

LEE  
MILLER

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## Exhibition facts

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| Press conference   | 7 May 2015   10 am  |
| Duration           | 8 May – 16 August 2015  |
| Venue              | Galleries for Photography   |
| Curators           | Walter Moser  |
| Exhibits           | 100   |
| Catalogue          | The catalogue is available for sale in the Albertina's museum shop and at <a href="http://www.albertina.at">www.albertina.at</a> for €25.   |
| Supporting program | Book presentation<br><i>Eine Amerikanerin in Hitlers Badewanne</i>   Elisabeth Bronfen<br>Hoffmann und Campe Publishing<br>24 June 2015   6.30 pm   |
| Contact            | Albertinaplatz 1   A-1010 Vienna<br>T +43 (0)1 534 83-0<br><a href="mailto:info@albertina.at">info@albertina.at</a>   <a href="http://www.albertina.at">www.albertina.at</a>  |
| Opening hours      | Daily 10 am – 7 pm,<br>Wednesdays 10 am – 9 pm  |
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# Lee Miller

8 May to 16 August 2015

Lee Miller (1907-1977) is considered one of the most fascinating artists of the 20th century. In only 16 years, she produced a diverse body of photographic work of a range that remains unparalleled, and that unites the most divergent genres. Miller's oeuvre extends from surrealist images to photography in the fields of travelling, portraiture and even war correspondence; the Albertina presents a survey of the work in its breadth and depth, with the aid of 100 selected pieces.

Lee Miller began her artistic career as a surrealist photographer in the Paris of 1929. Frequently working in collaboration with Man Ray, Miller produced images in which she alienated motifs by using narrow image frames and applying experimental techniques like solarization; in this manner, she could draw back the curtain on a reality of paradoxes, making them visible to the viewer. Miller similarly manifested the surrealist viewpoint on the streets of Paris, where she was struck by the absurdity found in everyday motifs, a phenomenon she would likewise unmask in subsequent photograph portraits taken at her New York photography studio starting in 1932, the era of the Great Depression. Miller remained in the USA only briefly. In 1934, she booked passage to Egypt, where she created travel photographs in which landscape is translated into modernist and ambiguous shapes. Egypt would only serve as another way station on her life's journey. In 1938, she moved back to England. These biographical aspects are indeed essential to an understanding of Miller's photographic work; as they are inextricably linked to her yearning for autonomy. As one of just a handful of female photojournalists, she began to photograph the disastrous consequences of the Second World War as early as in 1940. Miller photographed the attack on London by the German Luftwaffe ("the Blitz"), as well as the eventual liberation of Paris. One particularly famous portrait, in which she is seen posing nude in Adolf Hitler's bathtub, was made on her trip to Munich in 1945 – just after Miller, as one of the first photojournalists on the scene, chronicled evidence of the harrowing atrocities committed at recently liberated concentration camps in Dachau and Buchenwald.

Her reporting led her to Vienna via Salzburg in 1945, where she photographed a cityscape destroyed by war, along with the hardships at children's hospitals. The special focus of this exhibition is on this largely unpublished group of works.

In conjunction with the exhibition *Lee Miller*, the Albertina will also be opening its new, 450-square-meter *Galleries for Photography*. From this point onward, the museum will be devoting these exhibition spaces exclusively to the presentation of photography.

## Surrealism: Paris and New York, 1929–1934

In 1929, Lee Miller went to Paris to study the technique of photography with Man Ray with whom she soon entered into a private relationship. The two worked closely together for three years. This makes the attribution of some works quite difficult. Even Man Ray's nudes showing Miller are influenced by the way Miller – who had already worked as a model in New York – staged herself. She was both model and authoress.

Through Man Ray Lee Miller came into contact with the circle of the surrealists. She adopted their iconography and their strategies of alienating pictorial motifs. These strategies include the deformation and fragmentation of the human body, focusing on details, tilting the image, and experimental techniques such as solarization, which achieves a reversal of black and white values through extreme overexposure.

In 1930, Lee Miller opened a commercial studio, yet kept working together with artists like Jean Cocteau, for example. In Cocteau's 1930 film *Le Sang d'un Poète* she played a statue coming alive. She continued to run her studio in New York after her separation from Man Ray.

