

# **ELLEN VON UNWERTH**PRETTY ON THE INSIDE

9 - 29 June 2019



#### **FOREWORD**

"I like to photograph anyone before they know what their best angles are."

Ellen von Unwerth

This is why we decided to title the fourth solo exhibition with Opera Gallery worldwide by Ellen von Unwerth *Pretty on the Inside*. The title brings a slight irony with it, given that the subjects of her photographs are often famed to be amongst the world's most beautiful women, but it also acts as sign of times. It is the title of the first album by the 90s grunge band Hole, for whom von Unwerth subsequently photographed the iconic album cover. The Nineties were about absorbing weirdness, femininity, romance, fetishism, kitsch humour, decadence and sheer *joie de vivre*. This is typical of the work of Ellen von Unwerth, a photographer whose exhilaratingly elastic interpretations of the traditional fashion story and its supermodels are being celebrated in this new exhibition at Opera Gallery Zurich. Thanks to her unique vision, she launched the careers of many top models from the 1990s to the present day: Claudia Schiffer, who became her muse, Naomi Campbell, whom she discovered at the age of 16, and Eva Herzigová, whom she had particular admiration for and worked with often. Actresses and singers stepped before her objective too, Monica Bellucci, Jennifer Lopez, Vanessa Paradis, Eva Green and Demi Moore to name a selection. This exhibition is a celebration of our era's sexiest female icons but it is also dedicated to all women and their sensuality.

Affected by her own modelling career and a brief experience as a circus assistant, von Unwerth credits femininity and provocation she experienced as a constant source of inspiration, one that is not hard to trace through her works. Stereotypes are used to blistering effect, to illuminate a specific *mise-en-scène*. In her series *Heimat*, she uses kitsch aesthetics of the Bavarian countryside and captures a group of girlfriends as they explore the great outdoors: peeling potatoes, catching fish and riding horses, all the while donning vintage inspired outfits that range from full floral swimsuits to traditional *dirndls*.

In *The Story of Olga* she narrates the young widow, who after the death of her wealthy husband is overtaken by an insatiable lust. Away from the luxury and the strict high society rules, she discovers passion and love in unexpected places, with strange lovers with unorthodox tastes. The sexualised fantasy is set in a glorious castle with dark corners and hidden rooms.

In each of her series, strong exposure flexes the perspective, colours blossom, skin is smooth, and within the frame, the models seduce, prowl, pinch, flirt; armed with elaborate hair, make up, swirling dresses, explicit poses and simply enjoying to be watched, and perform in front of the camera. Whether naked or partially dressed, von Unwerth never objectifies her subjects, instead she presents a play between open personal fantasies and deeply subliminal ones, suggesting that we have stumbled into a secret world. Reflected in the lens of Ellen von Unwerth, fashion photography has rarely looked so vivid, so entrancing or so playful. And it's hard to look away.

Gilles Dyan Founder and Chairman Opera Gallery Group Maxime Groosman Director Opera Gallery Zurich



#### CHRISTY TURLINGTON AND LINDA EVANGELISTA CANNES, 1990

for Vogue Italy, 1990

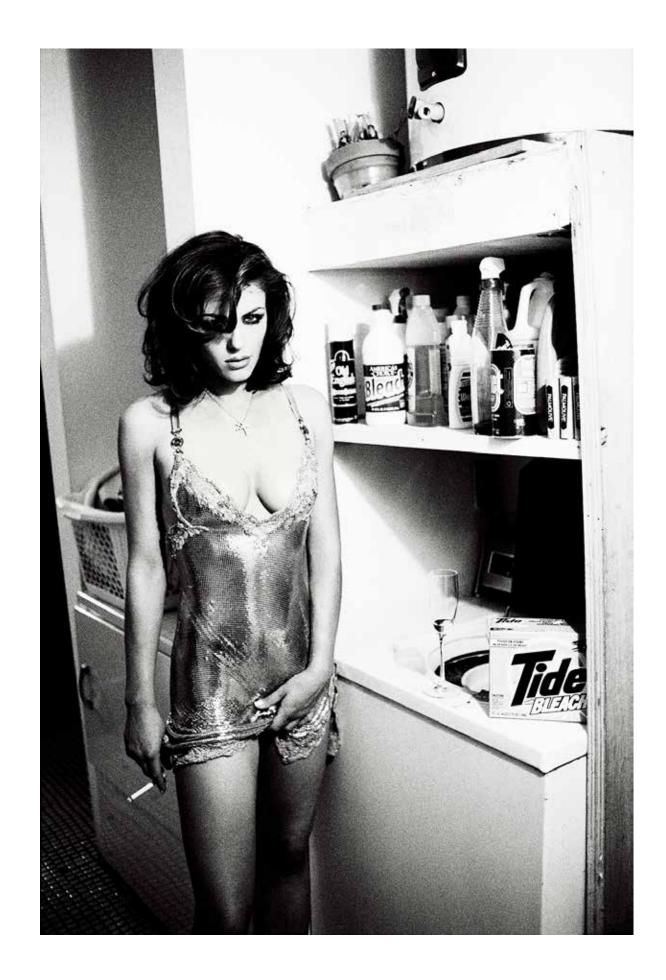
Black & white inkjet print on baryta paper Edition of 3 150 x 225 cm - 59.1 x 88.6 in

