Miller's work already. This work does not intend to reduce Lee Miller, or any photographer to their gender alone but intends to cast a critical lens on how their role as a female could perhaps cast such a different view in a time where women tended to adopt different lifestyles and roles. It is still pertinent to explore today given the contemporality of Miller's way of working and view through the camera. It is applicable to so many photographers working today, only with different societal norms and expectations gifted through the passage of time.

One of the first things writers and academics often comment on when discussing Miller is that she is underrecognised as a photographer.[2] This is often to attributed to the way she chose to live her life, the people she surrounded herself with and the time in history in which her existence occurred. She did not allow a single creative facet such as photography or a movement such as Surrealism illustrate her entire living, in contrast to many other household names with which she is often affiliated (Man Ray, Ronald Penrose to name a few). This has made Miller stand out in contemporary discussion but also to blend into historical ones, perhaps more than those who were seen to dedicate their entire existences to a singular creative pursuit, style or medium, or were of a different gender. Miller's rich and varied work can be somewhat unfairly reduced to part of the Surrealist movement, wife of Ronald Penrose or muse of Picasso and Man Ray. Her life cannot be pinned down into one singular area, Miller was a model, photographer, writer, artist, wife, and mother and did not allow social restraints or expectations hold her back from achieving any of these roles. Miller was a victim of horrific rape and sexual assault in childhood, and from this she held a vulnerability that did see her navigate sexuality and relationships from a place of trauma, secrecy, wounds, and healing[3]. Her methods for living were remarkable and unfamiliar for her lifetime and meant she lived a rich and successful existence. Although demure in nature, Miller held a bravery for women, taking on modelling jobs such as starring

[2] Carolyn Burke, Lee Miller: On Both Sides of the Camera (Bloomsbury: London, 2006), 11.
[3] Jeffrey Meyers, "Lee Miller and Martha Gellhorn: Parallel Lives." *The Antioch Review*, vol. 73, no. 1, Antioch Review, Inc, 2015, 57.

in a Kotex advert in the 1930s, and championing sex and masturbation for female pleasure.

Tracing female activity and influence in history will always be poignant given the assumed place of females in society.[4] The path and activities that women are expected to take is very much carved out, and any opposition to this behaviour, including that of Miller, is of interest. Pink described this behaviour as "rejection of the housewife role".[5] In Miller's early working lifetime, the woman's role in the social structure was expected to be a domestic one, inhabiting a domestic space in the home and attending to husbands and/or family members.[6] This submission to the everyday helped achieve a sense of stability, one that Miller resisted and played against. War work undertaken by women was intended to make up for the gaps left by men wounded or still fighting. Women who did work, did not commonly interchange employment, or travel as freely as Miller did. Although defying some of the gender norms that were entangled during her lifetime through her mixed employment, sexual liberation and choice making, Miller's role as a female combined with her chosen subject matter and working methods, meant that she photographed from a stance that was not often replicated in war photography but also when looking at domestic objects. She presents her world through the eyes of a woman focussing on areas of events that photographers (mostly male) would perhaps overlook or deem insignificant.[7] Drawing on the Surrealist nature of the everyday object, Miller had a specific way of framing trauma in a more personal and peaceful way than the harrowing experiences often depicted through tragic or shocking scenes. She presents a femininity in the images that is juxtaposed by her position on the ground during the war, sharing close quarters with male soldiers, or making herself vulnerable to possible injury.[8]

Fast forward to 2020 and female photographers live and work in a very different way. Working in multiple fields or becoming multi-skilled is a lifestyle choice and one that could be described as "the multi-hyphen method".[9] Those identifying as female are no longer seen as shunning a

[4] Gillian Rose, *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical* Knowledge (Oxford: Polity Press, 1993), 36
[5] Sarah Pink, *Home truths: Gender, Domestic Objects and Everyday Life* (Oxford: Berg. 2004), 102
[6] Sarah Pink, *Situating Everyday Life: Practices and Places* (SAGE Publications. 2012), 4
[7] Jui-Ch'i Liu, "Beholding the Feminine Sublime: Lee Miller's War Photography." *Signs* 40, no. 2 (2015), 318.
[8] Conekin, "Lee Miller", 104
[9] Emma Gannon, The Multi Hyphen Method (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2019).

societal expectation of themselves by choosing a way of life like that of Miller but are seen to be taking opportunity of creative and employment freedoms that are available to them.

Relationships

Expectations in relationships differed in Miller's era. Females were not seen as equals, despite progression slowly taking shape. Lee Miller presented detachment from her relationship with Man Ray despite the oozing intimacy that can be gleaned from his portraits of her. Miller instead chooses to concentrate on the skills taught through her technical apprenticeship, a role in a relationship that is much more contemporary and empowered than perhaps was expected in 1937. She did not submit to being redesigned in the same way that Man Ray's other lovers had, displaying an intense amount of confidence and empowerment as a female that projected into her own photographs. The intimate relationship between Man Ray and Miller could be viewed as one-sided as hundreds of portraits were taken of Miller, yet only three of Man Ray exist today. The strength and boldness that exists in Miller's character that are alluded to in every manner of her action and behaviour is key to the impact her photography has had on females in the field today. Although both unmarried, Miller lived with Man Ray openly as his lover for a number of years and is often referred to as his mistress. The documentation of her role in the relationship was open and honest. Miller did not extrude any shame or regret in how she presented her desire. Her approach was contemporary, and her documentation through lens-based media in this way, extraordinary.

Natasha Carauna is a photographic artist whose work is concerned with themes of "love, betrayal and fantasy".[10] Projects "Married Man" and "The Other Woman" explore infidelity. "The Other Woman" contains images of partially disguised women in harshly lit domestic scenarios appearing to hide from the camera in scenes that could be considered to be the place of the affair. Surrealist or abstract imagery often disguised the figure or the face in order to confuse or alter the meaning being portrayed to the viewer. Portraits of Miller; and taken by Miller share this thematic distortion. Miller appears with parts of her face away from view, sometimes with only her chin, hair or neck on view. This metaphor of hiding could read as a nod to the way she chose to live with Man Ray and her life in general, sexually liberated before the world caught up. Carauna's series "The Other Woman" hides the women through a number of different reasons. Exposing the

[10] Natasha Carauna, https://www.natashacaruana.com/our-story.

identity of the women was potentially a real issue for the women involved for fear of repercussion, but also for the men choosing to have affairs and the partners that this may affect if such a story was revealed. Carauna talks of her own experience of infidelity and thrills that sneaking around presented, but also how it presented problems, such as her being unable to photograph a key anniversary in their secret relationship. In "The Married Man", Carauna went on 80 dates with married men and took a limited number of images on disposable cameras per date. The resulting images are ones that express a covert and secretive activity. Imagining how Caruana approached the taking of these images makes the mind race. The confidence in capturing such an event is unnerving in skill and incredibly confident in execution. Documenting fleeting romantic events was the basis of a lot of Miller's portraits where she acted as the model. Her personal work from behind the camera noticeably ignores the same intimacy and close up nature that is shown so clearly in the photographs of those who were besotted with her garcon look and natural beauty.
Despite being often being viewed as part of key relationships, Miller acted far from a secondary character. Every reported act makes her seem like a trailblazer with ideas and the confidence to execute them.

Juno Calypso's work explores themes relating to "solitude, desire and femininity".[11] Calypso's aesthetic relies on her multi-faceted role both in front of and behind the camera. Calypso dresses as characters and takes elaborate self-portraits in sought-out sets. The locations she chooses often follow the same theme, surreal and filled with bright, sickly and insipid colours. Her choice to document herself demonstrates an air of confidence, one that is found in Miller's photography. Miller ensured she documented and reported herself in sought out locations, only this time, they happened to be that of war time or her lovers. The "solitude, desire and femininity" Calypso explores is found in Miller's long journeys away from home whilst working in photojournalism, her desire widely documented in her relationships with Man Ray and Penrose. Her femininity unquestionable in her confidence, fashion choices and entirely natural beauty.

Female Roles

The reappropriation of the "expected roles" of a female artist that Miller consistently played with are echoed in the work of French artist Sophie Calle. Calle chooses to use photography in her work often accompanied with text. Calle is well known for her disruption of banal or mundane

[11] Juno Calypso, https://www.junocalypso.com/about.

situations or undertaking an entirely different role in order to produce work. The comparisons between the actual subject matter of Calle and Miller may seem worlds apart, but with closer analysis, their values, lens and framework of production are often similar. In The Shadow, Calle asks her mother to pay a private detective to document her day. Calle simultaneously visits her favourite Parisian sights whilst writing detailed diary entries. The resulting exhibition contained the photographs alongside the diary entries Calle had written. The multi-layered roles here are complex. The private detective is male and would in a normal request of employment, hold the power in this temporary relationship. However, Calle has orchestrated this scenario and is aware of the detective thus moving the power back to her, without the detective knowing. The interchangeability of this power relationship is similar to that of Miller's consistent adjustment of roles within her life. Playing with male/female expectations through employment and societal norms meant Miller's work produced a progressive and unique standpoint. Calle's power play with the detective replicates the feminist mobility that can be highlighted in the imagery but difficult to untangle. In "Double Game" (1999) Calle exerts her ability to overthrow roles in surreal mix of fact and fiction.

Miller's work tends to stand out because women are underrepresented in photography as a whole and in photojournalism as a genre, even more so, a problem still apparent today.[12] Photography tends to be more important than the photographer, and even less so when a female photographer is behind the camera and in a time where photography held more value than in the saturated field of today. Of course, it was unusual for Lee Miller to put herself in danger in a warzone as a woman, just as Hadland and Barnett argue it is still one of the key factors to why women are less likely to become photojournalists today. It can be a "lonely and risky" profession for women, but one could argue this is equally a risk for males too.[13] Referring back to Mulvey, one of her key seminal points was that the film industry was male dominated and therefore provided the world with a male gaze- on men, for men.[14] It is important to state here the role of Miller in such scenarios during a time where gender equality gaps were cavernous. Not only did Miller get over an extraordinary hurdle of being a woman in areas of conflict but she

[12] Adrian Hadland and Camilla Barnett, "The Gender Crisis in Professional Photojournalism." *Journalism Studies (London, England)*, vol. 19, no. 13, Routledge, 2018, 2011.
[13] M. F. Thomas, "*Through the Lens of Experience: American Women Newspaper Photographers."* Doctoral diss., 111.
[14] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema". *Screen* (1975), XVI (3), 11.

chose to view these scenes through the eyes of a woman rather than imitating those of a man—the female gaze. Only very recently married to Roland Penrose, Miller defied the other main explanation for women shunning photojournalism- leaving domestic duties and familial life behind in order to choose work was unheard of, especially in 1939. In her photographs, Miller was brazen enough to fight the status quo and provide a viewpoint she felt important to a female audience reading *Vogue*. Being on the cover of *Vogue* at 19 years old, Miller had been subject of the female gaze right from her entry point into the world of photography. Despite being photographed for arguably one of the biggest women's magazines of all time, she was predominantly captured by male photographers. The male gaze for female consumption. It is this jarred perspective that led to her curiosity in the field and of course as history tells us, led Miller to Paris to be taught by male photographers. Despite this training, Miller did not lose her unique way of viewing the world, only now she had the tools to execute it in visual form.

Her gaze on life through her camera focused on a wider gaze than had already been reported in the press and turned the audience to a softer, yet still impactful and hard look at life during the war. The images beg of a longer look, a necessary visual unravelling of what Miller was seeing when experiencing the war first-hand through the eyes of a female. The surrealist view of focussing away from the face and onto objects appears time and time again, the inanimate objects speaking for the people (dead or alive) involved in the war who rarely featured in Miller's photography, at least not until after D-Day.[15] The use of objects in place of 'silent witnesses' brings the audience closer to the photographic subject.[16] Miller was inevitably inspired, whether consciously or subconsciously through her experience as both a surrealist and in fashion photography. Her imagery is littered with objects and at times can seem like elaborate compositions or staged scenarios, just as fashion photography emulates. Objects of the home cannot be ignored in Miller's work such as the destroyed typewriter in *Remington Silent* (1940). Family shots or "snapshots" were still fairly formal sittings when Miller descended onto the photography field. It is difficult to determine what she understood about photography before the modelling and Man Ray days, or even whether she had experienced anything other than the traumatic modelling for her father as a young girl. Her entire experience of photographing was of a formal nature, which makes it pertinent to note her trained, yet informal viewpoint presented in the resulting photographs.

[15] Caitlin S. Davis, "Lee Miller's Revenge on Culture: Photojournalism, Surrealism, and Autobiography", *Woman's Art Journal* 27, no. 1 (2006), 5.
[16] Burke, *Lee Miller*, 206

People turned towards the camera, caught somewhat casually in *Fire Masks* (1941) (fig. 2-6) possess all aspects of a quick photograph, one we are much more akin to in contemporary photography. Some of Miller's war photographs that featured objects were not too dissimilar to that of her magazine shoots, where she applied the training, she had in Man Ray's studio, looking at shadow, light, and the importance of framing a composition.[17]

Motherhood

Parallels can still be drawn with Miller and those choosing to become mothers in both eras, given the limits of maternity and childcare allowances and lack of workplace equality that still exist today. Miller suffered tragedy with a miscarriage during the early 1930s, and at age thirty-nine gave birth to son Antony in 1946. Miller struggled with pregnancy and became ill meaning she was bound to her bed. She missed working during pregnancy, a state that many females longed for and leant heavily into in the 1930s. In a letter to Roland Penrose, she stated that she did not want her "work room to be turned into a nursery" highlighting the value and balance she placed in these areas.[18] Jocelyn Allen is a photographer who uses self-portraiture to explore personal themes such as self-esteem, mental health and more recently, pregnancy and motherhood.[19] Miller did not turn to photography to document her pregnancy, but rather turned away from the medium for a period of time. The similarities between the two artists do not lie here, but more so in the honesty and balance of working female photographers. Allen has used her stark photographic style to continue a line of lens-based work whilst taking on motherhood, embracing the interwoven nature of two roles, and allowing a consistency of a former character to sustain. Miller hired a nanny to undertake childcare for Antony to continue travelling and working, around a year after he was born, allowing her to make photographic work again. Mental health issues such as depression and post-traumatic stress made life turbulent for Lee. Miller spoke of this in letters. Knowledge and treatment of mental health was not at all advanced, but Miller still did not hide away, instead turned to cooking and other domestic activities previously shunned in order to maintain some calm in her chaotic life. Allen uses hashtags and text delivered to an audience on social media as a vehicle for an honest account of motherhood, titling imagery with telling thoughts such as "I'm worried someone will tell me I'm holding her wrong" and

[17] Conekin, *Lee Miller: Mode*, 100
[18] Burke, *Lee Miller*, 301
[19] Allen, *Jocelyn Allen*.

addressing loneliness and anxiety. Given the contemporality of Miller's approach at the time, it feels that she too would approach work of similar themes in such a way if she were making work in the twenty-first century.

Domestic Spaces

Jui-Ch'i Liu discusses Miller's work as being an example of the feminine sublime, that perceives trauma and war in a way that subverts and resists a typical patriarchal order.[20] Miller's work uniquely combined domestic spacings with traumatic debris, providing the audience with a feeling of both the familiar and the unexpected, pleasure as well as pain. There is something bigger to be concerned about in the world when viewing Miller's photographs, like war, but at the same time she manages to draw the eye to the delicate nature of a net curtain, or an almost ethereal light casting a shadow. There is a suggestion that the eye can see further than the event that is in front of it. The familiarisation with the scenes means that the viewer no longer can disengage but instead is forced to be involved. This blurs the divisions between the observer and the observed even when viewed over half a century later, situating you within the frame Miller has so cleverly composed. The proximity and distance that is apparent in Miller's work as an example of the feminine sublime show the difference in perception of trauma, war and other through a viewpoint that invokes a relationship with the subject matter rather than a stark male spectatorship.

Despite an unconventional employment for a female at that time and a seemingly disconnection to the notion of home- a space that Rose describes as 'restrictive and oppressive',[21] Miller captures objects of the home in a way that a different audience may experience the atrocities and world as it was being presented in the press. Miller looked beyond the death and fighting to seek out remnants of relatable things that audiences perhaps overlooked. An example of this is in Miller's image *US Army Nurse's Billet*, taken in Oxford in 1943. The image is composed of nurse underwear, socks, stocking, and a uniform drying after presumably being washed. Fabric and soft furnishings feature in many of Miller's work and adds considerable depth and life to a photograph. The clothing in US Army nurses billet show creases, lines of movement of the nurses who will have worn them. Despite the image being black and white, the viewer can see elastic that may be misshapen or edges that are close to fraying. The image contains no people, or obvious signs of war. Without the title and date, it could be any

[20] Liu, *Beholding*, 315
[21] Rose, *Feminism and Geography*, 5

photograph from history. Miller has produced an object of the living by photographing a somewhat banal activity, and more importantly, an activity usually undertaken by women in this era, could have been ignored by a male photographer recording the same scene. The thematic importance of this image is concerned with a female's role in the war but a note on femininity, both in front and behind the camera.

When focussed upon, the role of fabric and soft furnishings in Miller's photography begin to stand out. In a portrait of Eileen Agar, taken in Brighton in 1937, the influence of Miller's fashion background begins to protrude. Miller has composed the image to capture Agar's shadow against what seems like a marble pillar or building. The folds of the marble are beautifully composed against what would be Agar's bottom half, whether it be dress, skirt or trousers. Even with only the suggestion of clothing, Miller manages to portray softness in her subject, drawing the viewer's gaze to the silhouette yet not providing us with anything other than the shadow itself. Miller photographed Martha Gellhorn in 1943. In this image, Gellhorn sits at a dressing table strewn with objects and is writing whilst looking in the mirror directly at the camera. The mirror is surrounded by images of men, yet the viewer's gaze lands upon these last. Miller's eye draws you to the centre of the image, the folds in Gellhorn's short sleeved jumper that are formed by the shoulder and armpit pressing closely to the arm in the action of writing. A shadow of a belt shows the imprint in which it is making in Gellhorn's waist, and an open pocket made only from the act of sitting are also central to this image. Patricia Allmer suggests that the framing and composition of the imagery was akin to that of Dada collages, drawing the audience in to a particular understanding of a scene that the artist was trying to portray.[22] This Dada-esque composition nods to Miller's constant spread across multiple platforms, be it model and photographer, or appearing on the same page of *Vogue* in 1930 both in front of and behind the camera.[23]

Miller's female gaze leads the viewer to her strength as a female photographer and casts importance where she feels we should look. This control is consistent in her work and employs strength in showing us what she saw when framing and taking the shot. Even in one of the most famous images involving Miller, of her in Hitler's bathtub, it is difficult to ignore the significance of the domestic setting. The image is already a surrealist composition with the added props of a statue of Venus and a framed photograph of Hitler himself, but with the contrast of muddy military boots, the voyeurism of invading the privacy of a female bathing and a hygienic

[22] Patricia Allmer, *Lee Miller, Photography, Surrealism, and Beyond* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 180.
[23] Conekin, *Lee Miller: Model*.

clean bathroom, the image becomes almost an epitome of Miller as a photographer, clashing worlds and changing perspective in order for it to be viewed in a different manner. There is a suggestion here of Miller producing images that imitate family album style photographs or inhabiting a domestic space in a way that a different audience would be able to interpret it in an alternative way. Family album images are treated as prized possessions and often protected in a way that precious commodities are.[24] By imitating the conventions, style and subject matter that have come to be, Miller is injecting a perspective that is recognisable and timeless to all who view the images. Framed photographs often appear in Miller's work, and often are smashed as a result of war. The framed photograph could be viewed as a marker of the home, a link that reaches to a deeper interpretation of the image, whilst acting as a visual representation of breaking down the societal and domestic norms that brought her to photograph such scenes in the first place. Taken in Egypt in 1937, *Portrait of Space* presents a vast desert partially concealed by torn insect netting. This tear presents accidental framing, a flimsy barrier. A small frame hangs above the tear. Frame within frame, the image presents a layered juxtaposition. Adventure and the domestic collide, a representation of the contrasting parallels that Miller was experiencing at the time. Contemporary photographic explorations of the home often reference a family album, photographs, or frames. Miller titled the image 'Portrait of Space' could suggest her thoughts and feelings at the time, the longing for a normality that was not recognisable to her any longer or a technical nod to how the insect netting has unintentionally framed the open void. Photographers Diana Markosian, Alessandra Sanguinetti and Hannah Starkey often include frames and mirrors in domestic spaces when exploring memory, place and themes relating to femininity. Framed images and markers of the home help anchor us to the familiar, especially in times of disruption such as separation or in Miller's case, war. Markosian tracked down her father after a long separation spanning nearly two decades. Markosian documented their subsequent reunion in a poignant and tangible series "Inventing my Father". In this series, Markosian states "for years my father wasn't anything but a cut out in our family album".[25] Markosian captures framed photographs as part of beautifully lit compositions. Hints of the domestic, filling in of non-existent memories shine through the final work, a consistent pull on a life being longed for.

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[24] Gillian Rose, *Doing Family Photography: The Domestic, the Public and the Politics of Sentiment* (Farnham: Taylor & Francis Group, 2010), 24.
[25] Diana Markosian, "Inventing my Father", https://www.dianamarkosian.com/father.

In *Untitled (Severed Breast from Radical Mastectomy)* (c. 1930), Miller photographed a severed breast on a plate with cutlery upon a white table setting. This deliberate and literal representation of female objectification produces a mass of contrast. The thick, dark red of the flesh presented in black and white shows a female body part often associated with sexuality turned into a representation of the grotesque. The folds of the table linen suggest a lack of use, or loss of connection with the domestic role. Clare Strand photographed table coverings in her series Skirts.[26] Strand photographed tables being 'skirted' to hide conceal flaws. However, in the images, the tables are completely empty along with the stark black background. The lack of content draws your attention to the fabric folds, just as it does in *Untitled (Severed Breast)*. Miller has chosen to use shock and controversy to document a deeply personal and significant life event specific to women. Strand draws our attention to nostalgic uses of linen with subtly, a marker of the changes in time and how representation of gender has altered between the two images being taken.

Conclusion

Lee Miller did not conduct herself as a brave role model with intent, but with courage and bravery that allowed her to live her life on terms that suited her, despite the era she lived in. Her attitudes to sex, sexuality, relationships, masturbation, motherhood, and work were contemporary and the society she mixed in accepted this. Having experienced great trauma in early life, Miller was continually troubled by what we would recognise today as significant mental health issues. Despite this, her work was pioneering both in front and behind the camera. Her documentation of war, fashion and her personal life has paved a way where female photographers can work with more freedom and choice in the industry. There are still huge inequalities in the photography industry, as the aforementioned women in photojournalism discussion began to address. Lee Miller captured her own version and narrative of being a female photographer and built an entirely different way of viewing the world she existed in. Whilst doing so, she was learning about herself, just as many of her contemporaries mentioned here have stated they do through the medium. Miller presented the ordinary and extraordinary in her framing, letters, and personal history in an extraordinarily timeless gaze.

[26] Clare Strand, "Skirts", https://www.clarestrand.co.uk/works/?id=181.

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CHAPTER FIVE

"TOMBS, RUINS AND EMBALMED BODIES": LEE MILLER'S EGYPT

IMAN KHAKOO

Fig. 5-1: Lee Miller, *Self-Portrait with Sphinxes*, 1940. Photograph, England: © Lee Miller Archives.

Introduction

"Egypt has been photographed literally inside out", proclaims writer Maria Golia. Photographic depictions of Egypt's monuments and ruins have continued to feed public and scholarly appetites since the inclusion of Horace Vernet and Frédéric Goupil-Pasquet's daguerreotypes of Egyptian monuments in the first photographically illustrated album, *Excursions daguerriennes: Vues et monuments les plus remarquables du globe* (1841–42).[1] American Surrealist photographer Lee Miller (1907–77) became part of this genealogy when sojourning in Egypt between 1934 and 1939 to be with her husband, businessman Aziz Eloui Bey (m. 1934–39). Miller used photography as a means to become acquainted with Egypt and its local and expatriate communities; in time it became "a means of transport, a way to escape elite Cairo".[2] Much like how André Breton sought to escape the hierarchies of literature and the familiar sites of Paris by including photographs of the city's ruins in *Nadja* (1928), so too did Miller regularly venture on long-range expeditions into what she described as "all the great empty spaces" of Palmyra, Baalbek, Tigris and the Euphrates in search of monuments and ruins to photograph.[3] On such expeditions, Miller toted at least two Rolleiflex cameras—the most lightweight and portable cameras at the time—lending her greater flexibility.

Patricia Allmer describes Miller's Egyptian period as a type of "Nomadic Surrealism", a term she applies to Miller's iconic shot of the Siwa desert pictured through a torn mosquito net, *Portrait of Space* (1937). For Allmer, it represents an "image of nomadic displacement and territorial desire".[4] Peter Schulman similarly identifies a vein of "creative restlessness" in Miller's Egyptian photographs, elaborating on Carolyn Burke's suggestion that Miller developed an "Egyptian complex, which means being a spectator".[5] These analyses favour a psycho-biographical reading of Miller's photographs as expressions of ennui, which tend to both romanticise her position as a Western, woman photographer and consequently paint her as an outsider to her artistic and socio-political contexts.

