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INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY ILLUMINATES THE ENIGMATIC MARLENE DIETRICH



PLAY THE PART: MARLENE DIETRICH

On View

September 29, 2023–January 8, 2024

Location

79 Essex Street, New York, NY 10002

NEW YORK, NY (August 22, 2023)—*Play the Part: Marlene Dietrich*, on view at the International Center of Photography (ICP) from September 30, 2023, to January 8, 2024, examines the multifaceted evolution of Dietrich's public persona with nearly 200 photographs made between

1905 and 1978. The exhibition provides a window into Dietrich's complex and intrepid life as well as the rapid transformations in the entertainment industry – from silent film to television – in which she thrived, cementing a legacy as one of the 20th century's most dynamic and iconic artists.

Play the Part offers insight into Dietrich's mastery of her own image in the era of studio-dominated movie making and distribution in Hollywood—a system that dissolved in the 1960s, drastically shifting the centers of power in the industry. Among the images on view are studio-commissioned publicity portraits, identifiable by the appearance of Dietrich's autograph, often in her distinctive green ink. The exhibition showcases captivating works by Hollywood photographers such as George Hurrell, Eugene Robert Richee, and William Walling Jr., alongside iconic photographs by renowned artists including Eve Arnold, Richard Avedon, Cecil Beaton, Alfred Eisenstadt, Horst P. Horst, Lee Miller, Irving Penn, and Edward Steichen. *Play the Part*, drawn from the Pierre Passebon Collection and on view in the U.S. for the first time, also highlights film stills, set pictures, and other candid photographs, many of which are unpublished and rarely seen.

Born in Berlin, Marlene Dietrich (1901-1992) was a performer renowned for her starring roles in films such as *The Blue Angel* (1930), the first feature-length German talkie, and her foundational partnership with filmmaker Josef von Sternberg. In 1930, opposing the ascending Nazi regime, she emigrated to the United States, ultimately renouncing her German citizenship. During World War II, she actively supported US troops, donated funds to refugees, and toured with the USO. In recognition of her efforts, she became the first woman to be awarded the Medal of Freedom in 1947. In the 1950s, she transitioned primarily to live performances, captivating audiences in theaters worldwide. Her final film appearance was in *Just a Gigolo* (1979), after which she withdrew from performing and public life.

Dietrich's infatuation with photography and creating her own image blossomed at the start of her career. In 1964 she told an interviewer, "I had no desire to be a film actress, to always play somebody else, to be always beautiful..." She utilized camera angles, lighting, makeup, and editing to perfect her appearance, adapting her techniques as she aged and as photo technology advanced. This control, combined with her daring fashion choices and uninhibited sexual expression, crafted a public persona of an auteur with unwavering self-assurance. *Play the Part: Marlene Dietrich* showcases Dietrich's remarkable ability to reinvent herself for each new audience, staying atop her chosen field throughout.

"ICP is delighted to present *Play the Part: Marlene Dietrich*, including hundreds of striking and rarely seen images of one of the 20th century's most boundary breaking and captivating personas," said David E. Little, ICP's Executive Director. "It has been a joy to collaborate with passionate collector Pierre Passebon, who has used his extraordinary eye to assemble an utterly unique and engaging collection of photographs of Dietrich. Pierre's collection reveals the complexities of Marlene Dietrich's many images and guises. The exhibition invites audiences to

explore Dietrich’s multifaceted relationship to photography and its enduring power to shape society’s understanding of culture.”

Dietrich played many parts throughout her life, both on and off the screen: seductress, matriarch, war hero, socialite. Each of these roles is a testament to her understanding of and adaptability to the industry she worked within. The roles also reveal Dietrich’s relentless obsession with the medium of photography.

This exhibition is curated by Haley Kane, Exhibitions and Collections Coordinator at ICP.

Also on view at ICP this fall are ***Immersion: Gregory Halpern, Raymond Meeks, and Vasantha Yoganathan*** and ***Muriel Hasbun: Tracing Terruño***. *Immersion* showcases three projects created by the artists during their respective residencies—Halpern’s in Guadeloupe, Yoganathan’s in New Orleans, and Meeks’s in France, first near the Spanish border and then along the coast of the English Channel. Consisting of alternating residencies between France and the United States, the Immersion program is a French-American Photography Commission created by the Fondation d’entreprise Hermès and presented in collaboration with ICP and the Fondation Henri Cartier-Bresson, Paris. *Tracing Terruño* is the first comprehensive career survey in New York City of Muriel Hasbun (b. 1961), a multidisciplinary artist, educator, and advocate for Central American culture and history. Featuring nearly 80 works from throughout her career from the 1980s to the present, the exhibition explores how Hasbun has developed a uniquely poetic and abstracted sensibility that she employs to explore identity and memory, using her personal story of migration from El Salvador to the United States to examine collective histories through photography, video, and installation.

Exhibition Access

ICP is open every day except Tuesday from 11 AM to 7 PM, and until 9 PM on Thursdays. Admission: \$18 for adults; \$14 for seniors (62 and over), military, and visitors with disabilities (caregivers are free); \$12 for students (with valid ID); \$3 for SNAP/EBT card holders; free for ICP members, ICP students, and all visitors 14 years and under. Admission is by suggested donation on Thursdays from 6 to 9 PM. Tickets can be reserved online at icp.org/tickets. Visitors are asked to arrive during the 30-minute window of their timed ticket to help ensure a safe flow in the lobby. For more information, read ICP’s updated Visitor Information and Accessibility guidelines and policies.

Exhibition Support

Exhibitions at ICP are supported, in part, by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council and by the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of the Office of the Governor and the New York State Legislature.

About the International Center of Photography

The International Center of Photography (ICP) is the world’s leading institution dedicated to photography and visual culture. Cornell Capa founded ICP in 1974 to champion “concerned photography”—socially and politically minded images that can educate and change the world. Through exhibitions, education programs, community outreach, and public programs, ICP offers an open forum for dialogue about the power of the image. Since its inception, ICP has presented more than 700 exhibitions, provided thousands of classes, and hosted a wide variety of public programs. ICP launched its new integrated center on Manhattan’s Lower East Side in January 2020. Located at 79 Essex Street, ICP is the cultural anchor of Essex Crossing, one of the most highly anticipated and expansive mixed-use developments in New York City. ICP pays respect to the original stewards of this land, the Lenape people, and other Indigenous communities. Visit icp.org to learn more about the museum and its programs.

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Image:

William Walling, Jr., [Portrait of Marlene Dietrich], 1932. Collection Pierre Passebon.