#### MISSION ACCOMPLISHED, NAOMI CAMPBELL, 2014

for Agent Provocateur campaign Spring/Summer 2015

C-print on Fujiflex paper Edition of 7 70 x 101.5 cm - 27.6 x 40 in





#### LIZ HURLEY, NEW YORK, 1997

Black & white inkjet print on baryta paper Edition of 3 180 x 120 cm - 70.9 x 47.2 in

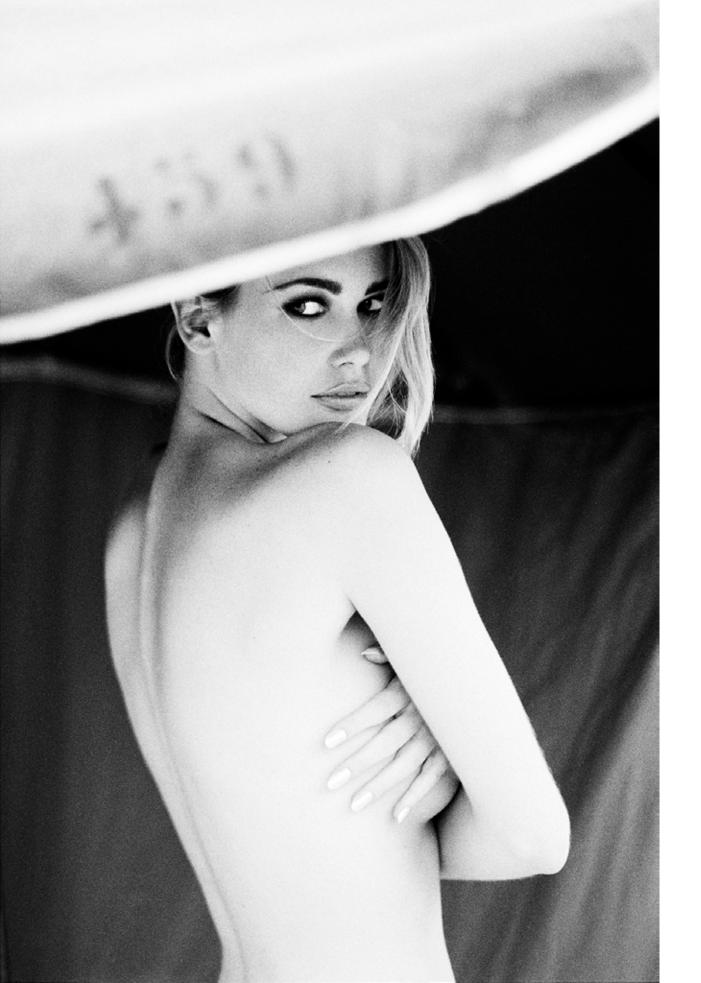
also in an edition of 7 100 x 70 cm - 39.4 x 27.6 in

#### MILK, KATE MOSS, 1995

for Vogue America

Colour inkjet print on baryta paper
Edition of 3
207 x 150 cm - 81.5 x 59.1 in





#### PARASOL, DEAUVILLE, 1990

Claudia Schiffer for Vogue Italy

Black & white inkjet print on baryta paper Edition of 3 180 x 120 cm - 70.9 x 47.2 in

#### MONICA BELLUCCI AND VINCENT CASSEL, PARIS, 2004 for Studio Magazine, 2005

Black & white inkjet print on baryta paper Edition of 7 70 x 100 cm - 27.6 x 39.4 in



#### NAOMI CAMPBELL, NEW YORK, 1994

for Naomi Campbell's album cover Baby Woman

Black & white inkjet print on baryta paper Edition of 3 180 x 120 cm - 70.9 x 47.2 in

also in an edition of 7 100 x 70 cm - 39.4 x 27.6 in





#### CLAUDIA SCHIFFER, MOROCCO, 1989

for a Guess campaign

Black & white inkjet print on baryta paper
Edition AP of 2
180 x 120 cm - 70.9 x 47.2 in

#### ELLE MACPHERSON, NEW YORK, 2004

for a Jimmy Choo campaign

Black & white inkjet print on baryta paper Edition of 7 100 x 70 cm - 39.4 x 27.6 in





#### RAINY DAY, 2002

Black & white inkjet print on baryta paper Edition of 3 180 x 120 cm - 70.9 x 47.2 in