Bretonian Surrealism encompassed a longstanding fascination with Egypt, as declared in the text "La Sortie d'Égypte" by René Alleau, which articulated the Surrealist identification with the "Orient" and Egyptian

[1] Maria Golia, *Photography and Egypt* (London: Reaktion Books, 2009), 7.
[2] Carolyn Burke, *Lee Miller: A Life* (New York: Knopf, 2005), 160.
[3] Lee Miller Archives (LMA), Lee Miller, letter to Roland Penrose, 6 January 1939.
[4] Patricia Allmer, *Lee Miller: Photography, Surrealism and Beyond* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 122.
[5] Burke, *Lee Miller*, 157.

mythology. Despite their solidarity with political and cultural "Otherness", the Surrealists internalised the dichotomy of imagination and rationalism, which corresponded with the "Orient" and "Occident". While Miller's Surrealism would have been informed by such dualisms, given her earlier involvement with Parisian avant-gardism in the 1920s, she inadvertently disrupted these binaries during her time in Egypt, coinciding with the Surrealist remapping of the world in *The Surrealist Map of the World* (1929), published in the Belgian periodical *Variétés*. This global turn was charted by a constellation of international centres of Surrealism including in Britain and Egypt, both of which Miller was affiliated with during the 1930s. These nations were also tethered to one another through their colonial histories: Egypt was a veiled protectorate of Britain, which was met with the revolutionary sentiment of Egypt's wing of Surrealism, *Art et Liberté* (1938–48).

Navigating these artistic and socio-political landscapes, this chapter focuses on Miller's unique portrait of Egypt, painted both as an active cultural agent in her independent artistic practice, and in collisions with other Surrealist artists and networks. Through a careful curation of Miller's works, two aspects of her Egyptian oeuvre are explored: her photographs of monuments, and those of ruins, all while highlighting Miller's seminal role in traversing British and Egyptian Surrealism—or as a *flâneuse des deux mondes.* The final section reconsiders these photographs as documents in visual and literary cultures, exploring how they relate to the new lines of cross-cultural affiliation established by Georges Bataille's Surrealist journal *Documents* (1929–30), to propose an alternative frame for viewing Miller's Egypt.

I. Monuments

In Luis Buñuel's Surrealist film *The Phantom of Liberty* (1974), a French couple make sounds of arousal and disgust while looking at a series of postcards, urging the audience to assume these are pornographic, until it is revealed that they are instead holding representations of nineteenth-century monuments and sacred sites. Here Buñuel satirically conflates pornography and tourism to tease out the long association between travel, fetish and the taboo. Although the term "fetish" has a disputed etymology, Dawn Adès has traced its "exotic" origins to the pidgin *fetisso,* from encounters between Africans and Europeans in the sixteenth century, which

itself evolved from the Portuguese *fetiço* meaning "charm".[6] These obscure origins, Adès argues, set out fetishism's job "to signal error, excess, difference and deviation"; meanwhile, the term "monument" remains strongly rooted in its Latin etymological ancestry, designating edifices of history and civilisation, and often coded as masculine or Phallic.[7] Miller's photographs occupy this liminal, transformative space between fetish and monument in their tissue of Surrealist and Orientalist quotations, which work to transfigure Egypt's monuments into fetishized objects of cultural and historical desire.

Much like Buñuel's filmic sequence, Miller's artmaking in Egypt displayed a wider interest in the travel postcard's fetishization of the monument. Miller's desert expeditions took her to the monasteries on the Sinai Peninsula and Wadi Natrun, recorded in a series of photographs including *Domes of the Church of the Virgin, Al-Adhra* (c. 1936).[8] In this close-up shot of the twin domes of the fourth-century Deir el Soriano monastery, Miller positioned angles, shadows and curves to lead the eye diagonally to the dome on the bell tower in the background. In *The Monasteries of Deir Simon and Deir Barnabus* (1938) Miller switches to a high-angle shot to transform the architectural forms into a desertscape, so that the buildings instead appear as "vessels riding at anchor in the ocean of sand".[9] In both photographs, the viewer is deprived of an orienting perspective of the building: the perspective one might expect in a postcard or tourist snapshot.

For film historian Thomas Elsaesser, the act of sending and collecting postcards makes the postcard a "commodity not so much bought and sold as endowing its decontextualized monumental presence with the potency of a fetish or totem".[10] Miller relished this fetishistic aspect of circulating

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[6] Dawn Adès, "Surrealism: Fetishism's Job", in *Fetishism: Visualising Power and Desire*, ed. Anthony Shelton (London: Southbank Centre Publications, 1995), 67.

[7] Ades, "Surrealism: Fetishism's Job", 67.

[8] LMA, Lee Miller, *Domes of the Church of the Virgin, Al-Adhra*, c. 1936. Last accessed September 25, 2021, https://www.leemiller.co.uk/media/t3Ohdbgs2VwSHgX9B1dX7A..a?ts=0BQanjK3CAb5ROF0iOEtmSCt639vRUc4Moe8R04Uxhw.a

[9] LMA, Lee Miller, *The Monasteries of Deir Simon and Deir Barnabus*, 1938. Last accessed September 25, 2021, https://www.leemiller.co.uk/media/Lee-s-desert-expeditions-took-her-to-these-monasteries-in-their-fearsome-isolation-on-the-Sinai-peninsular-The-ship-lik/yz6o5ijmpPbfvPz_648fRA...a?ts=1IerZrAshNnpRgA6Pc7Oiw..a ; Mark Haworth-Booth, *The Art of Lee Miller* (London: V&A Publications, 2007), 124.

[10] Thomas Elsaesser, "The Architectural Postcard: Photography, Cinema and Modernist Mass Media", *Grey Room*, vol. 70 (2018): 87.

postcards, which imparts both the aura of both the monument and the postcard's sender. Miller used postcards to maintain contact with British Surrealists including Eileen Agar, who sent Miller a postcard of "a diorama of Cornish China Clay Quarry" in 1937, and Miller's long-distance lover, Roland Penrose. Miller mentioned that Penrose's "collages are on [her] bedroom wall […] and they are brilliant like jewels".[11] On a trip to Mougins, France with other fellow Surrealists in the summer of 1937, Miller and Penrose started to use postcards in collages for the first time, resulting in works such as *Untitled* (1937). Here Miller flips a postcard of the Côte d'Azur vertically to anthropomorphise the landscape, and places it alongside a clipping of her photographic portrait *Eileen Agar at the Royal Pavilion* (1937).[12] In Miller's and Penrose's shared practice, the everyday postcard was often flipped, cut, repeated, and combined with Surrealist textural techniques of decalcomania to disorient the postcard's scene, and literally launch an attack on the "picture-postcard" representation of monuments.

Meanwhile, the ancient monastic buildings photographed by Miller take inspiration from the white-walled buildings of Le Corbusier's International Style, as a monument to Modernism.[13] The last issue of French *Vogue* Miller reportedly read in Paris before leaving for New York in 1932 featured a Paris roof garden designed by Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret and its combination of lush foliage and stark white geometry is echoed in the silhouetted, abstract forms in *The Monasteries of Deir Simon and Deir Barnabus.* Jean de Maisonseul, who accompanied Le Corbusier in Algiers, recounts that he would purchase postcards of "*indigènes nues* in an oriental décor", which prompted preparatory drawings for his monumental mural of three women in *Grafitte à Cap-Martin* (1938).[14] Le Corbusier painted the mural unbeknownst to the owner of the house, Eileen Gray, inciting Beatriz Colomina's argument that his "fetishization of Algerian women is consistent with his abuse of Eileen Gray", by violently trespassing her walls.[15]

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[11] LMA, Lee Miller, letter to Roland Penrose, 9 November 1937.

[12] LMA, Lee Miller, *Eileen Agar at the Royal Pavilion*, 1937. Last accessed September 25, 2021, https://www.leemiller.co.uk/media/Agar-was-a-British-Surrealist-painter-and-a-friend-of-Penrose-s-The-bulge-on-her-abdomen-is-formed-by-her-camera-When/qpTUFmpEKfFobA8Zhb7whg...a?ts=_LYFCbEe7hv0FZ4gQVY5nrQVjfVrSRtQy GiiYCRgF 2g.a.

[13] See Henry-Russell Hitchcock, *The International Style* (London: W.W. Norton, 1995).

[14] Zeynep Çelik, "Le Corbusier, Orientalism, Colonialism", *Assemblage*, no. 17 (1992): 72.

[15] Beatriz Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1994), 88.

Le Corbusier's "graffiti" is part of a wider history of Orientalist image-making which constructs the feminised space as a projection of masculine, fetishistic desire. In an act of reterritorialization, Miller colonised the walls of the Bey family mansion in Dokki, Cairo in her artful hanging of "beautiful Picasso etchings" in the front hall, and a "big painting by Man Ray" in the dining room where she hosted Surrealist dinner parties.[16] Miller further reconceptualised architectural space as feminine in her evocation of the female form in the very monuments which excluded women. In *Domes of the Church of the Virgin, Al-Adhra,* for example, the twin domes anamorphically shift into breast-like forms, anthropomorphising the spiritual architecture into the "present-absent ghost image of a nude".[17] Miller proudly transgressed such exclusive spaces as a Western woman who could move "freely" between the *haremlik* and the male-dominated reception rooms downstairs. Miller exoticized her role vis-à-vis the "harem wives", by recounting how she "became their Scheherazade, telling them stories which were as fantastic to them as the Arabian nights were to [her]".[18] In occupying a specifically "female Orientalist gaze" which Reina Lewis deems "a threat to […] absolute difference", perhaps Miller's Orientalist narrative invokes art-historical feminised visions of the *harem* which were domesticated as the *haremlik,* such as that of French Orientalist painter Henriette Browne.[19]

In the utmost act of self-mythologization, Miller transforms herself into the mythical creature of the sphinx in *Self-Portrait with Sphinxes* (1940) (fig. 5-1).[20] This was the first photograph Miller took upon her return from Egypt, borrowing props from the *Vogue* studio in London to depict herself positioned amongst the sphinxes typical of a kitsch Orientalism in their fusion of Egyptian sculpture with *beaux-arts* figures. In another variation, which uses a high-angle shot, Miller is shown in a dream-like state with her eyes closed, caressing the sculptures as fetish objects.[21] Although Miller

[16] LMA, Lee Miller, letter to Roland Penrose, 9 November 1937; letter to Roland Penrose, 9 March 1938.
[17] Katharine Conley, *Surrealist Ghostliness* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2013), 91–118.
[18] Burke, *Lee Miller*, 160.
[19] Reina Lewis, *Gendering Orientalism: Race, Femininity, and Representation* (London: Routledge, 1996) 251.
[20] LMA, Lee Miller, *Self-Portrait with Sphinxes*, 1940. Last accessed September 25, 2021, https://www.leemiller.co.uk/media/q3k4kKZsjkhwLi3NA8W7cA..a?ts=S6shjsQtKRKeUDDvL2s33fKKBESlCxvO2iTqxSkggxc.a.
[21] LMA, Lee Miller, *Lee Miller, Self-Portrait with Sphinxes*, 1940. Last accessed September 25, 2021,

initially appears to be enacting an Orientalist fantasy as she clutches the sphinxes, presenting them like spoils, she is most likely engaging with the representation of the sphinx within Surrealism. The sphinx featured in another Surrealist self-portrait painted a year later by Leonor Fini: *The Shepherdess of the Sphinxes* (1941). Here Fini depicts herself as a commanding *femme fatale*-type shepherdess ruling over a harem of sphinxes. While their men Surrealist counterparts adopted the sphinx as monstrous threat—in line with psychoanalysis or Greek mythology—Miller and Fini favour the sphinx of Egyptian mythology as guardian of temples of the Nile Valley, to expand "the sphinx's mythology for Surrealism so that the feminine denotes humanism rather than the simple threat of death".[22] As Marina Warner notes in *Monuments and Maidens* (1985), "monuments […] are for rent, and the myths are acquiring new tellers for new listeners".[23] By re-inscribing the sphinx myth back into Surrealism and depicting woman as monument, they "have claimed squatter's rights to the public signs which have predicated their meaning on the female form".[24]

II. Ruins

> I came back from Luxor by plane on Tuesday. It was one of those depressing Egyptian gray days when the world seems to have ended, and one senses the preoccupation of this country with death—after all it is just tombs, ruins, and embalmed bodies—and endless sameness. Generations of people, dead people doing exactly the same thing, in the same way—it glooms me, terribly.
>
> —Lee Miller, letter to Roland Penrose, 7 January 1938.

In the above letter, Miller evocatively describes Egyptian art as deeply entrenched in its "gray" climes, "generations of people" and history "of tombs, ruins and embalmed bodies". This tradition harks back to Giorgio Vasari's humanistic revival in *Le Vite* (1550), where he invokes theories of the four humours in medically charged terms such as "complexion" and "humour" to characterise artistic pathological tendencies and temperaments. Of the four prevailing humours, Vasari favoured the passionate and

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https://www.leemiller.co.uk/media/Xqw1i2ifbu9YmeMkVHohWg..a?ts=iQq9Yl2AeOHLDSBy0Drf0fIrfiHEYT3n5ds7Hs_LpAA.a.

[22] Alyce Mahon, "La Feminité triomphante: Surrealism, Leonor Fini, and the Sphinx", *Dada/Surrealism*, no. 19 (2013): 5.

[23] Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form* (London: Picador, 1987), 333.

[24] Warner, "La Feminité triomphante", 333.

voluptuary tendencies of sanguinity; meanwhile Miller associates Egypt to melancholia's gloomy disposition. It must be noted that in *Manifeste du Surréalisme* (1924) Breton specifically located the "marvellous" in "romantic *ruins*" as "capable of affecting the human sensibility" so that we become "painfully afflicted by them".[25] For Breton, natural and human ruin therefore created a *beauté convulsive* and *explosante fixe*, as epitomised by Man Ray's photographs which are used to outline these Bretonian ideas in Breton's later work *L'Amour Fou* (1937). In her photographs of ruins, Miller may be alluding to these Surrealist texts or even more closely to the reputation of Man Ray as "one who attempts to bring the cadaver back to life, the exorcist wandering among the sepulchres of the world".[26]

Schulman asserts that in "Miller's photographic art, she never felt more alive than when she was surrounded by death", and while Schulman embellishes her fervour for photographing tombs and ruins, he rightly discerns an existential tone in these works.[27] Miller's *Egyptian Pillars* (c. 1936), for example, was photographed at a site signifying death itself: the Saqqara necropolis in Memphis, Egypt.[28] By using a red filter on her Rolleiflex camera, Miller achieved dramatic chiaroscuro in her composition where three pallid pillars have been silhouetted against a jet-black sky. Emerging among ancient architectural remains and punctuating the horizon, these pillars summon Roland Barthes' notion of the *punctum*: the compelling detail of a photograph, which "rises from the scene, shoots out at it like an arrow, and pierces [the spectator]".[29] The pillars are also doubled by their shadows which conjure absences, intrinsic to the very premise of the necropolis.

The Procession (1937) depicts abstract wavering lines in the shore of the Red Sea, smudged by a series of webbed footprints made by a "procession" of birds in a sepulchral reference to the friezes of figures painted on the

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[25] André Breton, "Manifesto of Surrealism", in *Manifestoes of Surrealism,* trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 16.

[26] Janus, *Man Ray: Photographs, Paintings, Objects* (London: W.W. Norton, 1997), 14.

[27] Peter Schulman, "Sands of Desire: The Creative Restlessness of Lee Miller's Egyptian Period", *Miranda*, no. 14 (2017): 2.

[28] LMA, Lee Miller, *Egyptian Pillars,* c. 1936. Last accessed September 25, 2021, https://www.leemiller.co.uk/media/Near-the-Step-Pyramid-of-Djoser-Zoser-/GDBgXxsegaLFq3xzT7DLdw..a?ts=WHAXD3G-ix7bcrST4NUm6WI_VwFQZv77E1MbRcpqft4.a.

[29] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Vintage, 1993), 26.

walls of Ancient Egyptian tombs.[30] Furthermore, the animated ripples in the sand contrast with the haunted lack of inhabitation which, like the shadows in *Egyptian Pillars*, points to absences, exemplifying Susan Sontag's description of the photograph as "a trace, something directly stencilled off the real, like a footprint or a death mask".[31] Sontag narrates a phenomenon of indexicality, and indeed, Miller's photographs often bear the contagious imprint of their subjects: her own cast shadow in *Egyptian Pillars* or the bodily ghostly presence evoked in Katharine Conley's description of *The Procession* as "almost folded, like sheets on an unmade bed".[32] As William H. Fox Talbot noted the camera's aptitude for recording the "injuries of time", so too did Barthes explore "photography not as a question […] but as a wound".[33] As well as viewing these photographs as funerary documents which embalm the index, these readings point to Miller's visceral evocation of the ruin as a site of trauma.

Writing on depression and melancholia in Hans Holbein's *The Body of the Dead Christ in the Tomb* (1520–22), Julia Kristeva highlights the role of repression in the genesis of melancholia. In stating that "melancholia does assert itself in times of crisis", Kristeva argues that periods of crisis are particularly conducive to black moods, such as those described in Miller's letter. This triangulation of socio-political upheaval, melancholia and representation resonates with Miller's photographs which are not only reflective of an inner haunting, as inferred by Schulman and Conley, but also reverberate with the melancholic and revolutionary sentiments of *Art et Liberté*.[34] Founded by Cairo-based artists and writers Georges Henein, Kamel and Younane El-Telmisany, *Art et Liberté* proposed an adaptation of Surrealism to summon the absurd and to generate revolution in their art and exhibitions mounted between 1938 and 1948. Miller became engaged with *Art et Liberté* during her last three years in Cairo, as chronicled in her letters to Penrose where they were painted as a "gang of misfits […] starting a semi-surrealist magazine", and she later included herself in this never-realised project.[35] Much as Miller felt estranged in Egypt from the international avant-garde by finding herself surrounded by "people […]

[30] LMA, Lee Miller, *The Procession*, c. 1937. Last accessed September 25, 2021, https://www.leemiller.co.uk/media/31tB8NfLmpPshFcqG5Z9w..a?ts=N4K679VJn5KuvPL87ajQ6S9wNByLLtFbNj4LKMGToug.a.

[31] Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London: Penguin, 2008), 114.

[32] Conley, *Surrealist Ghostliness*, 104.

[33] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 21.

[34] Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* (New York: Columbia University Press,1992), 8.

[35] LMA, Lee Miller, letter to Roland Penrose, 30 January 1939.

who have never seen or heard of modern pictures", likewise members of *Art et Liberté* experienced feelings of alienation from contemporary art exhibitions held by Prince Youssef Kamel's *Société des Amis de l'Art* at the annual *Salon du Caire*.[36] The past, regenerated, appeared as an iconographic source for these state-endorsed projects, which favoured the Neo-Pharaonic style of works such as Mahmoud Moukhtar's colossal modernist public sculpture *Egypt's Awakening* (1928).

Miller and *Art et Liberté* instead independently photographed Egypt's fallen and ruinous Pharaonic monuments to liberate art from this nationalist agenda. A lesser-known set of Miller's contact prints show her repeated portrayal of the statue of Rameses II as a defeated figure in profile lying down, with its granite surface scarified by cast shadows.[37] This image strikingly prefigures a later photograph taken during The Blitz by Miller, *Revenge on Culture* (1941), in which a fallen, destroyed angel, violently cropped at its head by a thick black steel rod, is framed.[38] In *Al-Risāla* (1939), Telmisany wrote that "pharaonic art is Surrealism [and] much of Coptic art is Surrealist", thus claiming a Surrealist genealogy in Egypt for *Art et Liberté*.[39] Rather than signifying a melancholic discourse of Coptic Pharaonic nostalgia, their use of Pharaonic and Coptic symbolism implicated the Egyptian body politic plagued with economic and social injustice, and Miller herself described how "the political situation [was] in more than the usual muddle".[40] By representing the ruin as a site of social decay and evoking base materialism in artefacts, such images resonate with a Bataillean, rather than Bretonian, notion of Surrealism. Most explicit is *L'Étreinte* (1940) by Idabel, the collaboration of photographer Ida Kar and her husband Edmond Belali, in which rotting bones of an animal carcass uncannily resemble the crumbling forms of a Pharaonic colonnade. Like Eli Lotar's photographs of abattoirs, reproduced in *Documents,* Idabel combined horror with the banal, death with the monumental, in their image titled "L'Étreinte" ("The Embrace"), playing on Freudian notions of Eros and Thanatos.

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[36] LMA, Lee Miller, letter to Roland Penrose, 9 March 1938.
[37] LMA, *Ramses II Memphis*, Lee Miller, photographic contact sheet: E 0251 – 0262.
[38] LMA, Lee Miller, *Revenge on Culture,* 1940. Last accessed September 25, 2021, https://www.leemiller.co.uk/media/The-title-helped-to-make-this-one-of-Lee-s-strongest-statements-about-the-effects-of-the-bombs-on-England-It-was-publis/nE15NUZMp4KWdyhOrGw0fA..a?ts=r5aCTRYUKTUoq7cdMyQStg..a.
[39] Kamel El-Telmisany, "Hawl al-fann al-munhatt" ["About Degenerate Art"], *Al-Risāla*, no. 321 (August 1939): 1702.
[40] LMA, Lee Miller, letter to Roland Penrose, 28 November 1937.

While the noun "ruin" conjures the image of ancient remains, it is also useful to consider the Egyptian Surrealists' borrowing of its counterpart verb, "to ruin", in their defiant treatment of monuments and ruins. Miller uses the Surrealist concept of *dépaysement* ("displacement") in her photograph *Man Standing in Front of Sphinx* (1936) in which an unidentified man is staged as the mirror image of the Sphinx, shot from its ruinous, dilapidated side rather than head-on as a triumphant, glorified monument.[41] Miller's photographs reference, and often unravel, conventions of colonial representation perhaps in autoreferential critique of her territorialising impulse as a Western photographer. In the Orientalist tradition, Egypt was often constructed as ruin or archaeological site, as photographers wielded the camera as a tool for salvation, in "an attempt to preserve the exotic by fixing it into a photographic icon".[42] This Western documentary impulse pervaded Napoleon's encyclopaedic account *Description de l'Égypte* (1809–21), which comprised over three thousand illustrations recording ancient Egyptian ruins, landscapes and artefacts. While canonical representations depicted landscape as panorama in order to set up a "picture-world set apart from its observer", Miller instead shot a restricted view of the Sphinx, while intimately enveloping the viewer with cast shadows in the foreground.[43]

Although Miller's *trompe l'oeil* technique undermines colonial panoramic vision, it rather attaches itself to stereoscopy, which was regularly practiced by her father, Theodore Miller, an amateur photographer. English scientist Charles Wheatstone invented and coined the stereoscope, meaning "to see solids", referring to its ability to transform naturalistic qualities into a sublimity of the real, becoming "a miniaturised optical theatre".[44] Writing on scale and Egyptian ruins, Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby has argued that stereoscopic views "permit us to imagine not just a bodily relationship to its parts but a virtual experience of its size", a practice which Miller overthrows in her disproportionate approximation of the similarly-sized figure and

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[41] LMA, Lee Miller, *Man Standing in Front of Sphinx*, 1936. Last accessed September 25, 2021, https://www.leemiller.co.uk/media/-oI0V78W0DUsHoCLsyjkmQ..a?ts=ZJJERgmWvEOhxG_daWCZZPqHOEnc1d SA4tdpmGWm1V4.a.

[42] Ali Behdad, *Photography's Orientalism: New Essays on Colonial Representation* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2013), 22.

[43] Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 23.

[44] Peter Osborne, *Travelling Light: Photograph, Travel and Visual Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 22.

Sphinx.[45] The picture's jarring sense of scale is heightened by the sticks held by the figure as deixis, which literally point to the Sphinx as though it is a diagram to be mapped and dissected in a "colonising autopsy".[46] A contact sheet of photographs from 1945 by the Hungarian-Jewish photographer and affiliate of *Art et Liberté*, Étienne Sved, similarly stages a wistful, outmatched encounter between humans and Colossi. Sved confronts the body parts of ancient Egyptian sculptural ruins with their human equivalents to not only dislocate scale, but also to make the photographs inhabited. While photographs tended to depopulate the Orient to participate in a form of static monumentalism and invoke colonial nostalgia, both Miller and Sved celebrate "the might of human action […] that made these monuments exist in the first place", by inserting the human into their staging of ruins.[47]

III. Monuments, Ruins and the Document

When writing on the distinction between photography as art and photography as document, Sontag identifies an inherent overlap, arguing that "both are logical extensions of what photography means: note-taking on, potentially, everything in the world, from every possible angle".[48] Sontag's description conjures the Bataillean blurring of conventional boundaries between photograph and document—as well as between ethnography and Surrealism, and image and text—which were "collected" in *Documents*, to present "a kind of ethnographic display, a playful museum".[49] This cross-generic ambition brought together dissident Surrealists, including Miller, who was introduced by Man Ray to artists associated with Bataille and *Documents* in the 1920s, such as the American author William Seabrook.[50] By reinterpreting the photograph as document in the Bataillean sense, this section will finally consider Miller's production

[45] Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby, "Two or Three Dimensions? Scale, Photography and Egypt's Pyramids" in *Photography's Orientalism*, 126.
[46] Derek Gregory, "Emperors of the Gaze: Photographic Practices and Productions of Space in Egypt" in *Picturing Place: Photography and the Geographical Imagination*, ed. Joan M. Schwartz and James R. Ryan (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003), 207.
[47] Sam Bardaouil, *Surrealism in Egypt: Modernism and the Art and Liberty Group*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017), 181.
[48] Sontag, *On Photography*, 6.
[49] James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Surrealism", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 23 (1981): 550.
[50] See Janine Mileaf, "Between You and Me: Man Ray's Object to be Destroyed", *Art Journal*, vol. 63 (2004): 5–23.

and circulation of photographic documents, both as an expatriate and a collaborator of British Surrealism and *Art et Liberté*.

