



ART REVIEW

'Icons of Style: A Century of Fashion Photography, 1911-2011' Review: Capturing the Trend

Fashion photography not only documents a season's new look but zooms in on a zeitgeist about to coalesce.



Neal Barr's 'Dianne Newman' (1966) PHOTO: NEAL BARR/THE J. PAUL GETTY MUSEUM

By Laura Jacobs
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Los Angeles

"If you look through the viewfinder and you see something you've seen before," Alexey Brodovitch, the art director and avant-garde guru of Harper's Bazaar, told the photographer Hiro, "don't bother to click the shutter." This advice, useful to anyone who hopes to make a mark artistically, has special resonance for the fashion photographer. The nature of fashion is change—the new look that instantly renders all current looks old. The greatest fashion photographs not only document the season's new silhouette, they zoom in on a zeitgeist about to coalesce. In fact, the shutter click is the coalescence. Expressive, experimental, semiotically complex—these images, commissioned by the fashion glossies and retail advertisers, are among the most definitive of the past century.

Icons of Style: A Century of Fashion Photography, 1911-2011

The J. Paul Getty Museum Through Oct. 21

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Which is why it's amazing there hasn't been a large-scale survey exhibition of important fashion photography in decades (the last was in 1977, at the International Museum of Photography at the George Eastman House in Rochester, N.Y.). Striding into the void, Paul Martineau, associate curator in the J. Paul Getty Museum's department of photography, has organized "Icons of Style: A Century of Fashion Photography, 1911-2011." The exhibition is rich in imagery, with over 160 prints from 89 photographers—all the big names past and present, as well as lesser-known artists who've been under-represented. Accompanying material—magazine covers; video clips; eight ensembles on mannequins, each embodying a decade (Vionnet in the '30s, Halston in the '70s)

—is used with restraint, like perfume at the pulse points.



Lillian Bassman's 'The V Back Evenings, Suzy Parker, Dress by Trigère, New York' (1955) PHOTO: THE ESTATE OF LILLIAN BASSMAN/THE J. PAUL GETTY MUSEUM