

PHOTOGRAPHY

Avedon—Laborer in Fashion's Garden

by Owen Edwards



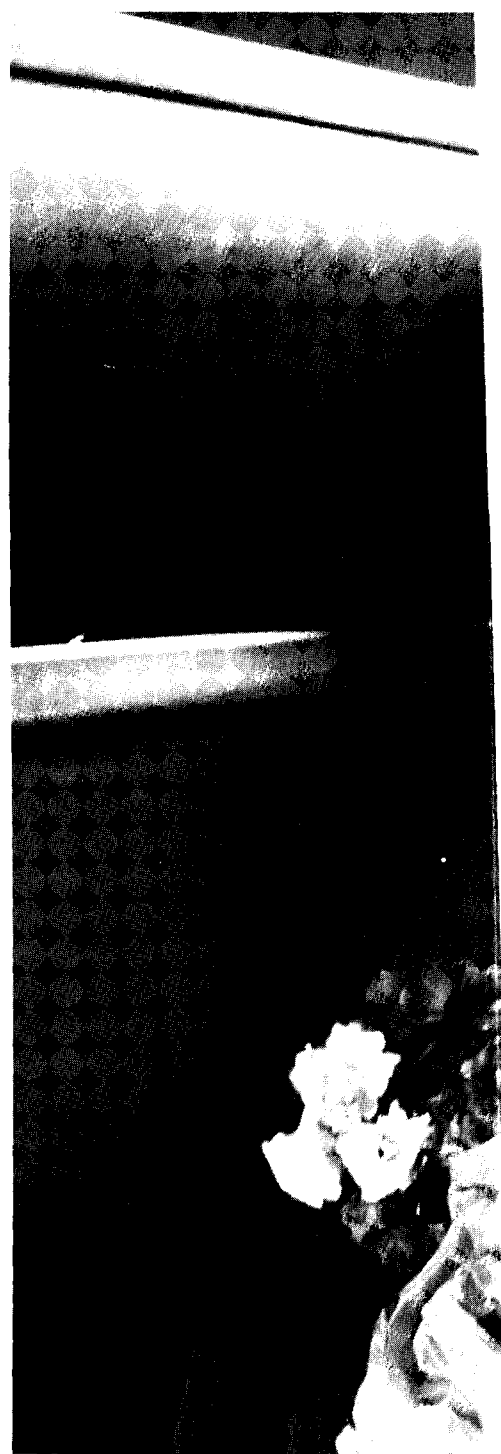
Jean Shrimpton (1965)—“Witty, innovative, technically fine photography.”

AH, WHAT a relief. With his vibrant, swirling, brilliant exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Richard Avedon has at last, surely, routed for good the tedious vestiges of defense against the idea that fashion photography deserves a place in the pantheon of camera art. The show, compiled mostly from Avedon's 30 years of hallmark work in magazines, is a triumph, a symphony dedicated to the long liaison between his wondering eye and women.

On the pages of *Harper's Bazaar* and *Vogue*, these sumptuous pictures were meant to lure, to dazzle the eye, to create immediate and pleasurable response, and they have lost none of their power to do so. But seen on the walls of a temple of art, on a grander, highly dramatic scale, they take on an unexpectedly splendid, epic quality. And, more importantly, these pictures become, with few exceptions, divorced from the modishness that was their original reason for being, and give us an extraordinary view of the artistry Avedon invested in them. There is an elegance here that abides beneath the whim of style, against fearful odds.

In a general, photographic sense, the show is the most resounding statement to date of the high vitality of purely commercial photography. Several earlier exhibitions have prepared the way. The pictures of such talented laborers in fashion's garden as Horst, Hoyningen-Huene, DeMeyer, Irwin Blumenfeld, Munkacsi, Deborah Turbeville, plus major fashion group retrospectives at Hofstra and the Brooklyn Museum, have made the point emphatically that money need not breed banality, and that the struggle to evade the clichés of such an overworked field has produced a wonderful array of witty, innovative, technically fine photography.

