

## Legendary Still Photographer Douglas Kirkland Looks Past the Frames

BY TT STERN-ENZI · OCTOBER 1ST, 2014 · FILM



Douglas Kirkland's "Marilyn Monroe 1961" - Photo: Miller Gallery

So much of the attention devoted to cinema as an art form focuses on the moving frames. It is easy to dismiss the singular beauty of the still images used in the promotion of film. Often, it is in these more intimate snapshots that we come to appreciate the humanity of the subjects; through these shots we are able to take the stars down from the pedestals we have placed them on and find ourselves privy to moments of private introspection and hints of real emotion beyond the performances we see onscreen.

Even prior to the Internet and social media, studios have always seen the need to whet the appetites of the audience, but decades ago, when photographers like Douglas Kirkland (*Life* and *Look* magazines) were granted access to film sets and the stars during filming, the resulting stills were not instantaneously posted online for worldwide consumption. The possibility existed for more interaction between the photographer and his subject. In turn, what was captured in those frames — the aforementioned humanity — was a rare and special gift that even the subjects felt obligated to share with their fans.

Yet, it seems impossible to imagine how someone like Kirkland could get lost in the mix. Over the course of an astounding 60-year career, he has trained his lens on the likes of Marilyn Monroe, Judy Garland, Elizabeth Taylor, Audrey Hepburn and Sophia Loren, along with more contemporary stars like Nicole Kidman, Monica Bellucci and Meryl Streep. Having worked on more than 150 films (from *The Sound of Music* to Baz Luhrmann's *Australia* and *The Great Gatsby*) and published several collections of his work, Kirkland contains both through his eyes and his voice a multitude of stories — the unseen and unheard behind-the-scenes narratives that tap into a more universal and fundamental aspect of this art form with impact far beyond any marketing aim.

I was able to peruse Kirkland's latest monograph — *Douglas Kirkland: A Life in Pictures* — and what struck me, right from the start, was his voice.

The best photographs strip away the artifice and glamour, even as they drape and cloak the scene, to uncover a raw and naked truth, and that is what Kirkland has accomplished through the narrative he has composed, which accompanies the images in this collection.

There is a quote from Kirkland on the front flap of the dust jacket for the book, which reads: "I've had radiant, wonderful experiences with numerous people." That many of those people have been famous is of little consequence because Kirkland endeavors to remove that barrier.

I was able to speak with Kirkland and I mentioned how the plainspoken power of his words, his stories and recollections was just as moving, if not moreso (which seems somehow sacrilegious to say out loud to him) than the images. For a man who has indeed lived "a life in pictures," the stories are just as meaningful to him.

"I tend to remember, reasonably well, everything that happens on each of my shoots," he said, sharing a snippet that sums up this idea. "We did a book about five years ago called *Freeze Frame*, a little book, a chapbook, and we did it in decades, you know '70s, '80s and '90s.

"A journalist was looking at the book with me and there's not a lot of text in that book. At that time, the publisher did not want text, just the pictures. So the pictures are there and just the name and date. That's about all. There are probably 200 pictures in there, at least, maybe more. I said to the journalist, who was asking this and that, 'Let's do something. I want you to open the book up to any page and I can tell you the story.' For me that's part of the joy of being a photographer. Being able to live with people and connect with them whenever possible, and you come away with a memory and a story."

As part of the FotoFocus Biennial 2014 celebration, Douglas Kirkland will lecture at the Cincinnati Art Museum's Fath Auditorium this Thursday from 6-8 p.m. where he will discuss his work and follow with a book-signing for *Douglas Kirkland: A Life in Pictures*, with all book proceeds benefitting the CAM. In addition, on Saturday from 6-9 p.m., Kirkland will attend an opening reception and party kicking off a two-week exhibition of his work at Hyde Park's Miller Gallery.

Come to these events prepared to hear, as well as see, all about this amazing life in pictures.

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