

ReadytoWear**Susannah Frankel**

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There is a complicity between subject and onlooker in Ellen Von Unwerth's photography that is unusual if not entirely surprising given the story of the brains behind it. Von Unwerth, after all, like both Sarah Moon and Corinne Day, is a female photographer who worked as a model before changing sides. She is therefore, inherently, and without anything even approaching the worthy, rather more sensitive in her approach to her subjects than most.

Erotically charged but never exploitatively so, intriguing and demonstrating kitsch humour and unashamed decadence, the photographer's signatures are both instantly recognisable and refreshingly warm - a far cry from the cool objectification of women that comes courtesy of the world's leading male photographers and that tends still to dominate.

Later this week, an exhibition of Von Unwerth's photography opens at the Michael Hoppen gallery in London. Entitled "Fraulein", neatly enough - Von Unwerth is German born and based in Paris - it precedes a limited-edition monograph of the same name published by Taschen next month.

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"[Women] are not just there to be admired, they are to be enjoyed," the peroxide-blonde snapper once opined and if anything sums up her aesthetic then that is it. Far from placing

the world's most feted faces onto some sort of unreachable pedestal - made all the more difficult to identify with by the sheer gloss of any exorbitantly priced clothes in the frame - Von Unwerth appears to actually engage with them in an intimate and, for the most part, very playful manner. Any fashion looks as if it belongs to the woman wearing it and, more often than not, she is scantily clad. Whatever, the overriding sense is that we, the viewers, are then allowed in on the act.

Von Unwerth's work seems very relevant for now. Hers is no passive heroine and certainly

not a woman to be reduced to arm candy. Instead, she dresses - and indeed behaves - in a way that pleases herself in the first place, looking straight to camera as if to say: touch me if you dare.

While there is a raw and often even comedic quality to the work - a model shot from behind strolling through a Tyrolean landscape worthy of Heidi in red stockings, black suspenders and talon heels, perfectly round buttocks on display for all to see - this does not detract from its luminous beauty.



In the end the great quality here is that the power belongs to the subject - any fantasy projected is ultimately her own. She may be far from alienating - instead a sense of come-and-play-with-me mischief, too, is central to the style - but to be allowed a glimpse into her world feels like a privilege nonetheless.

"Fraulein - Ellen Von Unwerth", Michael Hoppen Gallery, 22 October-2 November

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