### **Neck**

Miller's photograph *Neck* is a telling example of her collaboration with Man Ray. Man Ray made a portrait of Miller but was not happy with the result and rejected the negative. Miller retrieved it from the garbage can, abstracted the motif by cropping the image, and printed it. It was only Miller's intervention that transformed Man Ray's picture into the more reduced and suggestive representation of a neck.

### **Breast**

Lee Miller had come upon a severed breast while doing a commission in a hospital. She arranged it on a table like a meal and photographed the breast. The work was presumably intended as a comment on the staging of women's bodies in surrealist art which frequently presents female nudes as eroticized fetishes by visually fragmenting them.

## Travels: Egypt, 1934–1939

In 1934, Lee Miller followed her first husband, the businessman Aziz Eloui Bey, to Egypt. Setting out from Cairo as the new center of her life, she undertook many travels into the desert and photographed landscapes and architectural structures, capturing them with her Paris-trained eye for ambiguous realities. Her 1937 picture *Portrait of Space*, which shows a view of the desert, combines an inside and an outside space on the surface. Metaphorically, however, the photograph contrasts the realms of the subconscious and the conscious, which inspired the Belgian surrealist René Magritte's painting *Le Baiser* (1938).

Together with the British artist Roland Penrose, Lee Miller travelled to Bucharest via Athens in 1938. Penrose's book *The Road is Wider than Long*, which is dedicated to Miller, dates from this journey. Comprising photographs and poems by Penrose, the volume is regarded as a masterpiece of surrealist artist books. Penrose and Miller photographed the same motifs on this journey. While Miller's pictures are professionally composed and stand as works in their own right, Penrose's photographs present themselves as random snapshots which were included in the book as a kind of aide-mémoire.

## War: England and France, 1940–1944

From 1940 on, Lee Miller worked as a photographer for the British *Vogue*. Initially employed as a fashion photographer, she soon captured the ravages caused by German air raids in London during the Blitz. These pictures were still informed by a surrealist approach.

At the *Life* photographer David Scherman's suggestion, Lee Miller was accredited as a war photographer in 1942, which made her one of only five women press photographers working for the United States in Europe. Having made her way into a male domain, she moved across Europe at the front line with the US-American troops. In 1943 she began writing her own texts for her photo reportages, which were published to accompany her pictures in *Vogue*. In 1944, Miller witnessed the landing of the Allied troops in Normandy and the battle for St. Malo. These pictures fell victim to censors, however, as they showed the use of napalm, a weapon still kept secret at the time. Miller's work as a photo journalist is characterized by an increasingly matter-of-fact pictorial language.

## Zero Hour: Germany and Austria, 1945

In April 1945 Lee Miller took photographs together with David Scherman in Germany. She not only captured the scene of the suicide of Leipzig's Nazi vice-mayor but also the just liberated Buchenwald and Dachau concentration camps. Her pictures show the conditions in the camps and portray both victims and perpetrators. Whereas other reportage photographers tried to avoid the direct confrontation with the horror by focusing on the view through the camera lens and by maintaining distance, Lee Miller closely approached her subjects. Her straightforward pictures were to shake up the world. Unlike the American *Vogue*, the British magazine, intent on not shocking its readers, only published a small picture of this series.

### *In Hitler's Bathtub*

On April 30, 1945, the day of Hitler's suicide and shortly before the final capitulation of Germany, Lee Miller and David Scherman posed for each other in the bathroom of Hitler's apartment in Munich. The appropriation of the room by Miller and her colleague, characterized as members of the liberating military forces by means of a conspicuously visible pair of army boots, constitutes a radical reversal of power. The pictures Scherman made of Miller in Eva Braun's bedroom also strike the viewer as a politically charged appropriation of the private rooms used by the dictator's mistress.

## After the war: Vienna 1945

A few months after the war had ended, Lee Miller also travelled to Vienna. The city had been bombed in fifty-three air raids from June 1944 to mid-April 1945 and had been divided among the four Allied occupation forces in July 1945. Miller photographed soldiers of these forces as well as damaged sights of the city. Because of Austria's serious involvement in Fascism, Miller kept a critical distance from Vienna's inhabitants and rejected the myth of Austria as National Socialism's "first victim." She only sympathized with the ailing children in the city's hospitals, whom she regarded as the most innocent victims of the war. She saw their portraits as a warning against future wars. At that time, Lee Miller already suffered from the mental strain the aftermath of the war imposed on her. Soon after she returned to England and almost ceased to take photographs.