With each of these shows has come a growing awareness that photography has long been stifled by the prejudice against pictures motivated by something other than the salvation of mankind. This regressive bias can be traced to sources as various as Stieglitz's rejection of the Pictorialist painterly fabrications and the subsequent misreading of clarity as reality in Paul Strand's compositions, and to the Field Service Administration's inspired documentary coverage of the Depression (as well as some inspired propaganda indicating that the pictures were themselves something other than high-grade government propaganda). For these and other reasons, photography became the only form of artistic expression to be chained to the shibboleth truth—by which the commissars of the medium most emphatically did not mean beauty, at least not in the well-draped form of a fashion mannequin. Painting, music, drama, fiction, movies—all could revel in whatever inventions their creators desired, while photographers diligently, dutifully stuck to the “honest” surfaces of weather-worn faces, barns, and mesas. During the most creative years of Max Ernst, Picasso, Buñuel, Stravinsky, the Marx Brothers, Rivera, O'Neill, Disney, Fitzgerald, and Faulkner, only three groups of photographers managed to do similarly original work: montage makers like



Hannah Höch, John Heartfield, and Moholy-Nagy; surrealist experimenters like Man Ray and Bruguère; and the fashion photographers. Though a vastly wider understanding of what constitutes significant photography now prevails, commercially subsidized visionaries like Guy Bourdin, Irving Penn, Hiro, and Helmut Newton are still arguably the most consistently creative photographers around. And, of course, Avedon.

After three resounding shows of his



Dorian Leigh
(1949)—Bazaar's
editor refused
to publish
this because "When
you're wearing a
Dior hat, you don't
cry."

portrait work, Avedon has now come full circle, back to the wellspring that formed and continues to nurture him. An exhibition of such magnitude, in a place with such weighty reverberance as the Met, is for him an expression of extreme confidence (since Avedon takes nothing casually) in both the status of fashion photography and the indubitable mastery of his own work in the field.

For all the wonders of his precursors and contemporaries at *Bazaar* and

Vogue, there is finally no one who does it all quite like Avedon. He has no peer in his style, his composition, his graphic instinct, his conveyance of energy, vibrancy, fun, Proustian gossip. With apparent ease he seems to sweep the camera out from between us and whatever *mise-en-scène* he wants to include us in. He has an uncanny directorial genius for bringing women out of their skins, up beyond the fabric of the diverting clothes they wear, and into a realm of drama and emotion rarely

seen in the best street photography.

Is it false emotion, and therefore invalid? Don't bet on it. Standing in front of a picture of Dorian Leigh in a Dior hat, sitting in the back seat of a French taxicab, with a provocative tear bright on one cheek, one feels overwhelmingly the mood of a moment and an age, and one doesn't care what's "true" and what isn't. Avedon, thank God, has prevailed. For once, let me leave off; the pictures say it inimitably better. ●

SATURDAY REVIEW: BOOKS

Good Old-Fashioned Titan

American Caesar:
Douglas MacArthur 1880-1964
by William Manchester
Little, Brown, 816 pp., \$15

Reviewed by Orville Schell

IN A DECADE fixated on personalities rather than politics, it is odd that there are so few men worthy of our highest adoration, or even our contempt. While our thirst for idols is as strong, perhaps stronger, than ever, our cynicism and facility for distrust is so well developed that fledgling heroes seem hardly to hit their stride before they are defrocked.

We are quick to imbue likely leaders with our hopes and fantasies, but just as quick to reverse the process and heap on them our disappointments and disillusionment. Heroes and leaders of the 1970s have the life expectancy of shooting stars. For idols we must retreat into nostalgia.

Perhaps this abrasive skepticism is only the logical outcome of a Cold War, a Vietnam, and a Watergate. Like laboratory animals we received shocks every time we surrendered to trust, and we withdrew, slowly coming to accept deception and aberrant leaders as the rule rather than the exception. This is not the stuff from which heroes are fashioned.