#### BACCARAT II, PARIS, 2007

Raquel Nave for a Baccarat campaign

Black & white inkjet print on baryta paper Edition of 3 150 x 227 cm - 59.1 x 89.4 in





## PUNISHMENT, ROUILLY-LE-BAS, 2002 for the book *Revenge*, 2003

Black & white inkjet print on baryta paper Edition of 3 120 x 180 cm - 47.2 x 70.9 in

#### INVITATION ONLY, PARIS, 2007

Raquel Nave for a Baccarat campaign

Black & white inkjet print on baryta paper Edition AP of 2 180 x 120 cm - 70.9 x 47.2 in





#### RICH BITCH, PARIS, 2004

Bianca Balti for Vogue Italy

Black & white inkjet print on baryta paper Edition of 7 85 x 85 cm - 33.5 x 33.5 in



THE PINCH, BAVARIA, 2015

for the book Heimat, 2017

Colour inkjet print on baryta paper Edition of 3 150 x 225 cm - 59.1 x 88.6 in

FALLEN PARTY ANGEL, 2012 Charlotte di Calypso for 7000 Magazine

C-print on Fujiflex paper Edition of 3 120 x 180 cm - 47.2 x 70.9 in





### **BIOGRAPHY**

Ellen von Unwerth, born 1954 in Germany, gained wide attention with her sensual Guess campaign in the early 1990s, followed by campaigns for Absolut, Agent Provocateur, A.P.C., Aston Martin, Baccarat, Belvedere, Chanel, Chantal Thomass, Crazy Horse, David Morris, Diesel, Dior, Elisabetta Franchi, Ferragamo, G-Star, Guerlain, H&M, Hysteric Glamour, Jimmy Choo, Lacoste, L'Oréal, MAC Cosmetics, Mary Katrantzou, Mercedes-Benz, Miu Miu, Opel, Revlon, Rolex, Shiseido, Tommy Hilfiger, Veuve Cliquot, Victoria's Secret, and many more.

She is a regular contributor to magazines all over the world, like Arena, Cosmopolitan, Egoïste, ELLE, Glamour, i-D, Interview, Lula, Numéro, Paper Magazine, Playboy, Stern, The Face, The New York Times, Vanity Fair, and many international Vogue editions (American, French, German, Italian, Russian). Furthermore she directed short films for clients like Azzedine Alaïa, Dior, Guess, and Katherine Hamnett, and a range of commercials and music videos.

Her book projects are an important part of her career: Her first book, *Snaps*, was published in 1994, followed by *Wicked* (1998), *Couples* (1999), the photo-novella *Revenge* (2003), *Omahyra & Boyd* (2005), *Fräulein* (2009), *DieSpieler* (2010), the photo-novella *The Story of Olga* (2012), and lately *Heimat* (2017).

Her works have been exhibited worldwide, and are part of various collections. Ellen von Unwerth won several prizes, amongst others the first prize at the International Festival of Fashion Photography in 1991, and the LUCIE Award in 2012.

### RECENT EXHIBITIONS

2018

Here Comes Trouble, Opera Gallery, Beirut Beauté Fatale, Opera Gallery, Monaco Ladyland, Opera Gallery, London DEVOTION! 30 Years of Photographing Women, Fotografiska Museum, Stockholm Divas, Galeria Mario Cohen, Sao Paulo

2017

Heimat, Taschen Gallery, Los Angeles; Oberstdorf Fotogipfel, Oberstdorf; Immagis, Munich

2016

Happy Views, Kamil Art Gallery & Magdalena Gabriel Fine Art, Monaco Wild Wild West, Photokina, Cologne Goldie, Triumph Gallery & Numéro Russia, Moscow

2015

REBEL YOUTH, Archive 18-20 in collaboration with 7POST, Paris

2014

My Way, Izzy Gallery, Toronto

2013

Playdate, Staley Wise Gallery, New York Made in America, Fahey Klein Gallery, Los Angeles Little Beast, Acte2galerie, Paris 2012

The Story of Olga, Camera Work, Berlin Do not Disturb!, Michael Hoppen Gallery, London Caught!, Izzy Gallery, Toronto

2011

Photographs, Fahey Klein Gallery, Los Angeles Berlin at Night, NRW, Düsseldorf

2010

Le Cinéma d'Ellen, Le Bon Marché, Paris

2009

Fräulein, Galerie Kamel Mennour, Paris; Staley Wise Gallery, New York; Camera Work, Berlin; Michael Hoppen Gallery, London

2007

Be Fabulous, C5 Art Center, Beijing

2005

Omahyra & Boyd, Galerie Kamel Mennour, Paris

2003

Revenge, Camera Work, Berlin; Galerie Kamel Mennour, Paris; Staley Wise Gallery, New York

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Cover: detail of Milk, Kate Moss, 1995



#### OPERA GALLERY