In her representations of monuments and ruins in Egypt, Miller took the photograph as document to be central to the ethnographic concerns of Surrealism in its re-categorisation of the everyday. James Clifford notably linked modern ethnography to Surrealism, claiming that in both, "reality is no longer a given, a natural, a familiar environment" and therefore "the self, cut loose from its attachments, must discover meaning where it may".[51] While Clifford's utopian construct of "Ethnographic Surrealism" invokes Surrealism's study of other cultures, his consideration of its parallel term "Surrealist Ethnography" extends this notion to consider documents of "the self" within this unfamiliar context. Miller's *From the Top of the Great Pyramid* (1937) is an example of "Surrealist Ethnography" as Miller appears at the peak as an invisible shadow, present at the making of the picture but absent from the image itself so that "her presence-absence […] becomes a kind of self-portrait".[52] Miller represents the pyramid only indirectly, as an index of a shadow cast over the colonised land, in an auto-representation of the imperialist gaze which calls to mind Benjamin's assertion that "there is no document of civilisation which is not at the same time a document of barbarism".[53] Michel Leiris' diaristic account of his expedition to Sub-Saharan Africa, *L'Afrique fantôme* (1934), takes a polymorphous tone which is at once ethnographic, intimate and oneiric in the interest of creating not only a document of Dogon culture, but also a document of himself. Much as Miller self-referentially acknowledges the colonising impulse in her photograph, so too does Ian Walker note in a response to Clifford's essay on Ethnographic Surrealism that Leiris has produced "a complex celebration of Otherness that at the same suggests its own self-critique".[54] Miller would have been familiar with Leiris' work through her Bataillean connections, and continued to be indirectly involved with other ethnographic projects such as the Mass-Observation Group, which intersected with British Surrealism during the 1930s.

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[51] Clifford, "On Ethnographic Surrealism", 541.

[52] LMA, Lee Miller, *From the Top of the Great* Pyramid, 1937. Last accessed September 25, 2021, https://www.leemiller.co.uk/media/The-shadow-of-the-Great-Pyramid-stretches-over-the-city-below-When-Lee-Miller-first-moved-to-Egypt-in-1934-with-her-/EzyzuzQGcLwftRYvgI72Qg...a?ts=8U0d5OHe6S-MXbfPL7-tPg..a ; Allmer, *Lee Miller*, 129.

[53] Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History", in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (London: Fontana, 1992), 256.

[54] Ian Walker, "Phantom Africa: Photography between Surrealism and Ethnography", *Cahiers d'Études Africaines*, vol. 37 (1997), 651.

Etymologically rooted in the Latin *documentum*, meaning "written instruction", the document has textual, as well as ethnographic, connotations. A recurring theme in Miller's photographic oeuvre is her interest in documenting textual surfaces, which can be traced back to her time in Egypt. *Architectural View, Light and Shade on Ruins* (1938) is one of many photographs by Miller that depicts columns, wall panels and ruined doorways in Luxor inscribed with Egyptian hieroglyphs.[55] In purely Surrealist terms, these surfaces evoke automatism in both the texture's potential for rubbing or *frottage*, which Miller was practising in Egypt, and in the layers of decay which create new meanings in an automatic process. Allmer's reading of Miller's "signscapes" as an attack on Nazi ideological conceptions of art and memory cites her 1945 photographs of advertisements from Germany to demonstrate how "these ruined words signify not grandeur but decay and dissolution".[56] However, Allmer's consideration of the ruined textual surface is belated and only applied to recognisable signifiers; Miller had in fact been versed in anti-Fascist expressions from the 1930s via her artistic milieu in both Egypt and Britain. In a letter to Penrose in 1939, Miller recounted the "recent Fascist menace" in Egypt referring to a rise in local totalitarian ideologies which designated avant-garde art as *Entartete Kunst* and manifested into hegemony over the arts.[57]

Following a lecture given by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti in Cairo as a delegate of the Fascist government of Italy in March 1938, *Art et Liberté* stated their staunch opposition to any alignment of Fascism, nationalism and art. This commitment was penned in their founding manifesto *Long Live Degenerate Art* (1938), printed alongside a reproduction of Pablo Picasso's *Guernica* (1937). Picasso's image remained at the forefront of Miller's visual repertoire after she saw it on display in 1937 with Penrose, who had helped to organise its infamous world tour. Miller also encountered photographic documentation of *Guernica* in eight successive stages, taken by Dora Maar—who she met in the circles around Bataille—for *Cahiers d'art*. Miller went on to lend her copy to a member of *Art et Liberté*.[58] Furthermore, Miller's peers (including Picasso and Max Ernst) were included in the *Degenerate Art Exhibition* (1937), the Nazi counter-

[55] LMA, Lee Miller, *Architectural View, Light and Shade on Ruins*, 1938. Last accessed September 25, 2021, https://www.leemiller.co.uk/media/nKECO_9YNs7WZSNURZPF9Q..a?ts=qsv2OQL-MZTrLJhxgEo6ZQ..a.

[56] Allmer, *Intersections: Women Artists/Surrealism/Modernism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 211.

[57] LMA, Lee Miller, letter to Roland Penrose, 23 March 1939.

[58] LMA, Lee Miller, letter to Roland Penrose, 9 November 1937.

exhibition to *Great German Art*, which employed fragmentary signage in a propagandistic aim to disorient the visitor. The Other, which symbolises degeneracy itself in its implications of racial and cultural contamination, is evoked alongside textual decomposition in Miller's depictions of Egyptian hieroglyphs which are inscribed on crumbling ruins and further obscured by shadows. By studying these earlier photographic moments, Allmer's phrasing of "ruined surfaces" can be taken further to invoke the dynamising of these textual remains on the ruin itself to decompose Nazi aesthetics of mythology and monumentality. Such ideologies are encapsulated in Adolf Hitler's speech to the Nazi Party Congress in 1936 declaring, "what would be the Egyptian without Pyramids and temples […] no people lives longer than the documents of its civilisation".[59]

Christopher Pinney has written on anthropological engagements with photography as culture "objectified in visual and material representation, culture in other words as a form of 'writing'".[60] When elaborating on Pinney's notion of photography as a kind of "writing", it is important to consider how Miller's photographs of monuments and ruins doubled as travel documents. In a letter to Penrose from 1939, for example, Miller recounts her intent "to go on an eight-day tour of the oasis—at Bairam—", describing how she was "already studying the maps and the available literature", which gives an insight into how Miller would organise her desert expeditions with cartographic mapping and precision.[61] Miller's personal library favoured historical travel books depicting maps of various ancient, fallen civilisations and their now vanished territories, such as Charles W. Mead's *Old Civilisations of an Inca Land*, which whet her appetite to explore Egypt's ancient ruins. After Eloui-Bey bought a British car in 1935, Miller took frequent driving trips into the desert either alone or accompanied by scholars, including British diplomat and archaeology amateur Bernard Burrows, and English writer and poet Robin Fedden. These voyages led to a still relatively unknown partnership with Fedden, who reproduced some of Miller's Egyptian photographs in his travel books: *Syria and Lebanon* (1965) and *Egypt: Land of the Valley* (1977). Miller's photographs were unattributed by Fedden and used to accompany his redolent descriptions of Middle Eastern sites, monuments and people. This recalls Pinney in that Fedden problematically reconceptualised these images as extensions of his "writing": to be read, as well as looked upon. Miller was also involved in

[59] Adolf Hitler, "Address on Art and Politics", in *The Speeches of Adolf Hitler, Volume I*, ed. Norman H. Baynes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1942), 573.
[60] Christopher Pinney, *Photography and Anthropology* (London: Reaktion Books, 2011), 25.
[61] LMA, Lee Miller, letter to Roland Penrose, 6 January 1939.

Penrose's *The Road is Wider Than Long* (1939), comprising a hybrid of concrete poetry and photographs from their trip to the Balkans in the summer of 1938 in the form of an unconventional travel book and cryptic love letter to Miller. Although the book was made by and attributed to Penrose, like Fedden's novels, "the question of the book's authorship slides around a little", as pointed out by Walker who maintains that the photographs are most likely collaborative between Miller and Penrose.[62]

It is finally important to consider the relevance of the etymological origin of "document" for my reading of Miller's Egyptian work. The term also derives from the Latin *docere* meaning "to teach", which can be related to the mutual, didactic encounters between British Surrealism and *Art et Liberté*. In her letters to Penrose, Miller chronicles her strengthening ties to *Art et Liberté*, developing an educative role as "lecturer" by disseminating Surrealist material sent by Penrose, and mentions that by 1938 she had "lent [her] surrealistic library to everyone in town and they are beginning to have ideas on the subject".[63] Another important vehicle in the transmission of literary ideas and photographic images between the Surrealist circles in Britain and Cairo was *London Bulletin,* the official magazine of the British Surrealists. This small, paperback magazine, with layouts on candy-coloured pages, "demanded to be read as forms of Surrealist collage".[64] Issue 13 (1939) expanded the international reach of the publication by printing a reproduction of the *Long Live Degenerate Art* manifesto in French and Arabic, with a preface written by Penrose titled "From Egypt". This reciprocal circulation of visual and political material was enabled by Miller, who asked "a couple of friends […] to look [Penrose] up at the Carlton—George Henein—Lucienne Saporta—Santini and Maria Riaz", when he visited Cairo in January 1939.[65]

A selection of Miller's photographs taken in Egypt featured over the years in *London Bulletin,* such as *Cock Rock* (1939) which was titled as *The Native* in Issue 18–20 (1940). The photograph was not only exotically retitled, but also decontextualized and reduced to its formal qualities in a double-page spread alongside the abstract forms of a woodcut print by English printmaker Stanley William Hayter and John Tunnard's *Fulcrum* (1939). This journalistic treatment of Miller's photograph also depoliticised

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[62] Ian Walker, *So Exotic, So Homemade: Surrealism, Englishness and Documentary Photography* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 87.
[63] LMA, Lee Miller, letter to Roland Penrose, 9 March 1938.
[64] Hilary Floe, "Miller and Surrealism in Print, Britain 1935–1945", in *Lee Miller and Surrealism in Britain*, ed. Eleanor Clayton (London: Lund Humphries, 2018), 92.
[65] LMA, Lee Miller, letter to Roland Penrose, 27 January 1939.

its evocations of the Siwa environs within the Western desert, which had long served as a creative pool for *Art et Liberté* after having become an arena for conflict such as the Senussi Campaign and other wartime operations in the twentieth century. Much as Miller incorporated these territorial implications in her photography, so too did the Egyptian Surrealists adapt European Surrealist practices imparted from Miller. Most notable is their attendance at Miller's house where they would perform "telepathy, and clairvoyance, with cards […] called Extra Sensory Perception".[66] Their derivation of the *époque des sommeils* took on a life of its own by evolving into Sufi incantation practice known as *dhikr,* where they would perform as whirling dervishes. These clairvoyant sessions would also transcend the walls of Miller's domicile to spill out into Cairo's citadel and their ateliers in the old Mamluk quarter, to tap into the "resounding chamber" of the unconscious, as evoked by Egyptian Surrealist Fouad Kamel in his poem which goes on to anthropomorphise the unconscious into a ruinous, human form: "this chamber has very high walls that transform into ruins and then to human fingers with bones protruding".[67]

Conclusion

"I've sheer depression, I've abandoned classifying my photographs and am just going to bring the whole lot to London in a suitcase", writes Miller in her last letter from Cairo to Penrose, before departing from Port Said in 1939 to join him in England, a suitcase of her photographs in tow.[68] During her time in Egypt, Miller assumed a seminal role in facilitating the dialogue between *Art et Liberté* and British Surrealism in their common search for a reworked version of Surrealism. By navigating the politics and aesthetics of these idiosyncratic Surrealist phenomena, Miller concurrently experienced a political and artistic awakening which manifested in her own Surrealist photographic practice. While the Egyptian and British Surrealists negotiated the local and international, Miller traversed the personal and political in her own revised expression of Surrealism. Mark Haworth-Booth has argued that Miller initially used her time in Egypt "as an opportunity not to photograph but to recover from photography", and her photography of monuments and ruins is perhaps symbolic of her recovery and recollection of former roles, lessons and experiences, all of which fed into her distinctive Surrealist style.

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[66] LMA, Lee Miller, letter to Roland Penrose, 23 March 1939.
[67] Fouad Kamel, "A Pain Waiting to Be Found", *Art et Liberté*, no. 2 (Cairo, 1939): 5.
[68] LMA, Lee Miller, letter to Roland Penrose, 3 January 1939.

[69] Miller's physical act of transporting photographs, from Egypt to England, also poetically describes the preservation of her photographic spirit from this crucial period, which would reverberate in the years to come as Miller increasingly engaged with the world on her own terms.

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[69] Haworth-Booth, *The Art of Lee Miller*, 123.

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CHAPTER SIX

"THIS DREADFUL MASTERPIECE": LEE MILLER, *GRIM GLORY* AND PHOTOGRAPHING THE BLITZ

JOSH ROSE

On the evening of 29 December 1940, an already shaken and battered London faced some of the most brutal aerial bombardment from German planes yet. Later referred to as the "second Great Fire of London", the East End and the central financial district were battered with nearly 130 tonnes of explosives dropped by 136 Luftwaffe bombers, hitting several Christopher Wren churches, including the iconic St. Paul's Cathedral.[1] In the aftermath, amidst the numerous fires, American journalist Ernie Pyle reported:

> For on that night, this old, old city—even though I must bite my tongue in shame for saying it—was the most beautiful sight I have ever seen. [...] Below us the Thames grew lighter, and all around below were the shadows—the dark shadows of buildings and bridges that formed the base of this dreadful masterpiece. [...] These things all went together to make the most hateful, most beautiful single scene I have ever known.[2]

This shameful contrast Pyle feels between the hate and beauty wrought by the bombing, likely unintentionally, veers into the realm of surrealism. Pyle's aesthetic revelation to uncontrollable, external, even horrifying conditions is one Surrealists often contemplated, and one we can imagine many Londoners struggled with during the period of German aerial bombardment known as the Blitz. Seeing beauty in devastation is not unique to Surrealism—the Romantic *sublime* comes to mind; what is unique is this

[1] Alan Jeffreys, *London at War 1939-1945: A Nation's Capital Survives* (Imperial War Museum, 2021), 72.
[2] Samuel Hynes, Anne Matthews, and Nancy Caldwell Sorel, *Reporting World War II: American Journalism, 1938-1946* (Library of America, 2001), 45-47.

sensibility as revelatory. This relates to André Breton's concept of *convulsive beauty*, although the act of discovering such moments in the "real world" is more directly relatable to three things: the Surrealists' love of found objects, the revelations made through *objective chance*, and even how such chance encounters can present subversive political and moral outrage. If average citizens and seasoned journalists were struggling with the Surrealist dichotomies of this new reality, what would a Surrealist do with this situation?

American expatriate and Surrealist photographer, Lee Miller, found herself in England on the eve of the war. Having left her husband in Egypt for Surrealist artist and collector Roland Penrose, by autumn 1939 she had moved in with Penrose at his home on Downshire Hill in London. She began offering her services at the offices of British *Vogue* (affectionately referred to as "Brogue"), earning the trust of editor Audrey Withers and further support from founder Condé Nast, eventually working on fashion shoots for the magazine.[3] When the bombings began in September 1940, Miller started spending the following days exploring the city and documenting the devastation with her camera. Twenty-two of these photographs were included in a collaborative book edited by Ernestine Carter and published in 1941 titled *Grim Glory*.[4] This body of work serves as an important bridge in Miller's oeuvre linking the Surrealist experiments of her Paris and Egyptian years to her photojournalism and reportage as *Vogue*'s war correspondent during the latter years of the war.[5] The longer the war stretched on, the more Miller felt a disconnect between her work at *Vogue* and her desire to photograph the war itself: in a 1942 letter to her parents she commented, "...it seems pretty silly to go on working on a frivolous paper like *Vogue*, but it's supposed to keep up morale [...] though it may be

[3] Ami Bouhassane, *Grim Glory: Lee Miller's Britain at War* (Unicorn Publishing Group, 2020), 18.

[4] Ernestine Carter, *Grim Glory: Pictures of Britain Under Fire* (Lund, Humphries, 1941). The book was also published in the United States by Scribner's and Sons under the title *Bloody But Unbowed*.

[5] Miller became accredited as a war correspondent at the very end of 1942, and much of her war correspondence was published in 1944-1945. For more on Miller's war correspondence, see Lee Miller and Antony Penrose (ed.), *Lee Miller's War: Photographer and Correspondent with the Allies in Europe, 1944-45* (Thames & Hudson, 2005). Also of interest are Lynn Hilditch, *Lee Miller, Photography, Surrealism and the Second World War: From Vogue to Dachau* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018) and Hilary Roberts (Curator), *Lee Miller: A Woman's War* (Thames & Hudson in Partnership with IWM, Imperial War Museums, 2015).

Fig. 6-1: Photographer unknown, Ernestine Carter (left) and Lee Miller (right) show a police officer their photographer's permit, from *Grim Glory*, c. 1940. © Lee Miller Archives, England 2021. All rights reserved. leemiller.co.uk.

good for the country's morale it's hell on mine". A further hint of Miller's interest in being able to document the war directly is the photograph of her and Carter included on the "Publisher's Note" page of Grim Glory (fig 6-1): while showing a police officer their photographer's permit, Carter, on the left, wears a fashionable fur coat, high heels, and designer hat while Miller, on the right, wears work clothes, boots, and a hat that looks similar to those worn by servicemen. Thus, Miller's Blitz photographs are a critical example of her development as a surrealist and in applying Surrealist concepts and approaches to war-time documentation. However, before exploring the specifics of Miller's approach, it is helpful to first explore the ways the Blitz was photographed as a "surreal" environment.

Popular and Practical Surrealist Depictions of the Blitz

As Pyle's commentary suggests, it must have been difficult for anyone living through the aerial bombardment of 1940-1941 to not react to the horrors and unnatural quality of the devastation in a multitudinous way. As evident in *Grim Glory*, photographers captured these events in a variety of ways, ranging from the straightforwardly documentary—such as a distant and dramatic view of firefighters putting out flames roaring from a building—to the personal—such as an intimate image of an Air Raid Warden drinking a cup of tea and writing in a notebook.[6] Such images are striking, certainly, yet do not fully explore these events in a Surrealistic way. Yet, there is one example from *Grim Glory* that does attempt to capture the bombings with an obvious stylistic quality of "otherworldliness", or what might be considered a form of *popular Surrealism*.

Image 36 in the book is an evocative view of the two towers of St. Paul's cathedral. The towers are hazily revealed through a battered, dilapidated archway as smoke billows from the ground framing the miraculously surviving edifice of Christopher Wren's church. The ruined archway and the smoke, the twisted forms in the foreground against the stalwart upright church artifice in the distance...these qualities combine to present an image that seems like it's an unnatural location, an alternate realm out of a fairy tale or apocalyptic story. While a photograph, the image feels painterly, adding to the sense of unreality but one that feels removed from the everyday, the normal. The image is credited to Planet News Ltd., but is

[6] Both images are from *Grim Glory*: the firefighting image is 32 (credited to London News Agency Photos Ltd.) and the warden image is 24 (credited to Film Unit). Except for Miller's photographs, the credits throughout the book are assigned to the news agencies or other publishing firms rather than individual photographers.

nearly identical to photographs of the same scene by fashion photographer and socialite Cecil Beaton, although likely not his: in his published diaries, Beaton recounted while photographing the scene a "press photographer" was watching him and later came upon this same photographer recreating the photograph from the same vantage point.[7] Regardless, Beaton prized this photograph and used variations of it several times including a more distant view used as the frontispiece to his May 1941 book *History Under Fire* and as the cover and an interior plate in his 1944 book *British Photographers*.[8] Indeed, the sepia-tone to the version included in this latter book adds a veneer of age to the image, giving it a further sense of being "unreal" through a false historical distance, despite it documenting a moment from three years prior (fig. 6-2).

It is helpful to focus on Beaton, because not only did he and Miller know one another but were in many ways rivals. Like Miller, Beaton worked at Vogue and was familiar with artistic circles; similarly, both would go on to serve as official war correspondents, Miller reporting from western Allied forces while Beaton reported from North Africa. Moreover, the two were often in competition for fashion assignments when Miller arrived in London. Ami Bouhassane has recounted how Beaton was asked by Vogue editor Audrey Withers to also photograph a model and outfit against a

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[7] "We went to St Paul's to offer our prayers for its miraculous preservation. Near the cathedral is a shop that has been burnt unrecognizably; in fact, all that remains is an arch that looks like a vista in the ruins of Rome. Through the arch could be seen, rising mysteriously from the splintered masonry and smoke, the twin towers of the cathedral. It was necessary to squat to get the archway framing the picture. I squatted. A Press photographer watched me and, when I gave him a surly look, slunk away. When I returned from photographing another church, he was back, squatting and clicking in the same spot as I had been. Returning from lunch with my publisher, my morning's pictures still undeveloped in my overcoat pocket, I found the Press photographer's picture was already on the front page of the Evening News". Cecil Beaton, *The Years Between 1939-44: Cecil Beaton's Diaries* (Sapere Books, 2018), 68-69, Kindle.

[8] Beaton reproduced this image several times, albeit with variations. For instance, the frontispiece used in *History Under Fire* is cropped from a further distance, showing more of the shell of the structure the archway is from, with the caption "The Western Campanili of St. Paul's Cathedral, seen through a Victorian shop-front". Yet another variation of the scene, although most similar to the *Grim Glory* photograph, was used on the cover and in a plate from Beaton's 1944 book *British Photographers* (the smoke fills more of the middle distance than in the *Grim Glory* photograph). Cecil Beaton and James Pope-Hennessy, *History Under Fire: 52 Photographs of Air Raid Damage to London Buildings, 1940-41* (B. T. Batsford Limited, 1941) and Cecil Beaton, *British Photographers* (W. Collins, 1944).

Fig. 6-2: Cecil Beaton, *St. Paul's, London*, 1941. © Imperial War Museum (MH 2718).

different backdrop that Miller had already worked on. Hence, Beaton's fantastical view of St. Paul's through the smoke and destruction (and the press photographer he claims he inspired) can be considered a more mundane and populist presentation of "Surrealism"—even if not defined as such—as it visually evokes an unbelievable reality through photography. In other words, it makes reality unreal. By contrast, Miller's photographs for Grim Glory are like many Surrealist photographs: stark and evocative portrayals

Fig. 6-3: Lee Miller, *Burlington Arcade*, from *Grim Glory*, c. 1940. © Lee Miller Archives, England 2021. All rights reserved. leemiller.co.uk.

of the oddities of bombing. Like other Surrealist photographers, especially her mentor Man Ray, Miller's Surrealist photographs draw more from a documentary tradition, capturing a chance surrealist moment through framing rather than resorting to the heavy-handed stylistic quality of Beaton's St. Paul's image. In one of Miller's published photographs (image 49) a lone man works a pickaxe on the floor of a segment of the still-standing Burlington Arcade (fig. 6-3). Miller frames the image so the upper left side shows the destroyed roof and wall and the neighboring building beyond; the blasted-open space beyond the architectural archway casts an ethereal light down onto the remaining structure. Of Miller's Blitz photographs, this one

is in the minority of images where a human figure plays a central role. Yet, the inclusion of the worker here is crucial, as we question what exactly he is doing: as the ground his pickaxe moves towards appears undamaged, is he further dismantling the arcade, or attempting to build it back again?

In another photograph (image 62), Miller cheekily focuses on an iron gate with a sign reading "Site of St. John Zachary, Destroyed in the Great Fire 1666", while the distance beyond is all grey ruins from a recent bombing.[9] If Beaton's photograph seeks an antique, Neo-Classical timelessness to a fantastical portrayal of St. Paul's survival (specifically the sepia-toned version), Miller's image achieves more with a wry approach that, like much Surrealist art, combines text, image, and context that shifts the viewer from bystander to participant. Indeed, this photograph is used as the first in a section of *Grim Glory* dubbed "The Ironies of War". Many Miller's photographs are featured in this section, signaling the more intentional Surrealist tone she brought to her documentation of the Blitz.

One of the most reproduced of Miller's Grim Glory photographs is image 63: an upward view of the surviving upper story of a Victorian building spanning a blasted open space beneath it (fig. 6-4). The skewed angle helps deemphasize the pile of rubble beneath this archway. The text in the book reads, "A bridge of sighs finds itself an uncomfortable alien in the Victorian stucco regularity of Lowndes Street, Knightsbridge". The reference to Venice's Bridge of Sighs is twofold. First, there is a stylistic similarity between the enclosed style of the surviving floor that resulted from the bombing with the covered bridge being referenced. Second, it adds a poignancy to this wartime moment: the bridge is associated with a legend that if a couple kisses while passing under the bridge they will have eternal love. This poetically refers to the lives of the people who populated the now-wrecked building and for a more hopeful life beyond the devastation and war for anyone passing beneath this blasted open passage.

