

American MASTERS

20
years

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WNET NEW YORK

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press information

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THE PERSISTENCE OF AN ICONIC STAR'S DAZZLING IMAGE IS KEY TO THIRTEEN/WNET NEW YORK'S *AMERICAN MASTERS MARILYN MONROE: STILL LIFE*, PREMIERING IN JULY ON PBS

Features Interviews With Norman Mailer, Hugh Hefner And Gloria Steinem, And Photographers Arnold Newman, Eve Arnold And Elliott Erwitt

There is an oft told tale of Marilyn Monroe walking down a New York City street, incognito, turning to her companion and saying, "Do you want to see her?" With that, she threw off all vestiges of Norma Jean and miraculously transformed. There were no grand gestures, no change of clothes, no make-up. It was a simple shift, a slithering out of one skin into the other. Arguably the most photographed person ever, the "outing" of Marilyn is something she looked at with both skepticism and awe. She once said, "I carry Marilyn Monroe around with me like an albatross." In a new film, *AMERICAN MASTERS* offers a unique take on one of the world's first superstars by turning to the still photographs that captured Monroe's beauty, her complexity and, ultimately, her own complicated relationship with the star side of herself. *AMERICAN MASTERS Marilyn Monroe: Still Life* premieres Wednesday, July 19 at 9 p.m. (ET) on PBS (check local listings).

The film is a highlight of the 20th anniversary season of *AMERICAN MASTERS*, a five-time winner of the Emmy for Outstanding Primetime Non-Fiction Series and a recent recipient of its seventh Peabody Award. The 60-minute documentary is directed by Gail Levin, an Emmy Award-winning producer/director of both television and film whose most recent project was *AMERICAN MASTERS James Dean: Sense Memories*, which won a 2005 CINE Golden Eagle.

"The vast archive of Marilyn Monroe photographs cemented her in the public conscience like no one before or since," said Susan Lacy, creator and executive producer of *AMERICAN MASTERS*.

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“We are telling her story through the iconography of the 20th century. Her relationship with the lens was, perhaps, her greatest and most successful love affair.”

Says director Levin: “She was brilliantly conceived for the camera and perhaps equally its victim. Almost like Eve she entered the world naked and broke – a potent combination that created her indelible image.”

If she had lived, Monroe would celebrate her 80th birthday in June. This film is aimed at the persistence of her image. Through interviews with photographers such as Eve Arnold, Arnold Newman, Elliott Erwitt, George Zimbel, and Phil Stern, and especially through the photos themselves, *Still Life* captures moments of great triumph and great tragedy. From the 1949 nudes – when she posed because she needed the money – to the classic air grate photo from *The Seven Year Itch* through the final shots taken by George Barris in 1962, the photographs remain as an ageless memento of her guts, grace and sexiness.

Fearless, Monroe graced the first cover of *Playboy* in 1953. In *Still Life*, publisher Hugh Hefner recalls the now-classic centerfold. “One has to remember that the 1950s, the postwar era, was a very conservative time, socially, sexually, politically, and to pose for that picture and then to say that all she had on was the radio, to have that attitude in the 1950s, defined her persona and was a liberating force.” Hefner plans to be laid to rest in a crypt in Westwood Cemetery in Los Angeles, right next to Monroe, who died at age 36 in 1962.

Several celebrated writers have offered their opinion on the legend of Marilyn Monroe over the years, including Gloria Steinem (*Marilyn*, 1988), who discusses her earliest impressions in *Still Life*. “I was embarrassed by her because she was a joke, she was vulnerable. She was so eager for approval. She was all the things that I feared most being as a teenage girl.”

Norman Mailer wrote about Monroe in *Marilyn: A Biography*, (1973) and in *Of Women and Their Elegance*, (1981). In *Still Life* he recalls her marriage to playwright Arthur Miller. “When they moved to the country, five miles away, I just assumed that there’d be an invitation from Arthur to come over for dinner. And for a whole year, some of my friends were invited. We never were. And I never forgave Arthur for that. And what was my motivation? I wanted to meet her so I could steal her. Steal her from her husband. And you know a criminal will never forgive

you for preventing them from committing the crime that is really in their heart and so I always had an edge against Arthur ever after.”

Still Life looks at Marilyn from the inside out. Ultimately, it was the camera that was her friend and the rules of friendship applied – they respected each other. The unremarkable girl with the amazing smile. The sex goddess. The great dame. The movie star in the snapshots taken by the enlisted men in Korea. The worldwide seductress. She was, as *Some Like it Hot* director Billy Wilder described her, an original. “The first day a photographer took a picture of her,” he said, “she was a genius.”

Marilyn Monroe: Still Life is directed by Gail Levin for **AMERICAN MASTERS**. Susan Lacy is executive producer of **AMERICAN MASTERS**. Barry Schulman is director of cultural and arts programs for Thirteen/WNET New York.

To take **AMERICAN MASTERS** beyond the television broadcast and further explore the themes, stories, and personalities of masters past and present, the companion Web site (<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters>), created by Thirteen/WNET New York, offers interviews, essays, photographs, outtakes and other resources.

AMERICAN MASTERS is produced for PBS by Thirteen/WNET New York. This acclaimed series, now celebrating its 20th season, has become a cultural legacy in its own right. The **AMERICAN MASTERS** film library is one of the most highly honored in television history with profiles of more than 130 artistic giants. In addition to seven Peabodys, an Oscar and two Grammys, **AMERICAN MASTERS** has won 16 Emmys, including Outstanding Primetime Non-Fiction Series for 1999, 2000, 2001, 2003, and 2004.

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Thirteen/WNET New York is one of the key program providers for public television, bringing such acclaimed series as *Nature*, *Great Performances*, ***American Masters***, *Charlie Rose*, *Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly*, *Wide Angle*, *Secrets of the Dead*, and *Cyberchase* - as well as the work of Bill Moyers - to audiences nationwide. As the flagship public broadcaster in the New York, New Jersey and Connecticut metro area, Thirteen reaches millions of viewers each week, airing the best of American public television along with its own local productions such as The Ethnic Heritage Specials, The Thirteen Walking Tours, *New York Voices*, and *Reel New York*. Thirteen extends the impact of its television productions with educational and community outreach projects - including the Celebration of Teaching and Learning in Spring 2006. And as broadcast and digital media converge, Thirteen is blazing trails in the creation of Web sites, enhanced television, CD-ROMs, DVD-ROMs, educational software, and other cutting-edge media products. More information about Thirteen can be found at: www.thirteen.org.

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