

◀ In Our Midst

“Marilyn & Me”

At Heather James Fine Art



“Come on in, Mr. Wolf,” Marilyn Monroe said in her signature breathy voice to 23-year-old, Leica-draped Larry Schiller the day they met. It was 1960 and the star was inviting the young photographer into her dressing room on the set for “Let’s Make Love.” Although she was a decade his senior, he was a goner. “She was loveable, huggable and ...,” he says simply, if graphically, remembering that long-ago moment with a gentle smile.

For the next few days on assignment for Look magazine, he photographed her with the film’s costar French actor Yves Montand, as well as with her hairdresser and makeup artist, discovering that “she knew more about photography than most photographers, including myself.”

Schiller explains, “she was with Andre de Dienes, a Hungarian (from Transylvania) early on, and he shaped her photography.” A Google image search of their collaboration is heartbreakingly beautiful, showing the eager, peaches-and-cream teen morphing into a peerless seductress.

Lawrence Schiller’s work is on exhibit at the Heather James Fine Art gallery in Palm Desert where his photographs, including those shot during that several-day assignment, intermingle with others he took of Martin Luther King, Clint Eastwood, Robert Kennedy and even Pat Nixon in brave tears by the side of her defeated husband.

Heather James’ Chip Thom curated the show, and although the exhibition has had a multi-city schedule during last year’s 50th anniversary of Monroe’s death, only one-third of these images have been offered for sale elsewhere. “It’s the first time I’ve shown vintage prints,” Schiller says, and it even includes a contact sheet with red-ink notes and markings in Monroe’s hand, as she was exercising her right to reject any she didn’t like.

Although it’s clear from Schiller that Monroe was well aware of her allure in the photographer’s first session with her, the actress also was freely expressing her pain in 1960 at being underrated, according to his short memoir “Marilyn & Me.” Responding to him as he marvels at



LEFT: “Memories of Marilyn” 1962; C-Print; 24 x 20 inches; edition 1/75, signed, numbered recto.

TOP: “Marilyn Monroe and Paula Strasberg, May, 1962,” Silver Gelatin photograph; 24 x 20 inches; edition 1/75, signed and numbered recto.

ABOVE: “First Dip, Marilyn Monroe, ‘Something’s Got to Give,’ May 23, 1962,” Silver Gelatin photograph; 20 x 24 inches; edition 1/75, signed and numbered recto.

BELOW: “Joe DiMaggio and Joe DiMaggio, Jr. at Marilyn’s funeral, August 8, 1962,” Silver Gelatin photograph; 20 x 24 inches; edition 1/75, signed and numbered recto. All photographs this page by Lawrence Schiller.



Photo journalist, honored filmmaker and best-selling author Lawrence Schiller presents a selection of his images taken of Marilyn Monroe on the set of "Something's Got to Give," now offered at Heather James Fine Art in Palm Desert.





"Marilyn Monroe (wrapped in robe), 'Something's Got to Give,' May 23, 1962," by Lawrence Schiller. C-Print; 24 x 20 inches; edition 1/75, signed and numbered recto.

her worldwide fame, once again by the nickname she'd just given him, she says "Let me ask you, Larry Wolf—how many Academy Award nominations do I have?"

Two years later, on the eve of the actress' 36th birthday, the photographer was back on a Monroe set for "Something's Got to Give." There he would take a series of near-nude photos of her that not only showcase her still-remarkable beauty, but which also are the highlights of this gallery exhibition.

When asked whether her fragility was obvious on the second go around, Schiller answers that she was "breakable in any moment." She was being paid \$100,000 for this film, a lightweight comedy, and the resentment was eating her up. "She was angry," recalls Schiller. "20th Century Fox would loan her out for a \$1 million when she was getting paid \$100,000 and then pocket the difference."

Further, he explains, "She hadn't had a good picture in a long time. In 'The Misfits' (1961) with Clark Gable, she couldn't accept that she wore (director John) Houston down with her delays. She didn't realize—she was oblivious to the fact—that every time she held up production, didn't show, came with glassy eyes, she lost respect."

Worse, also at Fox, 30-year-old Liz Taylor had negotiated a million-dollar contract for "Cleopatra," filming that same spring. By this time, magazines all over the world were carrying fascinating features about her affair with co-star Richard Burton.

Monroe wanted that limelight turned in her direction and she would use the photographer to make that happen. The only caveat, after she had nixed those shots she didn't like, was that the approved photos couldn't appear in any magazine that also carried Taylor's photo.

"Marilyn was insecure in her film career at that point," he says, "but she knew she wanted to wipe Liz Taylor off the publicity map using the only weapon she had in her life at that point, her body. Deep down, she hated doing that, but she thought the publicity from the photo shoot would earn her respect."

While editing down the pool shots



champagne and fighting the studios...I felt she escaped into the darkness at night. But that night, I think she lost track of what she'd already taken."

Two of Schiller's shots from "Something's Got to Give" graced covers of Life magazine, one from the pool shoot that ran right after her dismissal. The other, with Monroe wearing a mink-trimmed suit and hat, a costume from the film, appeared on the commemorative issue following her death.

Schiller, now 76, not only shot extensively for a clientele that included Life and Paris Match—the

afterward over a bottle of Dom Perignon, Monroe said to Schiller, "I never wanted to be Marilyn—it just happened. Marilyn's like a veil I wear over Norma Jeane."

In early June, when Taylor and Burton were cavorting on the island of Capri, Monroe was fired from the picture. Although she was later rehired, she died in August before filming was scheduled to start up again. The morning before, on his way to a relaxing weekend in Palm Springs, Schiller stopped at Monroe's Brentwood home to drop off some prints and foreign magazine covers. Bitterly she responded to him about an offer for a Playboy shoot, "It's still about nudity. Is that all I'm good for?"

Does he think she took her own life? "No. Marilyn was fighting her demons, taking drugs, drinking Dom Perignon

latter having given him the last Marilyn assignment. But he went on to collaborate with Norman Mailer and also to produce films and television shows that would pick up an Oscar and seven Emmys. He additionally authored four New York Times bestsellers. But from that summer of 1962, after Miss Monroe's passing, it's Schiller's photo taken at her funeral of Joe De Maggio, inconsolable with his son by his side, that offers the ultimate private glimpse into a tortured soul.

—CARLA BREER HOWARD

"'Let's Make Love,' Marilyn Monroe, 1960" by Lawrence Schiller; Silver Gelatin Photograph; 24 x 20 inches; edition 1/75, signed and numbered recto.

▶▶ DETAILS

Heather James Fine Art, 45-188 Portola Ave., at Hwy 111, Palm Desert; (760) 346-8926; heatherjames.com. "Marilyn & Me. A Memoir in Words & Photographs" by Lawrence Schiller, published by Taschen in a limited edition appropriately of 1962 copies, covered in a royal blue satin fabric-covered hardcover edition with a coordinating clamshell box; 11.4 x 15.6 in., 210 pages, \$1,000; "Marilyn & Me, A Photographer's Memories," by Lawrence Schiller, published by Nan A. Talese | Doubleday, \$20.