It is telling to compare Beaton and Miller's respective documenting of how the bombings reform the urban environment. Beaton's is stylistically evocative with the soft shadows and ruined archway serving as a frame, suggesting a realm we might dream about or imagine; Miller's, on the other hand, is grounded in a directness, positioned from a human view looking upward and, while no less evocative, it documents a moment in the world

[9] Lee Miller, *The Ironies of War, St. John Zachary* from *Grim Glory* (image 62), c. 1940:
https://www.leemiller.co.uk/media/Published-in-Grim-Glory-Pictures-of-Britain-under-fire-edited-by-Ernestine-Carter-preface-by-Edward-R-Murrow-pho/OfrNQDJE8lYpcPyb660G1w..a?ts=DQwOgxeKOr249qaKOEtFBw..a, accessed September 25, 2021.

Fig. 6-4: Lee Miller, *Bridge of Sighs*, from *Grim Glory*, c. 1940. © Lee Miller Archives, England 2021. All rights reserved. leemiller.co.uk.

where the literary and imaginative allusions are compellingly real. In the first Manifesto of Surrealism, Breton referred to these overlapping moments of shared reality and imaginative reality as a surreality: "I believe in the future resolution of these two states, dream and reality, which are seemingly so contradictory, into a kind of absolute reality, a surreality…" Although he evokes "dreams" in that description, the essential quality for Breton is

not turning the real world into a dream (as Beaton accomplishes in his photograph) but discovering the liminal moments where the paradoxes of individual psyche and external reality blur together—like a staid Victorian structure being turned into the Bridge of Sighs by a bomb blast.

Since much of this interpretation of *Bridge of Sighs* relies on the accompanying text, it is critical to consider how Miller's Blitz photographs were presented beyond the book itself. *Grim Glory* was intended as a propaganda effort geared towards swaying American audiences to the war effort. This is evident from the included preface by American journalist Edward Murrow and the editorial directives to include images that focus on the daily lives of Londoners impacted by the bombings while avoiding any gruesome images of the dead.[10] Moreover, there was a near-simultaneous publication of the book in America by Scribner and Sons with the title *Bloody but Unbowed* and, in conjunction, an exhibition of many of the images and other material at the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) titled *Britain At War*, running from 22 May 1941 until 2 September 1941.[11] Although the catalog for the exhibition featured three of Miller's Blitz photographs—*Interior, Park Crescent, Regent* (not included in *Grim Glory*), *Hyde Park: barbed wire and half-inflated barrage balloon amid familiar scenery in London* (*Grim Glory* image 104), and *Burlington Arcade* (*Grim Glory* image 49)—the exhibition itself featured more images by her.[12] An installation view of one exhibition gallery featuring Miller's work is telling: her images are displayed in a row beneath a series of photographs showing various people wearing gas masks (fig. 6-5). This juxtaposition seems explicit: as alien are these wartime portraits of people with faces obscured and reformed by the security of gas masks, Miller's ironic depictions of bombed London are equally strange and unsettling—both suggest a surreality.[13] Further reinforcement comes from a similar pairing established in the exhibition catalog where, on facing pages, are a strikingly

[10] Bouhassane, 22.

[11] Information and archival material from this exhibition is available on MOMA's website:
https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/3002?, accessed May 31, 2021.

[12] Monroe Wheeler (ed.), *Britain at War* (exhibition catalog) (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1941). 58-73.

[13] The images on display are as follows, using the titles given them by the Lee Miller Archive followed by their image numbers from *Grim Glory* if applicable: *Remington Silent* (image 72)*, Shattered Roof of University College* (image 70), *Piano by Broadwood* (image 73), *Eggceptional Achievement* (image 104), *Interior, Park Crescent, Regent Park* (not in *Grim Glory*), *You will not lunch in Charlotte Street today* (image 68), *Paddington, London* (not in *Grim Glory*), *Spring Gardens, London* (not in *Grim Glory*), and *Burlington Arcade* (image 49).

Fig. 6-5: Photographer unknown, Installation view of the exhibition "Britain at War", May 22,1941 through September 2, 1941. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Photographic Archive. Digital Image ©The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, NY.

different view of Miller's Bridge of Sighs (taken from a further distance and one leveled at a head-on composition) with four gas mask portraits. Moreover, when Bridge of Sighs was exhibited, the caption was changed to the pedantic "A bomb-made portal in the West End of London". Bouhassane argues that this change was made because there was concern that the American audience would not understand the reference to the Venetian bridge (although if that were the case, the reference is made explicit in the book which was intended for both British and American audiences). By

changing the caption and choosing a photograph with a much more mundane, direct composition, the organizers of the MOMA exhibition strip the image of any Surrealist denotations, crafting a much more straightforward and documentary presentation. It is a stark contrast between the original published version and the exhibited version, and is instrumental in understanding what makes Miller's original presentation Surrealistic.

Finding Objective Chance

For Surrealist photographers like Miller, who worked in a documentary method, two concepts from the movement especially resonate: *found objects* and *objective chance*.[14] By most accounts, Miller began the Blitz work through her own initiative, interested in the surreal oddities the bombing wrought on the urban environment. Roland Penrose described it later in *Scrap Book* as, "her eye for a surrealist mixture of humour and horror was wide open".[15] This is not to say none of her Blitz images are straightforwardly documentary: image 6 in *Grim Glory* is a straightforward documentary image of Auxiliary Firemen learning to use hoses and photographs she took of the bombed British *Vogue* offices were used in the November 1940 issue of the magazine.[16] However, Miller's exploration of the bombed city seeking those moments of surrealist frisson indicate her understanding of Surrealist practices of the *flâneur*, or urban explorer, as central tenets of early Surrealist novels like Breton's *Nadja* and Louis Aragon's *Paris Peasant*. From such explorations, the Surrealists discovered the unexpected pleasures of *found objects* (*objet trouvé*), which became one of several features of Surrealist objects in the 1930s. Antony Penrose, Miller's son and earliest biographer, has described her Parisian period photography as "image trouvé," essentially found images, that she, as the Surrealist, is capturing with her camera.[17] These concepts combine with her

[14] I refer to a branch of Surrealist photography here as "documentary" to distinguish this from practices of a more abstracted/constructed approach to Surrealist photography displayed in works like J.A. Boiffard's highly abstracted images of toes, Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore's explorations of identity, Hans Bellmer's constructed doll photographs, and Raoul Ubac's heavily-worked negative images like *Le Combat des Penthésilées* (1937).

[15] Quoted in Carolyn Burke, *Lee Miller: A Life* (New York: Knopf, 2005), chapter 11, Kindle.

[16] Burke, *Lee Miller*, chapter 11, Kindle.

[17] Antony Penrose, *Surrealist Lee Miller* (Lee Miller Archives Publishing, 2020), 16.

Blitz work, since the bombings served as a catalyst for discovering the found images the next day during her explorations.

Bridge of Sighs, and as we shall consider, some of Miller's other Blitz photographs, represent an even more potent Surrealist practice: *objective chance*. This idea was prevalent among the Surrealists to explain the individual implications of seemingly random encounters. As Raihan Kadri and others describe, "...the notion of objective chance becomes comprehensible not through philosophical speculation but as a result of actual encounters experienced in the course of their [the Surrealists] own lived lives".[18] In other words, the chance encounters and found images so prevalent to Surrealists were experiential, not solely intellectual. Discovering the bombed-out building in *Bridge of Sighs* where the visual effects of the devastation go beyond damage to reforming the structure to mimic a famous bridge in Venice is itself notable. However, the conceptual and poetic connotations raised is an example of the central role photography plays with objective chance. Here, photography serves as the visual documentation. This combined with the text provides an invitation to contemplate, to apply individual Surrealist ideas to these found moments.

We might speculate that what compelled Miller to be the photographic *flâneur* during the Blitz was her Surrealist awareness that this environment would be riper with such moments. Her Blitz work is, therefore, similar to her approach during the Paris years where she wandered the city looking for surrealities necessitating recording *and* interpretation. And "interpretation" is the second crucial element to how Surrealists defined objective chance, for as Kadri notes, "In its day-to-day relations, and in particular in its constant and expectant quest for new encounters with objects, places and individuals, surrealism would come to be characterized above all as a documented enquiry into the matrix of facts and coincidences whose meanings demand to be unraveled."[19] For objective chance, discovery entails both *finding* in the world (the experiential) and the *individual meaning* of what was found (the interpretation). Miller's Blitz photographs typically apply both to varying degrees, but usually rely on the documentary image combined with text via captions. We have already seen how Miller's intent could be modified when *Bridge of Sighs* was pedantically renamed for the MOMA exhibition, and by doing so much of the interpretive meaning is lost, especially when combined with the more visually staid, direct, and distant version of the scene. In his biography of Miller, Penrose is forthright as to the importance of text to Miller's vision of her Surrealist photographs:

[18] Krzysztof Fijalkowski and Michael Richardson, *Surrealism: Key Concepts* (Routledge, 2016), 150.
[19] Ibid., 151.

"Lee was often dissatisfied with the text presented with her pictures. She felt that the cloying pap produced by some of the copywriters reduced the impact of the photographs and compromised her ideals of honesty and accessibility. [...] What she looked for was the ability to communicate clearly with flair and imagination".[20] For Miller, text was clearly as vital a component to the Surrealist meaning of the photographs as the imagery itself. This is acute when considering her Blitz photographs in *Grim Glory* as examples of Surrealist objective chance, and, in one other instance, the combination of image and text in the book is central to a Surrealist approach that incorporates an interpretation of objective chance unique to the German bombings themselves.

Reshaping Artistic Politics Through Bombs

As Miller explored the way the German blitzkrieg reshaped London in odd, unsettling, even ironic ways that correspond to the Surrealist idea of objective chance, one example of her photography in *Grim Glory* particularly stands out. Image 74 shows the shelled remains of a chapel, with rubble pouring out of the doorway onto the pavement outside with much of the surviving structure dominated by two fluted ionic columns flanked by arched windows and pilasters. On the far-right end, a ladder stretches up to the top of the edifice and a lone man stands on the pavement staring at the building (fig. 6-6). What is striking about this photograph is the distant vantage point; many of Miller's *Grim Glory* images involve careful framing to further enhance the surreality of a scene, such as the difference between the published version of *Bridge of Sighs* versus the alternate, distant one used by MOMA in their catalog. In fact, the more common portrayal of this scene (in contemporary publications of Miller's work) is a zoomed-in view of the doorway showing only the rubble pouring out. Clearly, Miller and Carter wanted this specific image to be included in the "Ironies of war" portion of the book, evident from the caption included beneath the photograph: "1 Nonconformist chapel + 1 bomb = Greek temple." The distant vantage point helps clarify the strange ramifications of the bombing, as the blast destroyed all but the primary classically styled columns. This transforms this non-conformist (essentially an independent) church into a classical Greek temple. Although it is unclear if this caption (and by extension others in the book) were written by Miller herself, or Carter, or the two in collaboration, it does reinforce what she intended to capture photographically—that the German bombs not only devastated the

[20] Penrose, *Lives of Lee Miller*, 104.

Fig. 6-6: Lee Miller, *1 Nonconformist chapel + 1 bomb = Greek temple*, from *Grim Glory*, c. 1940. © Lee Miller Archives, England 2021. All rights reserved. leemiller.co.uk.

structure, but by retaining the classical columns points to Hitler's desire to convert society and culture to his own vision. This culturally transformative view of Hitler is seen as early as 1933 (the year he became Chancellor of Germany) in a cartoon by O. Garvens from the satirical magazine Kladderradatsch (fig. 6-7). In the cartoon, Hitler is presented a modernist-styled sculpture of a figurative group fighting amongst themselves. He proceeds to smash the sculpture and reform it with his hands into a single Neoclassical, idealized male. The implication of the bombing is not just

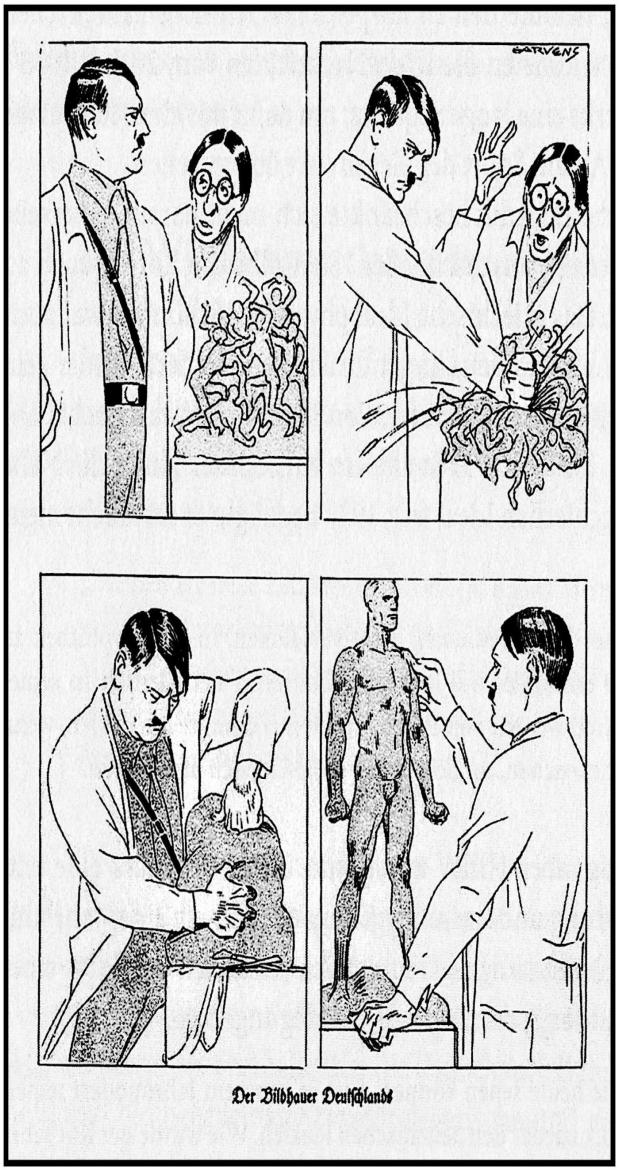

Fig. 6-7: O. Garvens, "Germany's Sculptor," cartoon published in *Kladderradatsch*, 1933. © Shawshots / Alamy Stock Photo.

wanton destruction, but a calculated attempt to literally transform places of worship into a vision of Classically styled architecture of which Hitler was so fond. Like in Garven's cartoon, the German bombing extends further into the realm of cultural and artistic reformation.

This reading of Miller's photograph becomes particularly compelling in light of Hitler's public denouncement of Modern art and artists (many of whom were Miller's friends) through the Nazi's *Entarte Kunst* (Degenerate Art) exhibition in 1937, followed by a series of annual government-sponsored *Great German Art Exhibitions* that promoted a strident Neoclassical style for the Nazi regime.[21] Thus, the literal restylisation of culture and art in a classical vein that Hitler pursued is evident in this bombed Nonconformist chapel Miller happened upon and documented, reinforced by the caption included with it in *Grim Glory*. Here, Miller's political undertones relate not only to *objective chance* but also to Surrealism's desire to radically change society by rebelling against any domineering cultural or governmental mandate. While the more commonly reproduced image of the rubble-filled doorway is, stylistically, more surrealist in composition, I contend that the version of this scene presented in *Grim Glory* (both image and text) represents Surrealism in its multifaceted glory as found moment, objective chance, and political and moral commentary.

Conclusion

The photographs included in *Grim Glory*, by Miller and others, range from documentary to emotional to striking to irreverent. Yet, Miller's pictures have a stylistic resonance that moves beyond presenting the Blitz as an historical fact or focusing only on the trials and travails Britons experienced during it. Rather, Miller stressed the deformation of the city space as resonant with startling, unexpected symbolism and moments of unexpected whimsy. Clearly, Miller was seeking moments that were not just newsworthy or meant as witness to atrocities but went beyond such immediacy to present real world scenes that shake viewers out of their everyday understandings of experience to something more personally resonant. These moments become calculated documentations of objective chance, the Surrealist idea that certain unexpected events reflect an inner interpretation or desire. Here, though, with Miller's photograph of the bombed nonconformist chapel, the "desire" is not Miller's, but Hitler's,

[21] Frederic Spotts discusses these exhibitions and Hitler's desire for a "House of German Art" in the eleventh chapter of his book *Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics*. Frederic Spotts, *Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics* (Hutchinson, 2002).

revealing through destructive stylistic transformation his intent to re-shape the world into his own superior, idealized vision. And, by reflecting Hitler's desire surrealistically, this Blitz photograph goes beyond documentation, or even remarking upon objective chance. It becomes a barbed moment when Surrealism is put to the purposes of denoting not the artist's meaningful interpretation, but what might come if the Axis forces are allowed to succeed.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

LEE MILLER: REVISITING THE ENEMY

MELODY DAVIS

for Anna

It is an uncanny experience to revisit an essay one has written over two decades ago. Besides the questions of merit and relevancy, comes the question of whether to revise it, for the original scholar is long gone, and a different (hopefully more mature) one looks at the imbricated histories and decides, in all fairness, that each ghost must have its due. Therefore, I have made revisions with a light hand. As for the question of merit, I humbly ask my readers to decide the matter for themselves. The question of relevancy, meanwhile, depends on the time. I live in the United States, Lee Miller's nationality, and I would hazard a guess that were she alive today, she would be as disturbed by the events of recent years as I am. Miller was one of the first photojournalists to break the story on the Holocaust, making its denial no longer possible. Yet, unfathomably today, we have Holocaust deniers, and their numbers are growing, along with other crackpot conspiracists. We witness the desecration of Jewish cemeteries, the rise of anti-Semitism and Naziism, and a politics of white supremacy that targets Blacks, Jews, Muslims, Central Americans, and women of all races. I know that Lee Miller, never being shy of an opinion, would have something to say. She might even be tempted to dust-off the camera to photograph the abuses at the US-Mexico border, or the concentration camps for the Uyghurs in China. I beg the reader's indulgence, here. There are many courageous forefathers, but women have had to work tirelessly to uncover the history of our foremothers. Yet perhaps they have been with us all along.

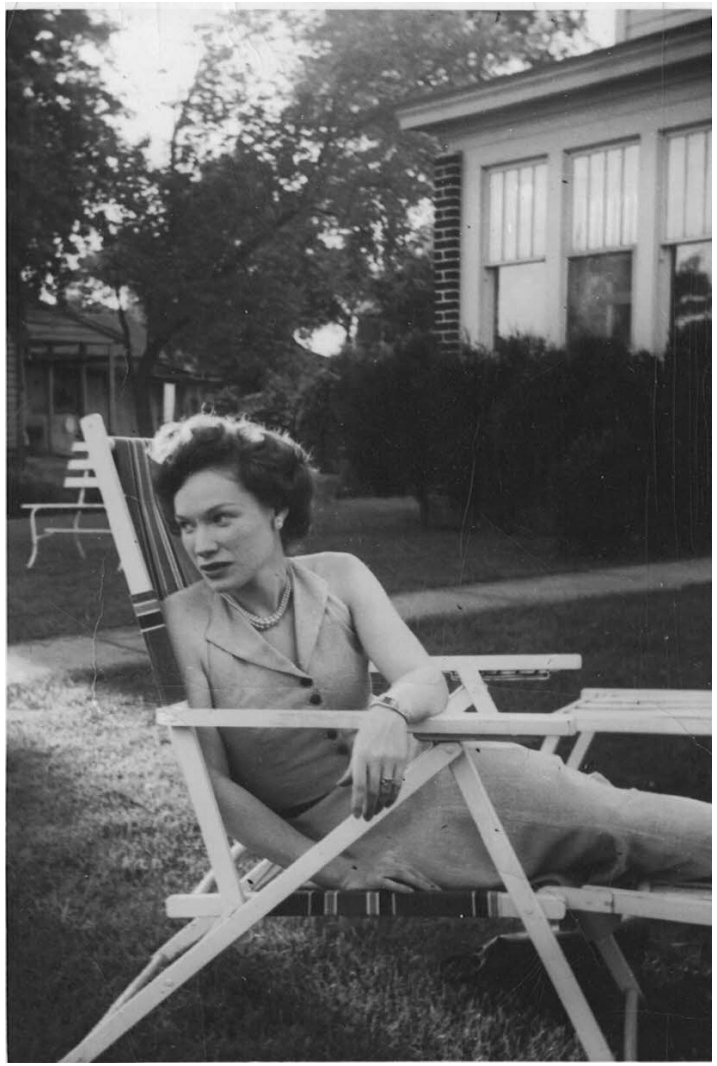

Fig.8-1: Russell Davis, *Portrait of Anna Mae Smith*, c. 1957.

When my mother was dying of Alzheimer's, an eight-year-old self appeared. She held my hand and spoke in pithy phrases that eventually took the form of poems.[1] I called her "the little girl", and she knew all about our mother, who like Lee Miller, was raped as a child. Like Miller, too, my mother was very close to her father. Yet, this paternal relationship shielded neither woman from trauma, both had turbulent histories. Today, the #MeToo movement has fostered an understanding that sexual harassment, abuse and rape are norms rather than anomalies. We have also begun to articulate how intergenerational trauma has shaped families. The little girl, so prescient about such matters, one day boarded a train, and I have not seen her since, but her message was received—we had a mother, who for all her faults, was brave as hell. And bravery can elide with compulsion. Both Lee Miller and my mother compulsively revisited hell, because they could—a problem to be solved was there. Now to double the doppelgänger: my mother actually resembled Lee Miller (fig. 8-1). I didn't realize this when I wrote "Bathing with the Enemy", yet I believe that the recognition was unconsciously present, though suppressed (or protected) by the formality of scholarship. Decades later I found the photograph and realised how Lee Miller's story allowed me to speak of a mother who was difficult in her best moments. Their generation had no recognition for foremothers, so they must have found themselves quite alone when they looked into the face of evil. But look they did, and I cannot image how hard it was for them. We can thank Lee Miller and David E. Scherman for their courageous collaboration on one of history's more disturbing photographs, which is the subject of this essay. The photographers instinctively chose a simple container for a surreal echo of the horrors of the Holocaust—a bathtub, just like the one in anybody's home.

Lee Miller: Bathing with the Enemy[2]

Certain photographs linger in my mind, accumulating a psychic force far greater in intensity than the initial shock or surprise I experienced when encountering them. Such was the case with the photograph that is my subject. My reaction—fascination mingled with disgust—begged the question: how does one articulate a pleasure that shares equally with revulsion? Where is the language for desire that, upon consideration, makes the skin crawl? Language at this point becomes an act of exorcism, and that

[1] Melody Davis, *Ghost Writer* (Frankfort, KY: Broadstone Books, 2019).
[2] "Lee Miller: Bathing with the Enemy" appeared in an earlier form in *The History of Photography* 21, no. 2 (Winter 1997): 314-318.

casting out pays a curious homage by locating what is not to be borne as uncanny power.

A woman sits in a bathtub (fig. 8-2). The photographer has chosen to avoid the typical--he has not made the woman an object of sexual interest. Though nude, her flesh is minimally visible. Rather than a display, she seems crouched down upon herself in a protective, almost fetal-like curl, arms crossed over breasts, revealing nothing. She does not acknowledge the photographer with a come-on look, but instead looks toward a Venus statuette, which bears the displaced nudity of the bather.

Fig.8-2: David E. Scherman, Lee Miller in Hitler's Bathtub, Hitler's apartment, Prinzregentenplaz, Munich, Germany, 1945

The filthy boots give a moment of pause. What are they doing there? Who would take army boots straight to the tub, forever soiling the fluffy, white carpet, bringing mud, more appropriately left on the threshold, into such a pristine space? A photograph makes an uncanny accessory to the bathing scene. From the stance, we instantly recognise the popularised image of Hitler. But who would place a photograph on the edge of a tub, where water would quickly ruin it? It's clearly a prop, and, like the muddy boots, carries a message: this lady is bathing with Hitler.

The photographers want us to decode such props and the constructed nature of the scene itself. We can assume only that, since the props are so obviously artificial. The woman sits between a calcified, Nazi-style Venus and the two-dimensional Hitler, looking toward the statue as though to say, am I this? but looking away with an upward roll of her eyes. Hitler, meanwhile, seems to gaze through the real bather to the artificial one, who gazes toward him through a bent, raised arm. A shower hose dangles behind the woman, emphasising the double rigor mortis of the scene—phallically rigid Hitler and clichéd, female nudity. The bather connects them. Yet, the hose, literally hanging, seems to hang her, its loop sectioning off brain from body. Now I lower me down to the tub with Hitler, but not all of me is here. Part of me is hanging out, above, watching the fetishes face off. Both the photograph of Hitler and the statue exist to deny death, which, of course, is what they will ultimately maintain. The woman-in-the-flesh hangs by a loop in a deathly embrace. Her flesh is crushed, sunken into itself, walled on both sides by death, enwombed/entombed in the symbolic tub.