And thus, reading William Manchester's new research colossus, *American Caesar: Douglas MacArthur 1880-1964* is almost like coming upon an old Hollywood screen magazine. Here was a man who stood tall for friends and foe alike. A good old-fashioned titan, this complicated and intriguing man was shrouded in legend and drama. Whether he was executing one of his stunning successes or his great failures, he always seemed to follow some inner voice rather than the dictates of others. This singularity was his strength. It was also his undoing.

On April 17, 1951, having been stripped of all his commands and humiliated by Harry Truman for his insubordination in Korea, MacArthur strode to the podium to address a joint

session of Congress.

I vividly recall sitting in the gymnasium of my grade school with my half-eaten lunch of ham, boiled potatoes, and brussels sprouts when the voice of General Douglas MacArthur, ex-Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (the "SCAP"), came over the school's public address system.

"...I address you with neither rancor nor bitterness in the fading twilight of life, but with one purpose in mind: to serve my country," he told Congress and the world.

The audience interrupted the 71-year-old general with cheering and applause 30 times during his 34-minute speech. After a short discourse on Asian history, he launched into an emotional defense of his own policies, which called for the bombing of Chinese sanctuaries across the Yalu River, blockading the Chinese coastline, and unleashing Chiang Kai-shek to fight in Korea. (At one point MacArthur had even advocated sowing the banks of the Yalu with radioactive cobalt to seal Korea off from China.)

"For entertaining these views," he continued, "all professionally designed to support our forces... and bring hostilities to an end... at a saving of countless American and Allied lives, I have been severely criticized.... History teaches with unmistakable emphasis that appeasement but begets new and bloodier war... Why, my soldiers ask me, surrender military advantage to an enemy in the field? I could not answer."

MacArthur had not finished, but the audience rose to give him an ovation.

"Once war is forced upon us," he continued, "there is no alternative than to apply every available means to bring it to a swift end. War's very objective is victory—not prolonged indecision.... In war, indeed, there can be no substitute for victory.

"I am closing my 50 years of military service," he told Congress in words that I, an 11-year-old then, still remember. "When I joined the army, even before the turn of the century, it was the fulfillment of all my boyish hopes and

dreams. The world has turned over many times since I took the oath on the Plain at West Point, and the hopes and dreams have long since vanished. But I still remember the refrain of one of the most popular barracks ballads of that day, which proclaimed most proudly that 'Old soldiers never die. They just fade away.' And like the old soldier of the ballad, I now close my military career and just fade away—an old soldier who tried to do his duty as God gave him the light to see that duty." And then, lowering his voice so that it was barely audible, he said, "Goodbye."

There was hardly a dry eye in Congress. Douglas MacArthur was a theatrical man. He knew how to use his props: his faded suntan, his famous stained gold-braided commander's hat, his corncob pipe.

He was also a great orator.

Truman called MacArthur's farewell address "Nothing but a damn bunch of bullshit... 100 percent bullshit."

Nonetheless, as MacArthur left Washington, 500,000 people cheered him in the streets. And when he arrived in New York that evening, Manchester reports, it took his limousine seven hours to inch along the 19.2-mile motorcade, so thick were the crowds.

MacArthur had spent 50 years in military service. He was born in an Army camp; his father fought with the Union Army and won a congressional medal. Young MacArthur's odyssey took him from the frontier in Indian territory (where his father had fought Geronimo, the Apache chieftain) in the 1880s to Korea in the 1950s. In between lay service as chief-of-staff with the Rainbow Division in the trenches of France during WW I (where he was decorated nine times for heroism), the superintendency of West Point, a stint with the CCC in the Thirties, his renowned defense and withdrawal from Bataan and Corregidor ("I shall return"), as commander in the reconquest of the Philippines, the occupation of Japan, and then Korea.

Before his tour of duty was over, he had won every medal known to the military, including his five stars. He