

Shot on the set of *The Misfits*, 1960.

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## Some like it real

American photographer Eve Arnold has a passion for realism, while Marilyn Monroe was the queen of silver-screen fantasy. So why did the pair click? **Mark Naglazas** reports.

**T**he first meeting between Eve Arnold and Marilyn Monroe could have been scripted by Billy Wilder, the sardonic comic master who directed the legendary screen siren in her greatest film, *Some Like It Hot*.

It was 1952 and Arnold's career-launching photo essay of Marlene Dietrich recording an album of wartime songs had just been published in *Esquire*, a series of candid snaps of the ageing German diva that would usher in a new era of realistic star portraits.

When Monroe was introduced to Arnold by another photographer, Sam Shaw, who had shown her the Dietrich photographs in *Esquire*, she declared: "If you could do that well with Marlene, can you imagine what you can do with me?"

Whether Monroe really was the Paris Hilton of her era or just playing at being the dumb blonde sex bomb and victim of sexist 1950s culture has been much debated. What cannot be disputed is that Monroe knew her way around a Leica.

"I never knew anyone who even came close to Marilyn in natural ability to use both photographer and still camera," says Arnold, who would go on to shoot the actress on six occasions and be central to the creation of the Monroe myth.

"Over the years I found myself in the privileged position of photographing someone who had not merely a gift for the still camera, as I had first thought, but a genius for it."

What Monroe was instinctively responding to in Arnold's work was a new realism that was not just taking hold in photography but sweeping across Hollywood and American culture in

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Eve Arnold and Marilyn Monroe during the filming of *The Misfits*, 1960.

general in the wake of World War II.

In stark contrast to the old-style Hollywood glamour photography, in which movie stars were carefully lit, dramatically posed and retouched, the photojournalist would be invited on to the set to record the creative process, catching their subjects off guard and in unglamorous moments.

So when Monroe invited Arnold to photograph her she was not looking for more cheesecake, for which she had become the epitome after her famous nude centrefold for the first edition of *Playboy*.

She wanted something to represent the Marilyn Monroe she believed herself to be, the serious actress who would later marry the great playwright Arthur Miller in the ultimate credibility-grabbing career move.

"Marilyn liked my pictures and was canny enough to realise that they were a fresh approach for presenting her — a looser, more intimate look than the posed studio portraits she was used to in Hollywood," recalls Arnold, who is now 97 and living in London.

Thus began a fruitful professional relationship in which Arnold established herself as one of the leading photojournalists of her time and Monroe grew from being the dizzy blonde from hits such as *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying* and *The Seven Year Itch* to the darling of intellectuals and cinema icon.

When Monroe died in 1962 Arnold embargoed all but a

select few of the thousands of photographs that she'd taken of Marilyn because she didn't want to exploit their relationship.

Decades later Arnold decided to return to her vast archive and exhibit some of those pictures in *Eve: Marilyn — The Exhibition* because she believed the world would gain insight into the phenomenon by seeing how Monroe saw herself.

Indeed, for all of Arnold's vaunted fly-on-the-wall documentary approach it is clear that Monroe was not merely the subject of those pictures but had a major role in creating them.

"As her celebrity grew, she was able to impose her authority and she became her own director, her own star and, finally, her own editor with the power to reject or kill any photograph she disliked," remembers Arnold in the foreword to her book *Marilyn Monroe*.

"She knew she was superlative at creating still pictures and she loved doing it. She didn't have to learn lines as she did for her films, she could let her imagination range freely without concern about consistency or continuity; she could be a different Marilyn for every photographer or each frame of film."

No matter how much a photographer would try to recede into the background, Monroe always knew where the camera was and, according to Arnold, she would give a performance. →



Mount Sinai, Long Island, 1952.

→ “The idea of the candid shot, the actress unaware, was impossible with her. She always knew — as though wherever she was, whether in a dressing room, resting on a plane or walking on a desert, her own in-built mechanism sensed the camera and responded before the first click was heard.”

There are, however, a couple of revealing unguarded moments during the most famous of Arnold’s Monroe photographs, the series she took during the production of John Huston’s *The Misfits*, a contemporary Western penned by Monroe’s then husband Arthur Miller and featuring Clark Gable and Montgomery Clift.

One of the most anticipated productions of the era, it was seen as the meeting of Golden Age Hollywood, represented by the *Gone With the Wind* star Gable, and the hottest actress of the new generation.

It was also tinged with deep sadness. A clearly ailing Gable would die of cancer just after end of production (Arnold’s were the last photos taken of him), Monroe’s highly publicised marriage to Miller was falling apart and she herself had become addicted to sleeping tablets that would kill her not long after.

“All the people on the film were misfits,”

remembered Ernst Haas, Arnold’s colleague at the photo agency Magnum, before he died in 1986.

“It showed how some stars are like stars in heaven that are burnt out. The light is still travelling but the star is gone. They were the actors playing out the allegory, then seeing it in life. It was like being at your own funeral.”

Arnold went on to photograph many icons of our age, from movie stars such as Charlie Chaplin, Orson Welles and James Mason through to political giants such as Malcolm X and Nelson Mandela. But she believes none connected with the camera like Monroe.

“I never knew anyone who even came close to Marilyn in natural ability to use both photographer and still camera,” writes Arnold.

“She was special in this, and for me there has been no one like her before or after. She remained for me the measuring rod by which I have judged — unconsciously — all other subjects.”

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**Eve: Marilyn — The Exhibition is on at the Perth Concert Hall from November 12 to December 20. Tickets through BOCS.**  
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