This tub is, in fact, Hitler's. On 30 April 1945, David E. Scherman and Lee Miller, war correspondent photographers, wrangled a billet from the new command of the 179th Regiment of the 45th Division US Army, which had just the day before, under direction of General Patton, conquered Munich. Scherman and Miller found themselves in an impersonally decorated apartment with only the linen, china, silver, and crystal ware, swastika-ed and monogrammed "AH", revealing that it was Hitler's personal apartment. Clues also lay in the vast telephone switchboard still directly connected to vital points in the Third Reich and the remote control near the bed which had labels for "maid, valet, and guard". Otherwise, the hastily left apartment could have belonged to any well-off *bürger*. It was Miller's first thought to jump into the enormous bath and take her first scrub in days. Scherman recalls that when they staged the photographs on that day—of Miller in the tub, and then Scherman—an impatient lieutenant, obviously with his own personal hygiene in mind, was angrily pounding on the locked door (Lee Miller, *David E. Scherman in Hitler's Bathtub,* 1945, gelatin

silver print).[3] But Miller and Scherman's collaboration does not merely represent a few gag shots from war correspondents, as the progression on the contact sheet reveals.[4] It was carefully staged. The shower cord, statuette and Hitler photograph are the sort of props that Miller habitually staged in her war photography, constructing within the document an exposure of the false authority of the Third Reich.[5] The photographers were not only aware that this was Hitler's apartment, they had just that morning photographed Dachau concentration camp. That they chose to place themselves so close to the Führer's body that his skin cells clinging to the tub could be said to comingle with theirs marks a transgression that has nothing to do with cleanliness.

At the newly liberated Dachau, they were among the first of the army to enter the gates, finding thousands of starving, skeletal people piled one on top of the other in barracks full of tuberculosis, typhoid, dysentery, and insanity. Miller's own prose for *Vogue* will say the rest:

> the triple decker bunks, without blankets, or even straw, held two and three men per bunk who lay in bed, too weak to circulate the camp. In the few minutes it took me to take my pictures, two men were found dead, and were unceremoniously dragged out and thrown on the heap . . . The doctor said it was too late for more than half the others in the building anyway.

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[3] Lee Miller, *David E. Scherman in Hitler's Bathtub,* 1945, gelatin silver print, Lee Miller Archives, Farley's House, Chiddingly, UK. Biographical information in this essay is from Anthony Penrose, *The Lives of Lee Miller* (New York and London: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, and Thames and Hudson 1985); and Penrose, ed., *Lee Miller's War: Photographer and Correspondent with the Allies in Europe, 1944-45* (Boston: Bulfinch (Little Brown), 1992); See especially, 'Hitleriana' (reprint from *Vogue*), p. 12 of the 1992 text.

[4] *"Lee Miller and David Scherman: The Photographers Who Took a Bath in Hitler's Apartment," Vintage News Daily*, 30 October 2020. https://vintagenewsdaily.com/lee-miller-and-david-scherman-the-photographers-who-took-a-bath-in-hitlers-apartment/

[5] Patricia Allmer has examined Miller's "signature trope" of including other photographs and framing devises in her photography: "'Special Works': reading Miller's war photography," in *Lee Miller, Photography, Surrealism, and Beyond* (Manchester University Press, 2016), 145-182. Allmer has also researched the caption for the photographs from Hilter's Munich apartment with Miller's comment "Note bad dull art." p. 190. Carolyn Burke has noted that Miller posed as an armless, classical statue for Jean Cocteau's film, *Le Sang d'un Poète* (1930): "Going Elsewhere: Lee Miller's Photographic Exiles", College Art Association Conference, 13 February 1997, New York, NY. See also, Carolyn Burke, *Lee Miller: A Life* (University of Chicago Press, 2007).

> The crematorium was out of fuel for long enough to pile up two rooms of bodies. The gas chambers look like their titles, written over the doors, "SHOWER BATHS"…
>
> One block is an Angora rabbit farm .... They are much less crowded and better cared for than humans, beautifully clean and housed…The stable of work-horses was also perfection, with fat-bottomed beasts which shocked the eye after so many emaciated humans.[6]

Though the camp was open to soldiers encouraged to "sightsee" the atrocities and write back home, by midday, only press and medics were allowed in, because, in Miller's words, "so many really tough guys had become sick it was interfering with duties".[7]

For Scherman and Miller, there was no denying what Hitler had done. They brought the ashes of dead Jews into his apartment, grinding their remains into the white bathmat, up to the edge of the place where the Führer got clean. In a rite of revenge, they sullied Hitler and his "social cleansing" by bringing the ashes that had been the people of the Mikvah into the private bathroom of the "Vater", making his body as dirty as they could by commingling what he loathed with his own cells. Dachau's "showers" became Hitler's bath, and Miller's body was the conduit, the place of meeting. The ritual of the Mikvah in reverse—instead of cleansing and separation, one has dirt and lack of boundaries. In this mourning and melancholy, one has to, first, become dirty and set the record straight.

In the Miller-Scherman collaboration, somatic memory returns with a psychic force that is deeper, because it is more primary, than genital-oriented sexuality.[8] This was no sick joke, even though it may resonate with Scherman's shot of a GI on Hitler's bed reading *Mein Kampf*, or Miller's nap in Eva Braun's bed.[9] An *unheimlich* (uncanny) disturbance stirs in this *heimhat* (homeland).[10] To the nationalism of blood and soil, Miller brought a Surrealist eye that deconstructed Nazi cartography, Patricia Allmer

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[6] Penrose, 1992, 182.
[7] Ibid, 187.
[8] For the tactile as a pre-genital, pre-Oedipal state, see Didier Anzieu, *The Skin Ego*, trans. by Chris Turner from *Le Moi-Peau* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), 139-46. Anzieu echoes a thread of Freudian thought on pre-genital erotogeny. Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (S. E.: London: Hogarth Press, 1971), v. 7, 169.
[9] Penrose, 1985, 138; Penrose, 1992, 199.
[10] Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny," S.E. 17: 219-256.

demonstrates.[11] Characteristic of surrealist, Georges Bataille, and his "unblinking stare at violence",[12] the photographers threaten the psyche, theirs and ours. The uncanny, which is the return of repressed content,[13] manipulates the boundaries of skin and ego, and volleys into somatic memory of that first home, which after early childhood, invites sickness, and ritual. Into the Fatherland they stare and return the female body to it, and the male. They shrink the angry father to the coffin of his likeness and subject it to a shower. The maternal body can bear that trauma.

Freud linked trauma, including war neuroses, to a "susceptibility due to childhood memory-traces".[14] Later research on post-traumatic stress has proved this theory untenable.[15] For Lee Miller, however, childhood experiences did find a counterpart in the unprecedented gender-break that war photography offered for her, as well as the endless supply of trauma it offered. She applied to be an American war correspondent while living in England, estranged from her first husband and an expatriate for more than twenty years. She had been photographing fashion and the bombing of Britain during the early war, and her friend, Dave Scherman, mostly in jest, encouraged her to apply as a US Army war correspondent.[16] Soon, she was off to the front line, frequently breaking the law to get there, and becoming known as the only woman combat photographer to travel with the allied troops in the Second World War. She took tens of thousands of pictures, consistently getting to the scene of action before others, placing herself in a high degree of danger, living on adrenalin, with large supplements of

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[11] Allmer, 153-171.

[12] Dawn Ades and Fiona Bradley, "Introduction" in Ades and Simon Barker, eds., *Undercover Surrealism: George Bataille and Documents* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 11.

[13] Freud, S.E. 17: 249.

[14] Freud, S.E. 17: 208-10.

[15] Deirdre Barrett, ed., *Trauma and Dreams* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996); See: Harry A. Wilmer, "The Healing Nightmare: War Dreams of Vietnam Veterans", and Ernest Hartnunn, "Who develops PTSD nightmares and who doesn't". Trauma and PTSD has become a field unto itself since I first wrote this essay.

[16] The stories of Miller as a war correspondent tend to mitigate her gender role-reversal by a frequent emphasis on her femininity and frivolity. One example is Scherman's account of why Miller joined: it piqued her jealousy to see the American GIs with Kleenex and other provisions that the British had to do without for years during the Siege. According to Scherman, this "no-Kleenex-in-the-midst-of-plenty" triggered her desire to be in on the action. "Foreword" by Dave Scherman in Penrose, 1992, 9. Allmer argues that the Miller was inconsistent in her self-mythologizing and downplayed the idea of agency for one of creator. Allmer, 15.

alcohol, cigarettes, sleeping pills, and Benzedrine.[17] Her desire for the unpredictable and uncanny morphed into important, documentary contribution, as surreal as it is historical.

Miller's life had begun on a small farm in Poughkeepsie, New York, where her devoted father, an engineer and free-thinker, made her the object of his attention, photographing her incessantly from birth. At age seven, however, a rupture in this romance occurred from which, according to son and biographer, Anthony Penrose, she never completely recovered.[18] While staying with friends of her mother's during the latter's convalescence, Lee was raped by a young man of this family and contracted venereal disease, the only cure for which was painful douching with bichloride of mercury. Out of guilt, Lee's parents lavished even more attention on her, which she learned to manipulate in order to get out of responsibilities. A psychiatrist taught the child to divorce sex and love in her mind. As time passed, Lee grew increasingly self-indulgent and undisciplined. She was expelled from four different schools for practical joking and could tolerate very little authority. She broke from her parents by fleeing to Paris and joining the rebellious Surrealists, who were informed by psychoanalysis.

She returned to New York for a few years and became famous as a model for some of the most prominent photographers of the day. She also modelled nude for her father's photography in an intimacy that for a nineteen and twenty-year-old woman bordered on the unhealthy, asserts Jane Livingston.[19] One example is Theodore Miller's 1928 stereoscopic nude of Lee, which stimulates a three-dimensional perception that evokes tangibility and visual possession.[20] The frontalised knees and legs produce depth cues that lead to the pubis, while the arms crossed behind the back, breasts thrust forward, and head turned nearly in profile, offer the passive body as a visual surrogate for physical contact. Lee recollected that during this time, "I looked like an angel, but I was a fiend inside".[21] Returning to Paris, Miller worked for and became a lover of Man Ray, but this relationship lasted only a few years. Penrose claims that Miller had a deep, abiding reverence for her father that

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[17] Penrose, 1985, 147.
[18] Penrose, 12.
[19] Jane Livingston*, Lee Miller, Photographer* (London: Thames & Hudson 1989), 25.
[20] Theodore Miller, *Elizabeth (Lee) Miller Nude by her Father,* 1928, gelatin silver stereograph, Lee Miller Archives, Farley's House, Chiddingly, UK, accessed December 29, 2020, https://www.leemiller.co.uk/media/v9luOWpruk_bnLVrInD-0w..a?ts=FnRyCQxBgJRsXMjBBviu4r2-M67bBF_k9G7q_bU9gk0.a. The pose calls to mind that of Jean Cocteau's use of Miller as armless statuary.
[21] Penrose, 1985, 16.

continued unabated throughout her whole life, and, as a consequence, "there remained a fundamental inability to form stable relationships with her lovers". "She wanted adventure, excitement, and freedom from responsibility", Penrose asserts.[22]

Through the war, Miller found the constant level of excitement and extremity. In psychoanalytic terms, she was recreating the original struggles that determined her life. The over-cathexis with her father, and his sexualised, visual aggression, made it difficult for Lee to emerge from the little girl's Oedipal adoration of the father.[23] The rape at age seven, resulting in long-term physical and psychological suffering, only reinforced the split between the "good father" and "bad father", and the authority and affection of the father became a source of betrayal and hurt. A sense of defilement, pollution, and self-hatred, characteristic in survivors of sexual abuse, can contribute to a rejection of all authority, as "premature sexual activity diminishes a child's educability".[24] Lee became the incorrigible child, the always child, bristling at any attempts to regulate her.

By seeking the horrors of war, Miller recreated the internal horrors of disillusionment, pollution, and betrayal she felt as a victim. A staple of psychoanalytic thought places the compulsion to repeat within the psyche's need to recreate past trauma and, by doing so, master it.[25] As a war photographer, Miller was always pushing limits--getting there faster and before anyone else, at times alone, as attested by her sole reportage on the siege of St Mâlo (the first napalm bombings). Scherman and Miller were the first photographers at the capture of Leipzig, and Hitler's and Braun's separate apartments.[26] She was also the first woman to do frontline reporting, breaking another boundary, which she pushed further with her iconoclastic transformation of British *Vogue* from a ladies' fashion magazine to one of hard-hitting journalism.[27]

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[22] Penrose, 16.

[23] Freud, S.E. 20: 212. The concept of a girl's first love object being her father is a staple of Freudian thought, and though subject to controversy and contradiction subsequent to Freud, it will nonetheless serve as a model for our discussion of Miller. I do not wish to assert that this model is a universal developmental stage, but I believe it aids our understanding of the mechanisms at work in Miller's life and war photography.

[24] Freud, S.E. 7: 234.

[25] Freud, S.E. 18: 18-23; S.E. 20: 167.

[26] Penrose, 1992.

[27] "The grim skeletal corpses of Buchenwald are separated by a few thicknesses of paper from delightful recipes to be prepared by beautiful women dressed in sumptuous gowns". Penrose, 205.

By breaking boundaries and subjecting herself to trauma, Miller recreated incestuous desire, child rape, and their consequent pain. In studies on hysteria, Freud and Josef Breuer observed that "sexual trauma [is] felt in physical attacks to the part of the body associated with the situation".[28] The traumatic douching with a mercury compound for VD assumes a second incarnation in the bath in Hitler's tub, a cleansing away of the physical dirt of Dachau, for which there will be no psychic cleansing, only a continually renewed sense of internal pollution. The skin, here, is the sight of the incorporation of the Führer's horrible body, the place of penetration, and the melting of boundaries. Bathing with Hitler recreates an ultimate violation—but on the side of choice. It is a willingness to absorb the skin of genocide.

Freud spoke of a defensive shield against stimuli and the effect of trauma breaking through that shield and depositing excitation within the organism, which it must then seek to discharge.[29] The concept of "too muchness," or unbearable over-stimulation, torments the victims of child abuse, according to Leonard Shengold, who calls the psychic possession of the child-victim, "soul murder".[30] Prior to Shengold's study, Didier Anzieu focused on the split or rupture in the ego's ability to contain trauma.[31] In *Le moi-peau,* (*The Skin Ego*), Anzieu asserts that mirroring the epidermis is a skin-ego, a fantasy image of integration that begins in the preconscious state of cathexis with the mother. Solely a mental image, the skin-ego can either incorporate wholeness and stability or be marked by disruption, ailments, flaws, incapacities, or instability because of over-excitation. Its genesis predates that of Jacques Lacan's mirror stage or Freud's Oedipal stage.[32] The three roles of the skin-ego are that of containing the bodily/psychic health; providing an interface, both protective and communicative, with the external world; and, most importantly for Miller's case, providing an inscribing surface for the marks of others.

Anzieu claimed that with trauma there is a skin-ego break—the bodily image becomes the property of the seducer, while the psychical ego remains with the self.[33] For Miller, rape and the consequent therapeutic douching broke the skin-ego, reawakening earlier drives: "Sudden, repeated and

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[28] Freud, S.E. 2: 172.
[29] Freud, S.E. 7: 24-33.
[30] Leonard Shengold, *Soul Murder: The Effects of Childhood Abuse and Deprivation* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1989).
[31] Anzieu, 1989.
[32] Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I", in *Ecrits*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton 1977).
[33] Anzieu, 40.

quasi-traumatic alterations account for masochism prior to eroticism, at the source of the skin-ego image".[34] The unconscious and very early Oedipal desire for the girl to have a baby with her father[35] becomes, in this re-enactment, a copulation with the ultimate father, Hitler, and his monstrous baby, social eugenics.

Hitler's bath represents the "good" father, the "bad" father, and a container which is a displaced womb for the father's baby. By sullying the father's bath with the boots bringing home the dirty truth, and with Miller's grimy body, the photographers say that this is a filthy desire. The douching elides with the bath, which further connects with the Dachau "shower-baths", and Hitler/the father is a rape not only of Miller but of the social body. Miller's body becomes the condensation of original, incestual energy and Hitler's genetic policy, a rape of the reproductive organs of society, death of its genes. Miller can bear the baby of the bad father, because she has before, and by so doing a second time, she controls the scene, laughing at the Führer, who is already becoming dirt, and making public his repulsive secrets. The horrible irony, though, is that this ritualised bath is one from which the photographers will never be clean or free. Being the locus of the social body carries a toll. The skin-ego is inscribed with the marks, so to speak, of its damage, its freight. The result is a masochistic personality structure.

For Freud, masochism, even in its moralistic phase, continually collapses upon the subject. In the severity of his conscience, the masochist loves his own suffering.[36] For the masochist as bearer of social meaning, however, we require a different theoretical framework. In *Powers of Horror*, Julia Kristeva locates a below-the-unconsciousness, primal repression which is related to masochism.[37] She terms this the "abject", which she roughly defines as a boundary-disturbing, identification with non-identity, not actually lack of cleanliness or health, but a perpetual danger. I experience abjection only if an Other has settled in place and stead of what will be "me". Not at all an other with whom I identify and incorporate, but an Other who precedes and possesses me, and through such possession causes me to be.[38] Similar to Anzieu's concept of the skin-ego which divorces the bodily possessed ego from the psychic one, Kristeva's theory moves forward to the idea of an ego predicated by possession. Related to putrefaction, though not

[34] Anzieu, 41.
[35] Freud, S.E. 11: 205; 17: 188.
[36] Freud, S.E. 19: 165, 169.
[37] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay in Abjection,* trans. by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press 1982), 5.
[38] Kristeva, 10.

necessarily physically putrid, the abject presents one's own body as a non-object, forfeited.[39] The abject person is dejected, a stray, moving through a diasporic psychic space which is non-homogeneous, disjointed, catastrophic.[40] The clean and proper self (*propre*) becomes filthy and banished. The skin no longer does its function of separating, and the self is inhabited by the concept of filth, a sign of otherness that threatens it with dissolution, yet, curiously, relates to its foundation. Signs of putrefaction are a mark of the subject's collapse of the Oedipal triangle and a return to pre-objectival unity, a place, since separation, of disgust.[41] Skin is an especial source of this boundary breaking,[42] and incest, "considered as transgression of the boundaries of what is clean and proper", is, as well, thoroughly abject.[43]

For Miller, the Führer was an abject which she nonetheless desired since it represented a somatic memory of love and erogenous gratification. As a little girl, she experienced a slippage of boundaries, permeability of the skin-ego, and a loathing tinged with excitement. War, which is by its very nature a transgression of boundaries, crossed into the space of a self ruptured by too-early eroticism and unhealthy relations. The disgust for Hitler's abject body was for Lee Miller a matter of course. There could be no better way of annihilating the bad father than swallowing him up, allowing him to permeate the already too permeable skin, and making obvious his hideous authority. It became the anti-authoritarian Surrealist act par excellence. *Der Vater* disappears into Lee, who maternally, renders him insignificant, as the woman unconsciously becomes her own totality, an impossible mother of herself as well as her father.

The social experience of abjection finds an especial corollary in anti-Semitism, which, for Kristeva, marks a breakdown of symbolic/paternal structure.[44] Since recorded time, the Jews have exhibited an especial

[39] Kristeva, 5.
[40] Kristeva, 8.
[41] Kristeva, 53.
[42] Kristeva, 101-02.
[43] Kristeva, 85.
[44] Kristeva, 186. A limitation of Kristevan theory makes itself felt at this point, since for her, the feminine is always an "otherness" which the abject incorporates to the hazard of the self, which is always masculine. Kristeva locates nascent selfhood in an association with the father, in the Oedipal triangle introducing independence and individuality. Her model throughout the book is male, and all her examples, likewise, are male, save one. When a female becomes abject, it is a vicarious abjection, as a maternal support for the abjected authority of the man she desires. This absolutist thinking is a problem with her theory, although, for Miller's case, it is applicable.

connection to cleanliness rituals used to separate masculine and feminine elements. Hitler's program usurped such symbolism for perverse ends: the clean Jews became "dirty" and cleansing them out of existence involved the most heinous and degrading practices—all in the name of "hygiene" and "the fatherland". The fatherland became the most filthy and inseparable parent of all. For Scherman, a Jew, as well as for Miller, his abject model, the people of the Mikvah make a mockery of Hitler's personal and social hygiene. The muddy boots point out his filthy project, his body made abject, lost in the artificial dignity of his uniform, a man more associated with disease than any other in history. Miller's body is the mother for this message, and Scherman, with the preternatural, instinctive wisdom of photographers, shot it.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

AT THE FRONTLINE: LEE MILLER AS A SURREALIST WAR CORRESPONDENT

VIOLA RÜHSE

Introduction

On behalf of *Vogue*, Lee Miller accompanied the Allied invasion of Europe as an accredited US war correspondent and also documented post-war Europe until 1946 with photos and texts.[1] A fashion magazine might seem to be an unusual place for such articles, but due to the general mobilisation, *Vogue* wanted to integrate war-relevant content into its format and to legitimise itself in this way.[2] However, in her war correspondence, Miller overstepped many of the boundaries that female war correspondents faced.[3] Furthermore, unlike the work of other correspondents,[4] Miller's

[1] The wartime texts and photographs are compiled in *Lee Miller's War: Photographer and Correspondent with the Allies in Europe 1944-45,* ed. Antony Penrose (London: Thames & Hudson, 2008), but a historical-critical edition of them is still missing. – This chapter is based on a lecture at the Academy of Fine Arts Leipzig in December 2020. My explanations on Lee Miller in Hitler's Bathtub in part IV of this chapter have already been published in part in a longer essay in German: Viola Rühse, "Lee Miller als surrealistische Kriegskorrespondentin in Hitlers Badewanne", in *8. Mai 1945. Internationale und interdisziplinäre Perspektiven*, ed. Alexandra Klei, Katrin Stoll, and Annika Wienert (Berlin: Neofelis, 2016).

[2] Katharina Menzel-Ahr, *Lee Miller. Kriegskorrespondentin für Vogue. Fotografien aus Deutschland 1945* (Marburg: Jonas, 2005), 235-238.

[3] Philippa [Pippa] Jane Oldfield, *Calling the Shots: Women's Photographic Engagement with War in Hemispheric America*, *1910-1990* (Durham: Durham University, 2016), 55, accessed October 23, 2021, *http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/11786/.*

[4] Beverly W. Brannan, "Perpetual Pioneers: The Library of Congress Meets Women Photojournalists of World War II," in *Working Memory: Women and Work in World*

work is partly artistic and shaped by her surrealist aesthetics. For instance, she includes *objets trouvés* in some of her photographs and she uses black humour and provocative juxtapositions in her war correspondence. In this chapter, I will focus on how Miller challenges and transgresses the boundaries set for her as a woman in the traditionally male domain of war correspondence. In addition, it will be addressed how Miller's transgression of boundaries also shaped some of her portraits that were published in *Vogue*.[5] I will pay particular attention to surrealist aesthetics and the often-overlooked text-image relationships.[6] To better situate the two themes in the analysis within a larger cultural and historical framework, the chapter begins with a short introduction to female war photographers.

Female War Photography

War photography is generally socially connoted as a masculine activity, which is of course related to the fact that war itself has historically been masculine. At the end of the 19th century, the battle photographer Jimmy Hare, in particular, shaped a forced masculine and mythified image of the war photographer.[7] In the 20th century, this perception was cemented in a particular way by Robert Capa as a "hypermasculine daredevil" war photographer.[8] Photo-historian Pippa Oldfield, therefore, pointed out: "In this popular conception, the female war photographer is an aberration, even an oxymoron".[9] The murder of the German photojournalist Anja

War II, ed. Marlene Kadar and Jeanne Perreault (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2015), 156.

[5] Some observations from photo historian Pippa Oldfield are taken up and deepened – Oldfield, *Calling the Shots*, 66.

[6] Ali Smith pointed out the need for a greater consideration of Miller's texts. Ali Smith, "The Look of the Moment", *The Guardian*, September 8, 2007, accessed October 23, 2021, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2007/sep/08/photography.art.
A more intensive engagement of Lee Miller with surrealism was denied for instance by Astrid Mahler in 2015. In recent years, however, Lee Miller's "surrealist documentary" of the Second World War has been confirmed and examined more closely by Lynn Hilditch in *Lee Miller: Photography, Surrealism, and the Second World War* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017), and Astrid Mahler, "Prägende Jahre: Lee Miller und der Surrealismus," in *Lee Miller*, ed. Walter Moser and Klaus Albrecht Schröder (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2015), 8.

[7] Oldfield, *Calling the Shots*, 47-48. In particular, James Hare's photos of the Spanish-American War became very well known internationally.

[8] Oldfield, *Calling the Shots*, 48.

[9] Oldfield, *Calling the Shots*, 48.

Niedringhaus in 2014 has, however, also made a larger public aware that war reporting is by no means a purely male domain, as is generally assumed. Especially in the last decade, important research results have been published and there have also been some major exhibitions focusing exclusively on female war photographers and their work.[10]

More recent research indicates that female war photography did not start in the Second World War,[11] but already in 1858 with Harriet Tytler. Together with her husband, Tytler took photographs of theatres of war, for example, the Kashmir Gate in Delhi, during the Indian uprising against the British Empire.[12] Real combat photographs were of course not yet possible with the plate cameras in use at the time. Several women were active as photographers during the First World War. The Austrian Alice Schalek, for example, was accredited as the first German-speaking female war reporter. She was even present at some battles on the South Tyrolean front, although her combat subjects were staged.[13] Some women who assisted the military in relief roles also privately took cameras to hand. Among them was Mairi Chisholm, who set up a first aid station in Belgium. She photographed, amongst others, war volunteer Irene Gartside-Spaight atop a burnt-out tank in 1916, which underlines the presence and contribution of women to the war on the Western Front. However, the photograph was only presented to the public in 2016.[14]

The Spanish Civil War was also documented by women photographers, including Gerda Taro. After Schalek, she was one of the first female photographers to report directly from the front.[15] Her photographs of female

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[10] For example, the nationally touring exhibition *No Man's Land: Women's Photography and the First World War* started at the Impressions Gallery in Bradford in 2017. An exhibition at the Kunstpalast in Düsseldorf in 2019 was accompanied by the publication *Fotografinnen an der Front. Von Lee Miller bis Anja Niedringhaus*, ed. Anne-Marie Beckmann and Felicity Korn (Munich: Prestel, 2019).

[11] Cf. Jorge Lewinski, *The Camera at War: War Photography from 1848 to the Present Day* (London: Octopus, 1986), 26.

[12] Unfortunately, for a long time Harriet Tytler was unjustly regarded as being her husband's assistant and not as an equal partner. Orla Fitzpatrick, "Women Photographers," in *Encyclopedia of Nineteenth-Century Photography,* ed. John Hannavy (New York and Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2008), 1504.

[13] Lutz Musner, "Dem Krieg eine gefällige Form geben. Alice Schalek an der Isonzofront," in *Im Epizentrum des Zusammenbruchs. Wien im Ersten Weltkrieg*, ed. Alfred Pfoster and Andreas Weigl (Vienna: Metroverlag, 2013).

[14] Mairi Chisholm's photo of Irene Gartside-Spaight was presented at the above-mentioned exhibition *No Man's Land […]* and featured on the exhibition poster.

[15] Irme Schaber, *Gerda Taro. Fotoreporterin. Mit Robert Capa im Spanischen Bürgerkrieg. Die Biografie* (Marburg: Jonas, 2013).

militiamen shooting or carrying weapons are still particularly impressive today because women were excluded from combat in many armies for a very long time.[16] Taro was also apparently the first female photographer to be killed in a war and the news of her death was reported all over Europe.[17] Her photographic work, however, was then long forgotten—in contrast to that of her partner Robert Capa, who was dubbed the "Greatest War-Photographer in the World" in the British magazine *Picture Post* in 1938.[18] Capa's photograph of the *Loyalist Militiaman at the Moment of his Death* (1936) famously became an icon of photojournalism.[19] The closeness and immediacy to the battlefield that Capa naturally expresses par excellence in this image of the dying soldier became an ideal of war photography and even today, it continues to have an effect on photojournalists.

During the Second World War, 117 women received accreditation as war correspondents from the US War Department. However, they comprised only about 7% of the total of over 1,600 war correspondents and the vast majority were engaged in text journalism. Lee Miller is one of only four American female photojournalists.[20] As mentioned above, unlike their male counterparts, female war correspondents were forbidden from covering combat on the front lines, which made it difficult for them to live up to Capa's ideal of closeness and immediacy to the battlefield.[21] Female war photographers were often expected to document the war from a woman's perspective, which was, of course, socially constructed. For example, nurses in military hospitals, the civilian population, and especially children represented typical subjects for female war photographers in the Second

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[16] One photo with an armed militiawoman by Taro is: *Militiawoman training on the beach, near Barcelona*, August 1936, 40.3 x 50.6 cm, Photo-Gelatin silver print, The Robert Capa and Cornell Capa Archive, Gift of Cornell and Edith Capa, New York, International Center of Photography, https://www.icp.org/browse/archive/objects/militiawoman-training-on-the-beach-near-barcelona, accessed October 23, 2021. See also Oldfield, *Calling the Shots*, 52-53.

[17] Schaber, *Gerda Taro*.

[18] *Picture Post*, December 3, 1938, 13.

[19] Robert Capa, *Loyalist Militiaman at the moment of his death*, 1936, Gelatin silver print, Image (printed later): 24.7 x 34 cm, New York, The Metropolitan Museum, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/283315, accessed October 23, 2021; Richard Whelan, "Robert Capa's Falling Soldier: A Detective Story," *Aperture* 166 (Spring 2002).

[20] Anna Hanreich,"Amerikanische Fotojournalistinnen in Europa: Lee Miller, Margaret Bourke-White und Therese Bonney, " in *Lee Miller*, ed. Walter Moser and Klaus Albrecht Schröder (Ostfildern/ Ruit: Hatje, 2015), 49.

[21] Oldfield, *Calling the Shots*, 56.

World War. However, such photographs did not have as much news value for the media as frontline photographs did.[22] Particularly in the fashion magazine *Vogue*, that Lee Miller worked for, topics such as misery and death were more difficult to place than, for example, in *LIFE*, for which Margaret Bourke-White, among others, worked.[23]

Lee Miller's Challenging of Gender Conventions in Her War Correspondence

Even though Miller had lived in Europe and Egypt for several years, in December 1942 she nevertheless received the US war correspondent accreditation.[24] This was probably supported by the fact that *Vogue* belonged to Condé Nast, an important publishing company for the USA and that several of Miller's photographs of the Blitz were published in *Grim Glory: Pictures of Britain Under Fire.*[25] Miller seemed to be interested in accreditation as a war correspondent because, like others of her engaged antifascist-oriented surrealist friends, she wanted to support the fight against Hitler's Germany more actively.[26] The accreditation and her London home gave her easier access to the European sites of the Second World War. In 1944, Lee Miller received her first assignment as a war correspondent on the European continent, namely to report on an evacuation station for wounded American troops in France. As mentioned, the military hospital setting represents a typical "women's topic". Miller, however, did not even strictly stick to the scope of her first assignment and went to the field hospitals close to the front lines where she took some very haunting close-ups of the wounded.[27] Her reportage was well received by the *Vogue* editors, and she was able to continue to cover the Allied invasion of Europe with a total of 18 reportages published in British and American *Vogue*.

Other female war correspondents also disregarded the rule against taking photographs at the front. A well-known example was Margaret Bourke-White, who, for the first time, photographed on the front lines in Moscow

[22] Beckmann and Korn, *Fotografinnen,* 16.
[23] Oldfield, *Calling the Shots*, 158.
[24] Hilary Roberts, *Lee Miller: A Woman's War* (London, New York: Thames & Hudson, 2015), 92.
[25] Ernestine Carter (ed.), *Grim Glory. Pictures of Britain under fire* (London: Lund Humphries, 1941). Nancy Caldwell Sorel, *The Women Who Wrote the War* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2011), 195.
[26] Rühse, "Lee Miller," 173-175.
[27] Penrose, *Lee Miller's War*, 14-31.

in 1941 when the German troops invaded.[28] Miller accidentally got caught in the front line at Saint-Malo in France in 1944 because the fighting there was not over after all. Even at the risk of losing her accreditation, she continued to shoot there.[29] In Saint-Malo, the fortress commander, Colonel Andreas von Aulock, refused to surrender and entrenched himself in the fortress for more than two weeks, which attracted a great deal of attention.[30] For example, when he finally surrendered on August 17, 1944, it was reported on the front page of the New York Times.[31] Miller also took pictures of the German colonel when he was captured. From the photograph that was printed in British and American *Vogue*, it becomes clear in two ways that Miller transgresses conventions.[32] In general, her presence itself is a provocation against military rules because the frontline battle had just ended. Thus, she shows a female presence in a sphere dominated by male activity. Moreover, she counteracts the male gaze regime in that, as a woman belonging to the victorious army, she directs her gaze at the defeated male German and wants to perpetuate her subversive gaze in the image. Likewise, the conquered male had a particularly rigorous image of women, since in Nazi Germany the role of women was primarily focused on motherhood.[33]

The defeated Germans were often uncomfortable because of the eager American press. Colonel von Aulock tried to avoid photos of himself being taken by frequently holding his hand in front of his face as soon as he noticed that he was being photographed.[34] Miller was thus also only able to photograph him from the side during an unguarded moment (fig. 7-1), which of course does not make for outstanding photography. In her reportage text, however, Miller also emphasizes that Colonel von Aulock was particularly uncomfortable being photographed by a woman: it would even have brought a blush to his face. In the text, Miller compared this blush

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[28] Oldfield, *Calling the Shots*, 59.
[29] Hilditch, *Lee Miller,* 158.
[30] *The New York Times*, August 11, 1944, 1.
[31] *The New York Times*, August 20, 1944, 1.
[32] Lee Miller, *Colonel Aulock*, 1944, published in British *Vogue*, October 1944, 53, and American *Vogue*, October 15, 1944, 94.
[33] Miller also critically examines the National Socialist model of women in one of her reports – Penrose, *Lee Miller's War*, 115; see also Rühse, "Lee Miller," 176.
[34] Penrose, *Lee Miller's War*, 58. Aulock also held a hand up in front of his face when Dave Scherman tried to photograph him. Dave Scherman, *Siege of St. Malo*, *LIFE* Photo Collection, ID: TimeLife_image_116723961, https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/siege-of-st-malo/KgFcf4zvxrcsrQ, accessed October 24, 2021.

to "rouge",[35] which of course is a comparison that is particularly apt for a fashion magazine. Naturally, the feminine connotation of red cheek powder further humiliates the formerly powerful Nazi commander.

Fig. 7-1: Lee Miller, Von Aulock "The Mad Colonel" surrenders, Saint-Malo, France, 1944 (5918-40) © Lee Miller Archives, England 2021. All rights reserved. leemiller.co.uk.

Audrey Withers, the editor of *Vogue,* had also told Miller not to photograph concentration camps—for *Vogue* and its readers they were not considered a suitable subject due to their awfulness.[36] In France, Miller

[35] Penrose, *Lee Miller's War*, 58.
[36] Menzel-Ahr, *Lee Miller*, 155.

Fig. 7-2: Lee Miller, *Bodies in the courtyard of the Buchenwald concentration camp crematorium*, Germany, mid-April 1945 (51-20) © Lee Miller Archives, England 2021. All rights reserved. leemiller.co.uk.

complied, although she reported from Buchenwald and Dachau in Germany. However, unlike Miller, another war correspondent Janet Flanner, did not visit Buchenwald immediately after its liberation, but waited three weeks, hoping, among other things, to encounter less dire conditions. Miller also indirectly draws attention to her courage in visiting the German concentration camps. At the end of one article, she mentioned that the terrible conditions in Dachau had made many Allied soldiers, who were encouraged to stand as eyewitnesses to the awful circumstances, physically ill and they were "really tough guys". In her photographs from the concentration camps,

Miller only spares the Vogue readers to a limited extent. Probably her most impressive and idiosyncratic photos are the close-ups of piled-up corpses in Buchenwald, which could not be burned before the camp was liberated. Miller also took pictures of a few faces of the lifeless bodies that looked almost like portraits. In its distorted pain, a dead face almost even looks as if the person is still alive (fig. 7-2). One could of course assume that Miller, as a woman, is particularly empathetic to the suffering of others.

However, there is even more calculation behind the visual staging, as in this way, Lee Miller can make the individuality and humanity of the undignifiedly piled-up corpses apparent—in the mass murder by the Germans, the individual has become faceless.[37] She resists this visually by bringing the individual faces of the dead into focus. This differs markedly from a shot by Bourke-White, which tends to draw attention to the multitude of the dead by bringing the feet in the piles of corpses into view in an only slightly dignified way.[38] Surrealists thus not only defended artistic freedom but also individuality.[39]

Unlike Gerda Taro, Miller had little opportunity to photograph women with guns on the European continent.[40] In this context, however, it is interesting to note that Miller, as a female member of the army, visually relates taking photos to shooting a person in a later frequently published photograph. In the Buchenwald camp prison, she photographed a Nazi perpetrator captured there (fig. 7-3). Since the photographer is head-on in front of the concentration camp guard, who appears to be kneeling on the floor, he has no means of escape.[41] His blood-encrusted face is in the centre of the picture and is illuminated by the flash. The fear-filled, wide-open eyes are shown to great advantage. Based on the man's panic, the war correspondent seems not only to be taking a photo but to be handling a real firearm.[42] Although "shooting" with a photographic camera has long been

[37] Ulrich Herbert, *Wer waren die Nationalsozialisten?* (Munich: Beck, 2021), 91.
[38] Menzel-Ahr, *Lee Miller*, 162 with fig. 153.
[39] Several Surrealists defended not only artistic freedom but also individuality. – T. J. Demos, "Duchamp's Labyrinth: First Papers of Surrealism, 1942," *October* 97 (Summer 2001): 97.
[40] In London, Lee Miller could only take pictures of Wrens (members of the Women's Royal Naval Service) cleaning armaments – see for instance Lee Miller, *Wrens in Camera* (London: Hollis and Carter, 1945), 48.
[41] Menzel-Ahr, *Lee Miller*, 186 with fig. 187.
[42] Ibid., 186-187.

related to that of a gun in general photographic history or theory,[43] the metaphor is used more frequently in war photography. In bringing this shooting metaphor to bear on reporting, and specifically on concentration camp perpetrators, Miller's photography is thoroughly singular, as the female photographer is thereby acting as an avenger for wrongs committed. One would not expect such an aggressive image from the correspondent of a luxury fashion magazine, and it was in fact not printed in *Vogue* at the time but was only published many years later.

Fig. 7-3: Lee Miller, *Beaten SS prison guard*, Buchenwald, Germany, mid-April 1945 (54-15)

[43] Clement Cheroux, *Shoot! Existential Photography* (Berlin: Revolver Publishing, 2010).

Selected War Portraits of Lee Miller

Lee Miller did not only transgress female conventions in her war correspondence in text and image but also tried to make several not-so-feminine portrayals of herself as a war correspondent. In general, popular war correspondents had celebrity status during the Second World War and received much media attention. When Margaret Bourke-White was assigned to the 97th Air Bombardment Group, Lee Miller photographed her next to a B-17 bomber in England for a feature article in *Vogue* in December 1942.[44] A meeting of the six accredited American female war correspondents based in London, including Lee Miller, was reported on in different newspapers and it was mentioned that they are "known throughout the English-speaking world".[45] Female war correspondents inspired characters in Hollywood movies and comics.[46] Making women's contributions to the war more popular not only supported the war effort but also provided an important solution for the career problem of young women.[47] War correspondents promoted newspaper and magazine sales and because of this, female war correspondents were also featured with the articles in the magazines. For example, in *LIFE*, Margaret Bourke-White was featured very prominently in an article about a bombing raid near Tunis.[48] Similarly, *Vogue* also tried to launch Lee Miller as a media star.[49] To provide the required visual material for this, Miller sent in some special images of herself from Europe. She was assisted by other photographers in the shooting, but it can be assumed that she had a strong influence on the conception of some of the pictures, which will be also explained in more detail below. Miller's experience as a model, which she had already used for her self-portraits in the 1930s, was also helpful for the war portraits taken of her.

In connection with her first war reportage about the military hospital in France, Miller created a picture of herself with a modified army helmet that

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[44] British *Vogue*, January 1942, 42-43; American *Vogue*, July 1, 1943, 50. See also Menzel-Ahr, *Lee Miller*, 238-239.
[45] *The Vancouver Sun*, April 10, 1943, 14.
[46] Oldfield, *Calling the Shots*, 154.
[47] Kim Guise, "Curator's Choice: Glamour Goes to War," in *The National WW2 Museum*, online articles, March 31, 2021, accessed October 24, 2021, https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/glamour-magazine-primrose-robinson.
[48] *LIFE*, March 1, 1943, 17.
[49] Oldfield, *Calling the Shots*, 156-157. Of course, it was an advantage for *Vogue,* that Miller, as a former top model and muse of the Surrealists, still had a certain degree of notoriety.

was used in an advertisement for the feature in the *New York Herald Tribune* in September 1944.[50] In the published reportage in American *Vogue*, the picture was also included on the bottom right of the first double-page spread.[51] In the photo, Lee Miller wears her correspondent uniform jacket, which made her look very professional and underlines her official role as a war correspondent (fig. 7-4).[52] Miller's proximity to the war front in France is visually accentuated by the fact that she wears a combat helmet. Lee Miller borrowed the helmet from Don Sykes, an American army camera operator, and the helmet seems to function as a surrealist *objet trouvé*. Sykes also took the shot, but it was certainly done in coordination with Miller.[53] The top of the helmet was cut with an opening to allow its owner to better operate their film camera. A protective flap like a visor was mounted on this exposed area. This flap, provided by Sykes, had painted longitudinal stripes, so that it reminds even more of a medieval helmet's visor.

Fig. 7-4: Lee Miller with Don Sykes, Lee Miller wearing a special helmet borrowed from Don Sykes, Normandy, 1944.

On a woman's head, the protective covering with the knight's helmet allusion takes on yet another variation of meaning. One quickly associates a woman wearing a knight's helmet-like headgear with Joan of Arc as, apart from her, women in knightly armour have been virtually non-existent in

[50] *New York Herald Tribune,* September 11, 1944, 2. See also Oldfield, *Calling the Shots*, 156-157.
[51] American *Vogue*, 15.9.1944, 139. A detail of the photo was also used on the front page of *Ce Soir* (September 1, 1944) for illustrating an article by Lee Miller.
[52] Caldwell Sorel, *Women Who Wrote the War*, 171-172.
[53] Hilditch, *Lee Miller*, 65.

history.[54] St. Joan had already been taken up as a model for women's war support in World War I, for example, by an American advertisement for private war bond stamps (fig. 7-5).[55] In the Second World War, the Joan of Arc reference was, among others, used for Resistance fighters or other wartime contributions by women in the British press.[56] The allusion to Joan of Arc with the helmet naturally underscores Miller's emancipated transgression of female conventions.

Fig. 7-5: Haskell Coffin, Poster for World War I war savings stamps with Joan of Arc, 1918, State Archives of North Carolina.

In the *Vogue* article resulting from Miller's forbidden frontline presence in Saint-Malo, a photo of the war correspondent was also integrated very prominently (fig. 7-6). David Scherman took it, and it was also published under his name.[57] However, according to Scherman's recollections, Lee Miller initiated the photo,[58] and as she also most probably chose her pose,

[54] Lee Miller also mentions Joan of Arc in her text on the Alsace campaign – Penrose, *Lee Miller's War*, 149.
[55] Haskell Coffin, *Poster for World War I war savings stamps with Joan of Arc*, 1918, State Archives of North Carolina, accessed October 24, 2021, https://digital.ncdcr.gov/digital/collection/p15012coll10/id/2230/. See also Allison Miller, "Joan of Arc, for Fascists and Feminists," *JSTOR Daily*, May 14, 2020, https://daily.jstor.org/joan-of-arc-for-fascists-and-feminists/, accessed October 24, 2021.
[56] Examples of references to Joan of Arc in the press in the Second World War can for instance be found in: *Birmingham Mail*, September 16, 1944, 3; *Sunday Post*, January 2, 1944, 2.
[57] American *Vogue*, October 15, 1944, 92.
[58] Penrose, *Lee Miller's War*, 10.

Fig. 7-6: Dave Scherman with Lee Miller, *Lee Miller and American soldiers,* St. Malo, France 1944 (NC0051-9) © Lee Miller Archives, England 2021. All rights reserved. leemiller.co.uk.

the photo can be seen as the result of a collaboration between Scherman and Miller. Unlike the previously discussed depiction of Miller, this is not a single portrait. Instead, Miller is seated on a large stone near a church in an area marked by extensive war damage. Behind her are four American soldiers, of whom two are visibly carrying rifles. All are looking intently into the distance, that is, watching the enemy. Miller almost completely visually blends in with the group of male soldiers as she also wears military trousers and a normal combat helmet, under which her hair is completely

hidden. However, the feminine features of Miller's figure also become apparent. She stretches out one leg decoratively while sitting; the sleeves are rolled up ready for action so that the forearms are visible. Her good looks as a former model and her former celebrity status because of the many fashion and artists circles she moved in could further support her popularity as a war correspondent. The androgynous image of Miller in this photo also resists classic gender stereotypes, even if less provocatively than other surrealist self-portraits such as those by Claude Cahun.

In the photo, it is noticeable that the camera pouch on her belt is a rather incidental accessory, and Miller also does not wear a visible war correspondent armband, whereby she is visually equated with the other soldiers. Through such a staging, of course, an attempt is made to correspond to the ideal of a masculine war photographer who is active close to the action on the front. According to Pippa Oldfield, such a visual strategy aimed "to legitimate the authority of the female observer of war and to pre-empt accusations of her being guilty of voyeurism and tourism."[59] Incidentally, Robert Capa, who was very influential in this performance, also depicted his partner Gerda Taro with a male Republican soldier.[60] However, the situation is even more dramatic, as the battle seems to be in progress. Taro ducks behind the soldier without a helmet and thus appears more feminine and fragile than Miller, who appears visually much more on a par with the other soldiers.

At the end of the war in Germany, a very special and even more difficult production of Miller in Hitler's personal bathroom emerges. The shot was published in *Vogue* under Miller's name although we now know that David Scherman pressed the camera shutter. In terms of style, however, the photograph differs too much from his work, especially from the shots he took for *LIFE* in Hitler's private apartment, wherefore Miller can be regarded as being the author of the picture. Several shots of her were taken in Hitler's bathroom;[61] one shot from this series was printed in small format in the 1945 British edition of *Vogue* at the end of an article about formerly important sites of Nazism in southern Germany.[62] The photo published at that time, however, is not as compositionally rich as the version published

[59] Oldfield, *Calling the Shots*, 66.
[60] Robert Capa, *Gerda Taro, Cerro Muriano, Córdoba front*, Spain, September 1936, 18.1 x 24.3 cm, gelatin silver print, New York, International Center of Photography, https://www.icp.org/browse/archive/objects/gerda-taro-cerro-muriano-c%C3%B3rdoba-front-spain, accessed October 24, 2021.
[61] The photos of Miller in Hitler's bathroom were taken on April 30, 1945.
[62] Lee Miller, "Hitleriana," British *Vogue*, July 1945, 73.

by Miller's son in the 1980s (fig. 7-7).[63] This later published version will be referred to below. Today it is among the best-known of Miller's war footage motifs.

Fig. 7-7: Lee Miller, *Lee Miller in Hitler's Bathtub*, Hitler's Apartment, 16 Prinzregentenplatz, Munich, Germany 1945 (79-19 R6) © Lee Miller Archives, England 2021. All rights reserved. leemiller.co.uk.

In it, an unframed, official photograph of Hitler in uniform is positioned on the left side of the rear bathtub rim, frontally to the viewer. Miller very likely found this photograph in Hitler's study. The half-length portrait was

[63] Antony Penrose, *The Lives of Lee Miller* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1985), 142.

taken by Hitler's personal photographer Heinrich Hoffmann in 1933/4.[64] The striking gesture expresses the power of a ruler as well as military vigour—through it, Hitler is stylised as a leader. The integration of the photograph into Miller's shot refers to Hitler as the previous owner of the apartment.[65] Miller's invasion of Hitler's bathroom as a war correspondent for the US Army, of course, highlights Hitler's loss of power. Fittingly, Hitler committed suicide in the "Führerbunker" (Hitler's air raid shelter near the Reich Chancellery) in Berlin at about the same time as the creation of Miller's not-so-glorious photograph for him. It is striking that Miller also chooses Hitler's simple bathroom as the location. In doing so, Miller ironically picks up on the genre of the "home story", which was popular with the fashion magazine's readership. Hitler's dining room in his "Berghof" residence near Berchtesgaden was also pictured in American *Vogue* in 1936 and described as "gemütlich" (cozy) – thereby trivializing Hitler and National Socialism.[66] In her coverage of Hitler's apartment, however, Miller does not idealize Hitler's premises as she did in her other earlier home stories. Instead, she criticises the mediocrity of the interior design of the bathroom which "could have been bought from a furnishing catalogue".[67] To confirm this visually, the shot of the seemingly plain bathroom, with its simple tiles, lends itself naturally—for it is not, after all, a fancy marble bathroom. A comparison with the floor plan shows that only about a third of the bathroom is visible in Miller's photo, thus it appears emphatically small.[68]

It is shocking that Miller places herself in the bathtub which is primarily connoted with feminine hygiene and comfort.[69] In films, divas often loll in bathtubs, like Marlene Dietrich in 1937 in *Knight without Armor* (directed by Jacques Feyder). Miller can thus additionally counter the masculine and ascetic image of the "Führer" with Hitler's bathtub, connoted as feminine and comfortable and she thereby contributes to the demythologization of the cult around the dictator Hitler. Such a demythologization corresponded to the main concern of the American victory propaganda at the time. The fall of Munich, the spiritual birthplace of National Socialism, was portrayed as

[64] Menzel-Ahr, *Lee Miller*, 206 with endnote 767.
[65] Ibid., p. 350.
[66] American *Vogue,* August 15, 1936, 70. See also Menzel-Ahr, *Lee Miller*, 212-213 with endnotes 787 and 788.
[67] Penrose, *Lee Miller's War*, 192.
[68] Menzel-Ahr, *Lee Miller*, 206 with endnote 767.
[69] Françoise de Bonneville, *Das Buch vom Bad* (Munich: Heyne, 1998), 149.

"a smashing blow at the Hitler myth."[70] In this way, the Americans wanted to be able to better compete with the fall of Berlin to the Russians through clever reporting. In the American press, the fall of Berlin was characterized as the physical and political collapse of the Third Reich. For Miller as an official war correspondent, the unclothed self-dramatization in a bathtub is quite daring because of its amorous character. Such portrayals have not survived of other female war correspondents during the Second World War.[71] However, Miller is careful not to appear too frivolous when taking the picture, as she very cleverly conceals her upper body with her arm.

In addition, she uses a very popular and frequent means of dressing up, namely the integration of antique references. For example, Miller positioned a small Rosenthal porcelain statue spatially diagonally opposite the photograph of Hitler. She found the figurine in one of the display cabinets in Hitler's apartment and it is the popular half-nude torso *Die Ausschauende* (*The Looking On*) based on a model by Rudolf Kaesbach.[72] The statuette with its "Nordic-Greek" style preferred by Hitler is ideally suited to the Nazi aesthetic. As a very patient onlooker, the portrayed woman conveys the passive female eroticism favoured by the Nazis, which of course contrasts with Miller's active participation in the war. Miller veils her upper body with a very self-possessed arm gesture. Her war involvement is additionally referenced by the uniform boots, which are prominently placed on the floor in front of the bathtub, while her uniform is placed on a stool nearby. Miller thus dialectically combines the masculine and the feminine and links the spheres of Venus with that of Mars, the god of war.

For Miller, the use of Hitler's bathtub had a functional background. In an interview a little later, she reported that she had washed off the dust of Dachau there.[73] However, there is also a symbolic interpretation of Miller's bath. The Surrealists often used external processes as a form of expression for inner experiences and the purification theme was more frequently taken up by Surrealists in terms of spiritual purification.[74] For example, Dalí

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[70] See also the article "Hitler Myth. It Is Smashed in Munich" with photos by Dave E. Scherman in *LIFE*, May 14, 1945, 36.

[71] See also Rühse, "Lee Miller," 175 with footnote 52.

[72] *Die Ausschauende* (*The looking one*) based on a model by Rudolf Kaesbach, produced by Rosenthal Selb, finest bisque porcelain, ca. 1937, ca. 25 cm high, base diameter ca 10 cm x 9 cm, private collection of Viola Rühse.

[73] Carolyn Burke, *Lee Miller. A Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 298.

[74] See Terri Geis, "My Goddesses and My Monsters," in *Surrealism in Latin America: Vivisimo Muerto*, ed. Dawn Edes, Rita Eder, and Graciela Speranza (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2012), 149, 152–153. Another example is Marcel

created an installation for a shop window in the *Bonwit Teller* luxury department store in New York in 1939. Part of the work consisted of a mannequin as a contemporary Venus with an ermine-lined bathtub. By including several mirrors mounted in the bathtub, Dalí seems to criticize narcissism.[75]

Miller, on the other hand, intends to portray the spiritual cleansing of the destruction of National Socialism. She once again slips into the role of Venus, which she has already played in Cocteau's film, among others.[76] As a contemporary Venus, the goddess of love and beauty, Miller counters the National Socialist violence of destruction, which she has intensively documented, with the positive energy of love. According to surrealist understanding, only through this can the liberation from fascism be completed.[77] Miller takes up a surrealist aesthetic by combining various contrasting elements in the photograph to create an enigmatic image. With its complex arrangement, the photo also fulfils important aspects of the surrealist convulsive ideal of beauty by including opposites such as male and female as well as war and beauty. In addition, the bath scene allows an erotic subtone.[78] This aesthetic, of course, contrasts with that of Nazi artists such as Heinrich Hoffmann or Rudolf Kaesbach; the scene would have been denigrated as "degenerate" by the Nazis.[79]

Conclusion

Of the published and unpublished portraits of Lee Miller from her war correspondence, the picture of her taken in Hitler's bathtub is certainly the most intricate and one of the best known of her wartime photos today. In this chapter, it was related to two other selected portraits of Miller from her

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Duchamp's *Salle de Pluie* in the *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme* in Paris in 1947 based on previous Surrealist ideas; see for instance Tessel M. Bauduin, *The Occultation of Surrealism. A Study of the Relationship between Bretonian Surrealism and Western Esotericism* (Amsterdam: Elck Syn Waerom, 2002), 234.

[75] *Lewis Kachur, Displaying the Marvelous: Marcel Duchamp, Salvador Dali, and Surrealist Exhibition Installations (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2001), 112, 156.*

[76] *Le Sang d'un Poète*, director : Jean Cocteau, France 1930.

[77] André Breton, *Arkanum 17. Ergänzt durch Erhellungen* (Munich: Matthes & Seitz, 1993), 108–109.

[78] Idem, "L'Amour fou," in idem: *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 2 (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), 687.

[79] A more comprehensive analysis of Miller's photograph in Hitler's bathtub can be found in Rühse, "Lee Miller."

correspondence, considering the reportage texts. This was preceded by positioning Miller in the history of female war photographers to illustrate the general obstacles that Miller faced as a female war correspondent. Several aspects were selected from Miller's war correspondence to illustrate the extent to which she, as a woman, challenged female conventions in her war reportage. She could be present at the frontline in the first half of the 20th century, and it was precisely her as a woman photographing the capture of a German colonel shortly after combat that was a provocation to him. She disregarded *Vogue*'s stipulation that the eyes of female and male readers should not be additionally burdened with concentration camp images. Her pictures from Buchenwald are very haunting because, for example, she does not anonymously depict the dead and integrates the individual suffering into the photographs. As a woman, she is particularly aggressive and enraged when photographing the concentration camp perpetrators. This is made clear in the shot in which she uses the shooting of the camera as a metaphor.

The reports of the official war correspondents were greatly beneficial to magazine sales. For this reason, female and male war correspondents were treated like media stars in a promotional manner. On the one hand, Lee Miller attempts to conform to the ideal of a hypermasculine war correspondent close to the frontline as coined amongst others by Robert Capa. On the other hand, by including a knight's helmet-like headgear, she also alludes to Joan of Arc, which of course underscores her emancipation. At the end of the war in Germany, Miller finally strips off her clothes, or rather her military uniform, in Hitler's bathroom for the creation of a complex photograph that disavows the Führer cult and the Nazi image of women. For the *Vogue* readership of the time, Miller, as a war correspondent, also highlighted alternative modes of behaviour for a woman. Unfortunately, Miller's fame declined after the Second World War—like that of other war correspondents.[80] Only thanks to the efforts of her son Antony Penrose, could she gain popularity again.[81] Lee Miller provides a powerful legitimation for today's female photographers, whose recognition in the still largely male-dominated field of war photography is unfortunately still not self-evident.

[80] Brannan, "Perpetual Pioneers," 156-157.

[81] In recent years, Miller's granddaughter Amy Bouhassane also made great efforts to process the estate of Lee Miller.

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CHAPTER NINE

LEE MILLER'S ENTERTAINING FREEZER: SURREALIST CUISINE FOR THE MODERN WOMAN

LOTTIE WHALEN

In a profile for a 1965 issue of *Vogue*, Ninette Lyons sat down with Lee Miller to "talk about food".[1] The photograph that accompanies the interview shows Miller leaning into shot, looking straight towards the camera with a large grin on her face. Wearing a professional clean white apron and clutching a bowl of vegetables, it appears as if she has just popped out of the kitchen to greet a guest. In the foreground, off-centre and in shadow, Miller's husband Roland Penrose turns to observe her. Miller spent much of her early life caught in the male gaze, her body spliced into sensuous fragments to be consumed by men's eyes: Man Ray turned her lips, neck, face, eye, and legs into icons of surrealism and objects of desire. Even during the Second World War, when Miller came into her own as a photographer, the photograph of her washing in Hitler's bathtub overshadowed her professional achievements for many years. In the *Vogue* photograph, however, Miller quite literally steps out of the shadow of the male gaze to claim what Lyons describes as her "second fame".

Miller's post-war transformation into a gourmet cook seemed - to some of her acquaintances and many critics - to be the most baffling in a dramatic sequence of reinventions. Her previous lives as a model, muse, avant-garde photographer, and war reporter were remarkable but obvious callings for a creative, ambitious, educated, and beautiful upper middle-class woman. On the surface, it seemed bewildering that such an accomplished and adventurous woman would abandon her active, professional life for the kitchen of an English farmhouse. For Miller, however, cooking was both a

[1] Ninette Lyon, "Lee and Roland Penrose, a Second Fame: Good Food", *American Vogue,* April 1974: 187.

serious endeavour and a form of "pure therapy" that helped her deal with the post-traumatic stress disorder she suffered from after the war.[2] By the time of her death in 1977, she had collected over two thousand cookbooks, trained at Cordon Blue schools in London and Paris, entered (and often won) competitions, written recipes for women's magazines, and begun drafting her own cookery manual "The Entertaining Freezer*"*. The kitchen became Miller's studio: a place of experimentation, design, and drama. The food she created there was anything but ordinary. Miller drew on her trained surrealist eye and flair for composition to transform dinner parties into culinary art installations where she served colourful, collage-like dishes, such as "cauliflower breasts" and Mirò-inspired blue fish. Miller's friend and *House and Garden* journalist Bettina McNulty declared her the inventor of "surrealist cuisine".[3]

This essay argues that Miller's turn to domestic art was a clear continuation of her avant-garde artistic career; through cookery, Miller explored themes she had developed during her years as a photographer, in a radically different medium. Her enthusiasm for gadgets, practical technical knowledge, and eye for composition would all re-emerge as key skills in her career as a gourmet cook. For Miller, cooking and presenting food was a form of performance art, through which she continued a collaborative, creative camaraderie with friends from the surrealist movement. In the second part of this essay, Miller's culinary art is placed in dialogue with the work of Leonora Carrington to highlight the ways both women collapsed boundaries between art and the everyday, the domestic and the art-world through alternative art practices. Their shared interest in the kitchen as a site of creativity and experimentation keys into a broader lineage of avant-garde, feminist efforts to reimagine domestic space and domestic arts as tools to challenge patriarchal narratives. However, as the final section of this essay shows, a love of modern kitchen technology and machines marked Miller out as unique among her friends and collaborators. As in her photographic art, Miller's culinary artworks were technologically mediated, thoroughly modern creations. Far from signalling a retreat from the world, Miller's career as a cook signalled a new step in her engagement with it: her plans

[2] After the horrific scenes she witnessed during the war, Miller also turned to alcohol, which became a lifelong battle. Her struggles with trauma and alcohol had a particular impact on her relationship with her son, Antony Penrose; he writes about his mother and the discovery of her war photographs after her death in: *The Lives of Lee Miller* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1988).

[3] Bettina McNulty, "The Compulsive Cook", *Lee Miller: A Life with Food, Friends, and Recipes,* ed. Ami Bouhassane (Oslo and East Sussex: Grapefruit Publishing with Penrose Film Productions Ltd, 2017), 15.

for "The Entertaining Freezer" (dated 1973) show that the cookbook was aimed at - and written from the perspective of - an active, modern woman eager to use modernist design and innovative technology to improve everyday life. Even in the last decade of her life, Miller sought new ways to create experimental, innovative, and modern forms of art.

From Camera to Cookbooks

Photography was Miller's first chosen creative medium, or, perhaps more accurately her destined medium. Miller's father Theodore was an avid amateur photographer who enjoyed testing out new gadgets and technological innovations, particularly stereoscopy. Miller was his favourite muse, a relationship that became increasingly obsessional and inappropriate as she grew older. Nevertheless, she became fascinated by the process of photography and enjoyed assisting her father in his studio. Theodore gave Miller her first camera, a Kodak Brownie, when she was ten years old. Nine years later, Miller was spotted in Manhattan by Condé Nast himself and soon found herself in front of the cameras of New York's most fashionable photographers, including Edward Steichen and Horst P. Horst. Despite her success as a model, Miller was already planning her shift into the role of artist, rather than muse. Modelling sessions became opportunities to hone her own camera skills; Miller's son Anthony noted that she treated modelling sessions as "privileged tutorials", picking up tips from the photographers as she worked.[4]

Once Miller decided she was serious about photography, she moved to Paris, where she aimed to develop her craft with one of the most innovative and radical practitioners of the era – Man Ray. Miller recognised in his work the same love of experimentation and inventive image making that she had cultivated while assisting her father. Despite Man Ray's initial reluctance to take on an assistant, they quickly formed an intimate collaborative partnership at the heart of surrealism, pushing the boundaries of photography. Reflecting on his radical style years later, Man Ray declared that he "deliberately dodged all the rules" by mixing "the most insane products together", using out of date film, and generally committing "heinous crimes against chemistry and photography".[5] Miller was an equal partner in this process. Indeed, she was responsible for one of the most significant "heinous crimes against

[4] Quoted in Francine Prose, *The Lives of the Muses*: *Nine Women and the Artists They Inspired* (New York: Harper Collins, 2002), 237.

[5] Quoted in Gabriel H. Sanchez, "Man Ray: Rayographs and Solarizations", *In the In-Between: journal of new and new media photography* (2014): para 2, accessed May 3, 2021, https://www.inthein-between.com/man-ray-before-digital/

chemistry and photography" while working in the studio in 1930: suddenly startled while developing film (so the story goes), she instinctively flicked on the light switch, exposing the negatives to a harsh bright light. The resulting images were stunningly surreal, showing figures and objects glowing and melting into an aura of light, as if emerging from another world. The process, which they called solarization, became a favourite technique of Man Ray's and Miller's during their time together; however, many of Miller's solarised photographs are solely credited to Man Ray.

Once Miller left Man Ray in 1932, she was free to make her own way as an independent photographer. She briefly ran her own portrait studio in New York, utilising her practical skills to install electric wiring and fit out all the equipment herself.[6] However, it was not until the outbreak of the Second World War that Miller truly came into her own as a photographer. Working for *Vogue*, Miller broke new ground in documenting the impact of war on women's lives. Her perspective on women's experiences was utterly unique and offered a stark contrast to traditional macho, militaristic visions of war. It also aligned perfectly with the unprecedent opportunities that the Second World War opened for women, on the home front and on the battlefield. Photographs such as those of Polish pilot Anna Leska in a Spitfire and female Auxiliary Territorial Service officers changing their uniforms show women in active, specialised roles. There is a clear sense that Miller's life as a modern, liberated woman gave her an understanding of the women she photographed and the challenges they faced.

Across all her war photography, whether on the bombed-out streets of London or the shattered battlefields of Frances and Germany, Miller's work retains her distinct aesthetic. Her images are characterised by an eye for the uncanny and a sense for moments of macabre humour: a photograph of two women staring deadpan at the camera whilst wearing fire masks (to be worn during Air Raid Precautions work during the Blitz in London) captures the surreality of everyday life in wartime. Elsewhere, an eerie portrait of the lifeless body of Regina Lisso, daughter of the Deputy Mayor of Leipzig Ernst Lisso, could almost be a surrealist composition. Lisso's head lolls back, her teeth bared in a half-smile, with her hands clasped around her body. The dramatic play of light and shade, particularly the bright white of Lisso's skin, recalls Miller's experiments with solarisation. Only the heavy military overcoat and her German Red Cross armband situate the image in its historic moment: Germany, April 1945.

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[6] Naomi Blumberg, "Lee Miller", *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 17 Jul. 2021, accessed August 7, 2021, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Lee-Miller.

This striking body of work marks Miller out as a master of the form: her war photography does not simply document, but also asks questions of the viewer while drawing out the entwined absurdity and terror that defined ordinary life in wartime. Miller was left deeply traumatised by what she saw during her time as a photographic reporter, to the extent that she turned her back on the medium in the post-war period. In addition to the horrendous scenes she bore witness to, the very processes of photography had become troubling to her. In other words, photography's inherent link to a dehumanised (and dehumanising) mechanical mode of modernism was a contributing factor in Miller's struggle with grief and trauma in the post-war period. As Sara Danius describes, photography was intimately linked to a modernist aesthetic in which the sensuous and the technological merged; the "cold, mechanical" camera eye shaped and radically altered human visual perception.[7] Seen through the lens, the world seemed less stable, less convincingly whole. Avant-garde photography exploited the gap between perception and reality that the camera lens uncovered. Barbara Beth Zadel notes that Man Ray's "new rayographic technique [of the 1920s] provided a way of conceiving of the human body as a stripped-down automaton".[8] The processes of dematerialisation that defined the rayographs were, Zadel argues, part of Man Ray's "statement of resistance" to the Taylorist and Fordist "ideals of precision" that were dominant in the United States. Instead of factory efficiency, Man Ray alluded to the dark side of modern mechanised society, namely "the human loss and lives that were dematerialized by World War One".[9]

As a model and muse, Miller experienced the dehumanising effect of the camera eye directly. Man Ray repeatedly and obsessively sliced up Miller's body into fragmented pieces in works including *La Prière* (1930, a provocative image of Miller's hands and feet folded under her buttocks) and *Neck (Lee Miller)* (1930). After Miller split from Man Ray, he created *Object to be Destroyed* (1933) by attaching a photograph of her eye to a metronome; accompanying notes instructed viewers to destroy the piece with a single blow of a hammer.[10] Being behind the camera's mechanical

[7] Sara Danius, *The Senses of Modernism: Technology, Perception, and Aesthetics* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2002), 15.
[8] Barbara Beth Zadel, *Assembling Art: The Machine and the American Avant-Garde* (Jackson, Mississippi: University of Press Mississippi, 2004), 30.
[9] Zadel, *Assembling Art*, 60.
[10] *Object to be Destroyed* was based on an earlier work, *Object of Destruction* (1922-23). The first piece was linked to Man Ray's practice, its movement encouraging him to paint faster and stop when he had gone on too long (the eye intensifying the sensation of something watching him as he worked). The second version had much

lens only exacerbated her sense of the disturbing and sometimes violent ways that photography mediated our vision of the modern world.[11] For Miller, the very practice of photography was bound up with loss and a disconnect between vision and memory, emotion, and subjectivity.[12] The war brought her up close to victims of a regime that engineered mass murder into an efficient technologized process; photographs bear witness to this atrocity, but also risk making a spectacle of the dead, another step in the dehumanising process that led to their deaths.

Miller's post-war, post-photography life marked a dramatic shift in her identity and the trajectory of her life: in 1947 (aged forty) she became a mother and married Penrose, and, two years later, the family moved to Farley Farm in Sussex. While Penrose was active as an organiser, curator, and impresario on the London art scene, Miller struggled with alcoholism and depression. However, to the surprise of those closest to her, she began spending time in the kitchen cooking elaborate and eclectic meals. Miller later credited cooking as her "therapy", an activity that provided her with focus and a vital outlet for her creativity. From the outset, Miller approached cookery seriously, as a craft rather than a hobby. She studied courses at the prestigious Cordon Bleu schools in Paris and London and spent hours poring over her vast cookbook collection researching ideas for new dishes.[13] She was, in turn, treated seriously as a cook by contemporary magazines, including *Vogue* and *House and Garden*, as well as the many tourist boards and food manufacturers whose cookery competitions she won (earning her trips to Norway, Spain, and Italy). Many of her friends and acquaintances were, however, less enthusiastic about her turn from avant-garde adventurer to domestic cook. The opinion of actor Priscilla Morgan, who occasionally dined at Farley Farm, that Miller was "a hugely creative person who wasn't fulfilling her creative potential" summed up the general sense of bemusement.[14] Similarly, many critics have failed to situate Miller's

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greater emotional significance: in the instructions, Man Ray also notes 'cut out the eye from a photograph of one who has been loved but is seen no more', advising that the fatal hammer blow be administered when one reaches 'the limits of endurance'. For notes see *This Quarter*, Vol I (September 1932), 55.

[11] Alongside photography, many films of the modernist period explored the dehumanising effects of modern technology and machines, including Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times* (1936) and Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927).

[12] See, for example, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy's *Painting, Photography, Film*, which champions the hygienic, cleansing properties of the camera-eye.

[13] Miller passed her first Cordon Bleu course in Paris in 1957 and followed it up with an advanced course in London in 1961.

[14] Quoted in Carolyn Burke, *Lee Miller* (Boston: Little Brown, 2003), 339.

culinary art in the broader context of avant-garde interventions into the practices of everyday life.

Yet, as a cook, Miller continued to innovate, break boundaries, and create art, in an ephemeral, experiential form. Her experimentation in the kitchen repurposed many of the skills and interests that she had pursued in her previous career as a photographer, highlighting several crossovers between both the scientific and artistic aspects of photography and cooking: to make toners and developers, the photographer must mix chemicals, weigh powders, heat water, and monitor temperatures in a sensitive process that clearly mirrors that of the cook, carefully mixing up a dough or sweating over a delicately balanced sauce. Developing photographic film and cooking a meal are both labour intensive, methodical processes, dependent on repetition, patience, and dexterity – but also requiring a dash of boldness and flair to transcend the formulaic. The creativity that pushed Miller's avant-garde photography similarly drove her to be innovative in the kitchen, where she experimented with flavour combinations, textures, and unusual ingredients to create new dishes. Her painstakingly researched, carefully balance recipe for "Mahlebieh-Ground Rice Pudding" (Miller's take on a Middle Eastern milk pudding she recalled from her years living in Egypt, which went through many versions before Miller was satisfied with the recipe), is typical of her meticulous approach to cooking.[15]

Miller's photographer's eye (which was so skilled at framing interesting and unusual compositions) was also a crucial factor in her success as a cook. Miller's dishes were visually appealing, colourful, and often assembled in a collage-like fashion. The recipe for "Cauliflower Breasts", perhaps Miller's most obviously surrealist-inspired dish, directs the reader on how to achieve the correct colour scheme: an entire egg (not just its yolk) goes into the mayonnaise dressing to give a light colour, and then tomato paste is added to create a fleshy pink "tint".[16] A dash of caviar (or tapenade) presumably gives the effect of a nipple on each cauliflower "breast", and the dish should be garnished with chopped eggs, quartered tomatoes, and parsley. Miller frequently used natural food colouring to enhance the vivid tones of her dishes; in her recipe for "Parsley Ice", she suggests using four to five drops of green food colouring and advises washing and drying the fresh parsley

[15] Variations of the pudding exist across the Middle East; it is known as *Muhallebi* in Turkey, *Mahalabia* in Egypt, and *Malabi* in Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq.

[16] Lee Miller, "Cauliflower Breasts", *Lee Miller: A Life with Food, Friends, and Recipes,* ed. Ami Bouhassane (Oslo and East Sussex: Grapefruit Publishing with Penrose Film Productions Ltd, 2017), 300. Its name was altered to the more respectable 'Cauliflower Mayonnaise' in a 1973 issue of *House and Garden* magazine.

before chopping "so as not to lose its colour".[17] Despite scepticism from some friends, *Vogue* magazine frequently accompanied features on Millers cooking with remarks upon the surrealist panache of her dishes. In a profile written by Robert Fizdale and Arthur Gold, they described how "Lee Penrose invents dishes like no others – dishes that are Surrealist surprises…Mack Sennett cream pies add a dash Dada since, as Lee says, they are 'delicious to eat and fun to throw'". [18]

Miller's ability to transport avant-garde styles and forms into food led to her being asked to create several artist banquets through the 1960s and 1970s, usually to mark exhibitions of her friends' work at the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA). She designed an inventive Spanish Supper for Picasso and prepared a colourful feast in honour of Míro. Her most creative, experimental dinner party was reserved for Man Ray, to mark a retrospective of his work held at the ICA in 1975. Tapping into their shared history, Miller took inspiration from the 1930 Bal Blanc in Paris, an elaborate party with an all-white dress-code thrown by the Count and Countess Pecci-Blunt. Man Ray and Miller designed lighting and film for the party; for their main installation, Miller hand-coloured black and white film she found in a flea market, which was then projected from a window down into the courtyard where guests were gathered. The play of vivid colours and moving images on their white costumes was dazzlingly surreal, creating canvases out of the guests' bodies. In tribute to this moment, Miller devised an all-white menu, something that required a stark departure from her usual colourful food choices. Despite the limitations dictated by the colour theme, Miller found ways to concoct her usual flavoursome, "exotic" dishes: French *Brandade de Morue* (whipped salt cod, olive oil, and potatoes) featured as an appetiser, with vanilla ice cream and lychees for dessert.[19]

Miller often drew inspiration from a past episode in her life to inform the food she cooked in the post-war years. The evocative stories and anecdotes that accompany some of Miller's written-down recipes give an intriguing insight into her life and travels (particularly significant considering Miller's well-known refusal to talk about life pre-1945). The

[17] Lee Miller, "Parsley Ice", 265.

[18] Quoted in Ami Bouhassane, *Lee Miller: A Life with Food, Friends, and Recipes,* (Oslo and East Sussex: Grapefruit Publishing with Penrose Film Productions Ltd, 2017), 15.

[19] It is reasonable to assume Miller used canned lychees, as fresh ones have only been available in Britain in recent decades. In the 1970s, lychees were almost exclusively served (in Britain) in Chinese restaurants, so this is another example of Miller's use of unusual and unfamiliar foods.

original dish that became Miller's "Muddles Green Chicken" was, she notes, passed on to her by "Vladimir Peniakoff of Popski's Private Army fame and his wife Sugar in the cool shade of a wasp ridden sugar factory of which he was the manager"; in fact, Miller's take bears "no relation to his original" due to her haphazard attempts to follow it when still a novice but, typically, the result was a success.[20] These autobiographical fragments also serve as a reminder of how influential global cuisine was on Miller's cooking style, with many of her dishes drawing on dishes, herbs and spices, and flavour combinations from Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. During an era of infamously bland post-war British cuisine, this was an incredibly forward-thinking approach. Several of the dishes Miller included in the draft of *The Entertaining Freezer* are now familiar staples of British dining, such as "Ricotta and Spinach Gnocchi", "Moussaka", and "Poulet a la Kiev", but all would have been considered exotic by the standards of the average mid-century British palette. The latter dish ("Poulet a la Kiev") pre-empted the rise of the readymade Chicken Kiev to a dinner table staple in the 1980s, thanks to Cathy Chapman, a product developer at Marks and Spencer. Chapman's Chicken Kiev revolutionised convenience food in a way that Miller aimed to with her freezer-based recipes (to be discussed later in this essay), highlighting one of the many ways that Miller's understanding of food was ahead of its time.

Any consideration of Miller's cookery-as-art practice must also consider the elements of presentation and performance that were so vital to her dinner parties. Although she was Cordon Blue trained, Miller took a playful approach to food and certainly was not precious when it came to allowing other people to help with cooking. In fact, guests were actively welcomed into the kitchen, where they would be invited to take part in the preparation as if participating in a performance art piece. Miller placed almost as much emphasis on the food's display as she did on preparing it. Her serveware was made up of an eclectic mix of traditional table items and handcrafted art objects. Ami Bouhassane notes that Miller found great amusement in arranging "Toby jugs, kitsch nudes, and odd butter dishes" on the dining room table and dresser.[21] A plastic chrome plated King Kong took pride of place as a centre piece, adding an extra element of absurdity to the surreal spread. These camp and quirky objects were complemented by more highbrow items gifted by Miller and Penrose's artist friends: a gravy boat made by Picasso, slipware dishes by Ursula Mommens. Props to accompany Miller's practical jokes were also always at hand, including "a brandy glass

[20] Lee Miller, "'Muddles Green' Green Chicken", 146.
[21] Bouhassane*, Lee Miller: a Life with Food, Friends, and Recipes*, 169.

that never emptied, a convincing replica of a melting ice cream sundae, French patisseries cakes made of wax, fake flies [to be frozen in ice cubes]…fake cat poo and vomit…a rubber imitation of a beer bottle".[22] Miller's enthusiasm for menacing her guests with tricks recalls her friend and fellow surrealist Leonora Carrington, also known for strange and alarming food-themed pranks. Going beyond hijinks, Carrington's and Miller's shared an ongoing interest in staging surreal interventions in domestic art and spaces; by comparing the two, we can come to a deeper understanding of the ways that Miller's cooking was part of a broader surrealist effort to radically transform everyday life through art.

The Surreal Kitchen

The enthusiasm with which Miller embraced the kitchen as a site of experimental creative expression can be placed within a broader history of an avant-garde domestic art practice that began with women associated with the surrealism. As a gendered space associated with stereotypically feminine roles, the kitchen was ripe for subversion and reclamation; domestic art offered strategies of resistance against masculine Surrealist narratives of consumption and desire. There are clear parallels between the way that Miller approached cookery as an art form (and turned her dinner parties into performance art), and her friend Leonora Carrington's turn to the kitchen as a focus point of her art. Although Carrington's and Miller's lives were very different in the post-war years, both developed mature creative identities away from (and independent of) the centres of Surrealism that they had once been part of. Unwillingly cast as muses, the two women found this role restrictive and incompatible with their own creative ambitions. Crucially, they found ways of making art that took elements of Surrealism in different directions, far away from the male-dominated core movement. In both of their work, Surrealism's masculine narratives of sexual appetite and desire become transformed into collaborative women-centred practices.

For Carrington, the kitchen became a site of radical creativity, where the boundaries of traditional concepts of gender and domesticity were overturned through artistic experimentation. It was, as Katharine Conley argues in "Carrington's Kitchen", "her living, talking, and thinking space…her intellectual hub".[23] In the years before she moved to Mexico, Carrington

[22] ibid.
[23] Katharine Conley, "Carrington's Kitchen", *Papers of Surrealism*, 10 (2013): 2, accessed June 12, 2020,

had already begun acting out shocking surreal pranks that merged performance art and domestic art. In *Anthology of Black Humour* (which includes Carrington's short story "The Debutante"), André Breton describes the peculiar dinner parties that Carrington threw in New York, cooking peculiar but "meticulously prepared" dishes from a sixteenth century English recipe book.[24] Having been persuaded to eat a hare stuffed with oysters "for the benefit of all those who had preferred to content themselves with its aroma", Breton notes that he decided to "space those feasts out a bit".[25] Breton also recalled an incident in an elegant restaurant where, mid-conversation, Carrington took off her shoes and "patiently [slathered] her feet with mustard".[26] On another occasion, Carrington served her house guests an omelette garnished with locks of Max Ernst's hair. Through these performances, Carrington enacted and embodied surrealism in a way that unsettled domestic life; in the process, it defied the gendered practices of surrealism's male leaders, who sought to contain women as muses and fetishized sexual bodies.

Carrington's intense engagement with the kitchen and a magical domestic art practice began after she made her home in Mexico City, in 1942. In her art and writing, Carrington radically reimagined the kitchen as a site of agency, mysticism, and occult practices. She subverted the kitchen's association with a submissive and subservient femininity, transforming it, instead, into a space where women could gather and wield power as a community. In *Grandmother Moorhead's Aromatic Kitchen* (1975), the link between domesticity, creativity, and magic ritual is writ large. Robed figures gather around a celestial table, placed in the centre of a circle etched on the floor.[27] They prepare garlic, corn, aubergines, and other mysteries vegetables, ready for an "aromatic" stew. The kitchen, a stage for metamorphosis presided over by a giant white bird goddess—its body ghostly against the vivid red of the kitchen walls–and its attendant antelope, clutching a broomstick as a staff. The painting is an act of visual mythmaking in which Carrington connects her Irish family heritage with the Tuatha de Dannan, a magical and creative pre-Christian tribe said to be descended from the Celtic mother goddess Danu; collapsing time and space, Carrington maps Mexican domestic rites and pre-Columbian mythology

https://scholarworks.wm.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1290&context=aspubs.

[24] André Breton, *Anthology of Black Humor*, trans. Mark Polizzotti (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1997), 335.

[25] Breton, *Anthology of Black Humor,* 335.

[26] Breton, *Anthology of Black Humor,* 335.

[27] Leonora Carrington, *Grandmother Moorehead's Aromatic Kitchen*, 1975. Painting. Artist's Rights Society, New York.

onto the Irish folklore of her childhood. For Carrington, each are connected by ceremonies of making, cooking, and feasting.

The visions that Carrington painted during her post-war Mexican years reflected certain realities of her daily life. After settling in Mexico City, Carrington forged a close, collaborative friendship with the Spanish painter Remedios Varo. Janet A. Kaplan describes how the two women used "the kitchen as a laboratory…[for] pseudo-scientific investigations in the guise of recipes that promised an impressive range of magical results".[28] Varo's notebooks record hybrid spell-recipes for scaring off nightmares, curing insomnia, and stimulating a dream of being the King of England (that latter involved slathering egg whites over one's body); Kaplan suggests that these "domestic incantations" transform "the ordinary practice of cooking as an alternative means of access to extraordinary realms of experience".[29] In the kitchen, Carrington and Varo would combine domestic chores with artistic and occult practices, mixing egg tempera (made by combining the yolk of a fresh egg with vinegar) and making tarot cards, alongside raising children, tending animals, and generally running a household. By merging art and everyday life in this way, the two women expanded the possibilities and boundaries of art.

For Carrington, as with Miller, the kitchen represented the possibility to create art *and* a creative identity on her own terms. Indeed, Carrington's kitchen was an ever-evolving assemblage, in which she assembled playful expressions of her personality and her history: as an amusing nod to her aristocratic background and Lancastrian upbringing, English tea and Chorley cakes were kept in plentiful supply, and postcards of the British royal family were stuck to cupboard, juxtaposed with art postcards. Sculptures and paint brushes jostled for space alongside cooking pots, jars of spices, and utensils. Like Miller (in less extravagant style), Carrington entertained guests in her kitchen, emphasising its importance to her as a dynamic social space. In photographs taken by visitors in her later decades, Carrington is invariably captured seated at her circular dining table surrounded by kitchen clutter, paintbrushes, kitsch postcards, and sometimes her beloved pet dog Yeti. Her identity as an artist and - in later years - as the final living icon of an historic avant-garde movement was staged in the space of the kitchen. These images of Carrington symbolise her success in making a career outside of narrow masculine frameworks of art.

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[28] Janet A. Kaplan, "Domestic Incantation: Subversion in the Kitchen", *Remedios Varo: Catalogue Raisonné*, ed. Ricardo Ovallo (Mexico: Ediciones Era, 2008), 40.
[29] Kaplan, "Domestic Incantation: Subversion in the Kitchen", 40.

The element of collaboration and community that Carrington sustained through her domestic art practice was also present in Miller's life and work as a cook. Miller's dinner parties at Farley Farm were part of a post-war network that connected the avant-garde, which were, by then, scattered across Europe, the United States, and Mexico. Dining at Farley Farm was a collective, informal, and fun event that continued the Surrealists' pre-war hijinks, such as their 1937 holiday in Cornwall. Over the years, all of Miller and Penrose's artist friends experienced a dinner party at Farley Farm, including a four-day visit from Carrington in December 1960, and frequent visits by Picasso, Eileen Agar, Max Ernst and Dorothea Tanning. Through these years, Miller's collaborative exchanges with the women artists associated with surrealism were particularly significant: in exchanging ideas and taking influence from one another, they continued a creative, collaborative dialogue despite the distances that separated them. Their responses to Miller's cooking practice also demonstrate that many of Miller's women artist friends did understand and appreciate it as a creative act.

Miller's archive provides much evidence for this network of mutual interest and respect. Miller's "Golden Hearts 1" recipe proved to be a source of inspiration for Agar.[30] The dish featured veal loin chops wrapped in parcels of gold foil, each pinched into the shape of a heart. After Agar was served this meal at Farley Farm, she took the foil home and made a collage, which she then sent to Miller as a token of her appreciation. Correspondence also shows that Miller frequently exchanged thoughts about food and recipes. A letter (undated) that Dorothea Tanning sent to Miller, with a recipe for "Tomato Pepper Pot" soup stuck to it, evocatively illuminates their shared passion for food:

> For we who like really provocative cuisine, rare are the recipes of epicurean imagination and invention which we have not already savoured. We are ever on the watch for those taste treats, *those delicious jewels of the culinary artist which inspire our most poetic thoughts, which make of life a poem in itself*…I am sending you this recipe. I know it will take its place in your excellent kitchen as well as in your gourmet's heart.[31] (my italics)

Tanning's comments stand in stark contrast to the assessment of Miller's biographer Carolyn Burke, who suggested that Miller's "passion for cooking, whether complimentary or defiant, was not a way of life"; in other

[30] Lee Miller, "Golden Hearts 1", 214.

[31] Correspondence: Tanning, Dorothea, undated, GMA A35/1/1/RPA704, Roland Penrose Archive, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art Archive, Edinburgh, Scotland.

words, it lacked the significance of her previous photography work.[32] Instead, Tanning frames Miller's cooking within the broader context of surrealism and creative interventions into the practice of everyday life.

The Electric Freezer

Carrington's turn to a mode of art making that centred (and subverted) domesticity and the kitchen offers a fascinating parallel to Miller's focus on cookery in the post-war years. However, Miller's culinary art practice differed from Carrington's in several key ways. For Carrington, rituals of cooking and feasting were connected to ancient cultures, alchemy, and witchcraft. By contrast, Miller's technologically mediated culinary creations speak to the fast-paced language of modernity and the city, firmly rooted in the lifestyle of the modern woman. When Miller discovered cooking, she also discovered a wealth of modern gadgets that were revolutionising the kitchen. Just as the introduction of the Kodak camera, 35mm film, and other processing apparatus made taking and developing photographs faster and more seamless, so too were new technologies bringing shifts to domestic practices. Miller swapped her camera for domestic gadgets, redirecting her practical skills to the creation of modern, innovative ways of cooking gourmet food. Shortly after moving to Farley Farm, Miller planned a kitchen renovation that would make it suitable for a modern cook. She drew inspiration from women's magazines like the *Ladies Home Journal*, which were filled with futuristic kitchen advertisements couched in a technical language of efficiency, hygiene, and economics. Farleys' kitchen was brought up to date with sleek bespoke cabinets, Formica worktops and an electric oven (placed alongside the traditional Aga).

Miller's modern kitchen became home to a range of gadgets, from perennial favourites the blender and fridge-freezer to more niche items, such as an electric cream separator and an ice shaver. Describing her love of gadgets in an article for American *Vogue*, Miller noted that the blender was, to her, the most indispensable item because "I can be dressed in an evening gown and, while waiting for a taxi, I can make a chocolate mousse for 10 people".[33] Kitchen technology freed up time, meaning that Miller could enjoy socialising with her guests or throw elaborate weekend dinner parties at last minute, after arriving at Farleys from London late on a Friday. Miller's attachment to kitchen gadgets emphasises the fact that she still lived an active, creative life, despite the trauma and alcoholism that marred

[32] Burke, *Lee Miller*, 339-340.
[33] Quoted in Bouhassane, *Lee Miller: a Life with Food, Friends, and Recipes*, 170.

her later years. She was by no means locked away in the kitchen; cooking was a way of engaging with the world, whether by throwing lively dinner parties for friends or entering cooking competitions and traveling the world in search of new recipes. Furthermore, Miller still understood the shifting role of the modern woman and, indeed, identified herself in that category. Like other modern technological innovations, kitchen appliances allowed women to be faster, freer, and more creative.[34]

In this way, Miller's modern approach to cooking aligned with her efforts, as a photographer, to capture and make visible the realities of modern women's lives in war time. Her interest in this subject is central to her plans for "The Entertaining Freezer", an alternative cookbook that combined her carefully developed knowledge of kitchen technology, modern cooking practices, and aesthetic. Unfortunately, Miller did not live long enough to bring this project to fruition, but her proposal draft and menu plans offer an insight into its aims and motivations. Miller wanted her cookbook to help women be creative in the kitchen without expending too much precious time and energy: in her own words it would "[redefine] dinner party preparation time for all of us who work inside and outside of our homes, and who often find entertaining in 'haute' style past our weekday energy levels".[35] Acknowledging the equal burden of housework and labour outside the home that most women were juggling (to some degree) in post-war Britain, Miller identified a gap for a cooking manual that would suit busy modern lifestyles. She promised "no short-cuts, gimmicks, or inexpensive dishes", placing emphasis on quality achieved through forward-planning and sound use of kitchen technology.[36] By focussing on the freezer as an efficient machine, "The Entertaining Freezer" could be situated in a lineage of twentieth century domestic manuals that promised to revolutionise everyday life through modern technology, building on the utopian thinking that characterised much modernist design, from the Bauhaus to Le Corbusier.

[34] This comes, of course, with several caveats, not least the fact that only privileged women had access to certain new appliances and technologies (like many upper middle-class women, Miller also relied on the help of a nanny, Patsy Murray, and a housekeeper, Paula Murray). Additionally, mid-century kitchen appliance advertisements highlight an unavoidable conflict between efforts to portray women's domestic work in a positive light and an acknowledgement that women wanted to escape domestic chores.

[35] Lee Miller, "The Entertaining Freezer", 189.

[36] Miller, "The Entertaining Freezer", 189.

A key aim of "The Entertaining Freezer" was to bring together "the theory of gourmet cooking and the theory of food freezing".[37] In her proposal, Miller repeatedly deployed technical language to emphasise her modern approach and situate her book within the broader context of domestic advertising in the pages of women's magazines. She refers to the "theory and facts", "art and science", "philosophy", "chemistry" of food preparation and hosting, as well as a thorough grounding in all aspects of freezer "maintenance".[38] The plan for the book suggests that the chapters focussed on theories of freezing and best practice be sold to reprint, to keep pace with the changing nature of kitchen technology. The wording of Miller's proposal offers a stark contrast to nostalgic, cosy images of mid-century homemakers that often spring to mind when we think of women's domestic practices during that time. Miller's plans for "The Entertaining Freezer" serve as a reminder that domesticity (specifically, women's roles in the home) had a significant relationship with modernist design and technological innovation in the twentieth century.

In her career as a cook, Miller carried forwards the skills, avant-garde aesthetic, and passion for innovation that drove her success as a photographer. However, whereas in the studio she was bound to male peers and a male dominated art form, the kitchen was a space where she could be creative on her own terms. It satisfied her love of gadgets and appliances but allowed her to remain connected and in collaborative dialogue with her circle of fellow artists. If photography appeared cold and dehumanising, cooking anchored Miller in the present moment, in surreal, communal celebrations of art and friendship. The role Miller and her cooking practice play in a network of surrealist and avant-garde women artists, who broke down boundaries between art and domesticity deserves much more critical attention. Along with Carrington and many other avant-garde women artists that followed, Miller strove to realise surrealist's revolutionary aims in the spaces of everyday life. Miller's modern, surreal cuisine merged artforms and staged anarchic communal experiences, in a way that anticipated experimental fusions of art and food by contemporary artists and chefs such as Jenny Dorsey, Laila Gohar, and Josie Keefe and Phyllis Ma's Lazy Mom project. When *Vogue* director Harry Yoxall was approached by MI5, which was investigating Miller's (non-existent) links to Communist movements, he described her as an "eccentric [who] indulged in queer food and queer clothes".[39] Unwittingly, Yoxall put his finger on an essential radical element

[37] Miller, "The Entertaining Freezer", 189.
[38] Miller, "The Entertaining Freezer", 189.
[39] Quoted in Bouhassane, *Lee Miller: a Life with Food, Friends, and Recipes,* 15. Miller and Penrose were under surveillance between 1941 and 1956.

of Miller's work: her so-called "queer food and queer clothes" disrupt a male-dominated narrative of art that placed women as muses, first and foremost, and classified feminine-coded domestic arts as inferior.

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EPILOGUE

SUNDAE FOR LEE MILLER

MORWENNA KEARSLEY

Fig. 10-1: Morwenna Kearsley, *Bell Jar*, 2019.

In an imaginary diner, I sit opposite Lee Miller. I eat her *Marshmallow-Cola Ice Cream*[1] made from the ingredients implicit in its name and she eats my *Sundae for Lee Miller*, made by collaging photographic prints. I'm worried about scales falling into the drink from the fish tail that protrudes from the top of the sundae or that she'll rip her lip on the pink, spiky chestnut casings that fill in for cherries. Mine is delicious; it slides down my gullet like silk. I'd like to ask Lee some questions but I realise that neither of us have mouths and much as I'd like to believe so, we cannot communicate telepathically. We can't touch either. We just look, and eat, and look.

I take a photocopy of her *Tanja Ramm Under a Bell Jar, 1930* into the darkroom with a small, inexpensive bell jar from IKEA and a length of black velvet. I sit the empty bell jar on the cloth and focus the 5x4 plate camera on its gleaming edge; my back pushed up against the wall, another length of black cloth covering my head. When I'm ready, I load the darkslide, turn off the light and in the total darkness open the shutter. I set a timer for 8 minutes and slide on the torch attached to my I-Phone: I sway the light backwards and forwards over the empty belljar and listen to *Wild Swans*[2] on Audible (it's the bit when Communist soldiers are being gruesomely tortured by the Kuomintang army but I can't turn it off because one hand is waving the torch around and the other is holding open the shutter with a cable release that won't lock!). When the alarm bell rings, I close the shutter, turn off *Wild Swans*, replace the darkslide's cover and turn on the light: the bell jar is empty. Without much care, I slosh some chemistry into small trays, turn *Wild Swans* back on, turn the light off and dip the negative into the developer (11 minutes) then the stop (1 minute) and then the fix (5 minutes): a pile of Communist bodies accumulates. I hold the negative up to the light and a bolt of electricity runs through me: inside the bell jar, a woman's body has appeared. *Lee?*

In the imaginary diner, she frowns at me, fishscales flutter down onto the blue Formica table top. *Ok, so you're not a romantic then*. I was hoping she'd agree with me and join in the hair-raising pleasure sensation that can occur when we believe that the spirit world and this world overlap. I was hoping she'd agree with me that this figure in the bell jar is her ghost, sent to me through that powerful spirit-conductor we call photography. Whose is this body, floating in the deep, dark shadows of the negative? I think of her photograph *Dead SS Guard, Floating in Canal, Dachau 1945*, the overcoated body not yet bloated, framed by a shock of spiky grass on the

[1] From Ami Bouhassane, *Lee Miller, A Life with Food* (Oslo, Norway: Grapefrukt Forlag, 2017).
[2] *Wild Swans* by Jung Chang (published 1991).

left hand side of the image and the diagonal, bright white edge of the canal's walkway. I can't look at it without thinking of John Everett Millais' painting of *Ophelia*: the grasses, the flowing garments, the water. *The madness.* I look into Lee's bright, blue eyes as she sits opposite me, secret as the ocean. I look around the imaginary diner: why did I summon her here? Lee glitches. We watch as a man sitting alone at a table on the other side of the room puts a handgun under his chin and pulls the trigger. A spray of hot red blood hits the back of the banquette seat, his head falls onto the table and a pool of blood oozes out from under his face. He wears a crumpled white shirt, his beard and ponytail are dirty and tousled. There's a small amount of bright pink milkshake in the glass nearest him and ¾'s of a chocolate milkshake in the glass opposite him. Everyone keeps chatting and eating, a waitress with a blood-splattered face walks by, smiling as she puts the bill down next to his fractured head. I look around bewildered; Lee smiles and takes a sip of the purple cloud that sits atop her sundae. I know I've seen this before but I can't remember when and I can't recall how it ends. Another of Lee's images appears in my head and I close my eyes to see it better: it's *The Burgermeister's Daughter, Leipzig, 1945*. The young woman reclines in death against the firm patina of a Chesterfield sofa, cyanide providing an immovable barrier between her and the advancing Allied forces. I recall that Lee wrote about this image, demanding we remember that even pretty girls with nice teeth participated willingly in the de-humanising ideology and actions of Nazism. The detail of the photograph that pierces me, the *punctum* as Barthes would have it, is the lone button that has worked itself loose and hangs limp by its thread. It is deeply photographic, almost beyond language…something vertiginous in the button's fragile, untethered state in relation to the bulk of the body and the starch of her nurse's uniform, bound tightly together within the photographic frame. What was it was like to open the door to that room and see the bodies of the Nazi Mayor, his wife and his daughter, arranged like figures in an allegorical painting? What did it smell like? Was it a relief to raise the camera to your face; to concentrate on framing, focus, exposure? Click. Step forward, lean in closer, breathe in the stench of rotting flesh: framing, focus, exposure. I look intently at her from across the table but Lee's face is unreadable: like polished marble or mountain ranges or death.

A young girl with a white-blonde bob and sad blue eyes comes back into the imaginary diner from somewhere and sits down opposite the man; she touches him lightly on the head. She could be a young Lee. *Hey Joe, wake up.* The man lifts his head slowly, like Lazarus: the blood is gone, his head intact. *Let's* go, the girl says, *it's a beautiful day.* He put his lips to a straw and sucks up the last of the pink milkshake, the raking gurgle dispelling the

dream-like atmosphere of the imaginary diner. A 1950s recording of Eileen Barton and the New Yorkers plays in the background: *if I knew you were comin' I'da baked a cake, baked a cake, baked a cake. If I knew you were comin' I'da baked a cake, baked a cake, baked a cake…* [3]

I look up, and Lee is gone.

Fig. 10-2: Morwenna Kearsley, *Sundae*, 2019.

[3] Description from *You Were Never Really Here*, dir. Lynne Ramsay, 2018.

CONTRIBUTORS

Derek Adams is a professional photographer and poet. He has an MA in Creative and Life Writing from Goldsmiths, University of London, and has published poetry collections about both Lee Miller and Man Ray including *EXPOSURE: Snapshots from the life of Lee Miller* published in 2019 by Dempsey and Windle. He was BBC Wildlife Poet of the Year in 2006.

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Melody Davis earned a PhD in Art History at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, an MA in Art History and Criticism at Stony Brook University, and a BA in English from Barnard College, Columbia University. Her research specialties are the history of photography, stereography, and visual culture, with an intersectional focus upon gender, race, and the creation of discursive practices through multivalent perception, social circulation, and patterns of collecting. She is the author of seven books. Her most recent publications in art history are *Women's Views: The Narrative Stereograph in Nineteenth Century America* and a 2019 digital book, *Sentiment and Irony: The Stereoscopic Treasures of F. G. Weller.* She has held fellowships from the Henry Luce Foundation/ACLS and the Sage Colleges, and she publishes and lectures internationally on the history of photography. She is also a poet; her latest volume, *Ghost Writer* (Broadstone Books, 2019), was nominated for a Pushcart award and the Pulitzer Prize. She can be found as a feature at poetry readings in the Capital District of New York, and beyond.

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Morwenna Kearsley is a Scottish visual artist and educator, working with and thinking about lens-based media and its effects on ways of seeing and being. Often through photographs, videos, and writing, she considers the question: how are we changed by the images we consume? She studied for a degree in Photography, Film & Imaging at Napier University (Edinburgh), graduating in 2007, and from the Master of Fine Art course at The Glasgow School of Art in 2015, for which she was awarded a Leverhulme scholarship. She lives and works in Glasgow.

Josh Rose earned a Master of Art degree from the University of North Texas with a thesis on Lee Miller's war correspondence as informed by Surrealism. His scholarship and teaching have since broadened to encompass Surrealism generally and, most recently, the relationship between comics and art history. He has frequently written and presented on Surrealism, including entries on "Surrealism: An Introduction," "Meret Oppenheim's *Object*," and "Man Ray's *The Gift*" for *Smarthistory* and the

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