

MEMORIES OF MARILYN

In celebration of what would have been her 85th birthday this summer – and 49 years since her death – *Waterfront* looks at the cultural highlights and honours of the great Marilyn Monroe. Julie Burns reports

Blonde bombshell, sex symbol, cultural icon and ranked as the sixth greatest female star of all time by the American Film Institute. The story of Marilyn Monroe is one of classic rags to riches, Hollywood glory and intriguing tragedy. Born Norma Jeane Mortenson, she never knew her real father and due to her mother's mental instability, had a fractured childhood growing up in foster care across California. Youngest of three, her half-siblings were kidnapped by their father and all were unaware of the others' existence until adulthood. Marilyn was often unsettled by disturbing visits from her mother, Gladys, who was constantly in and out of hospital, but despite her troubled upbringing she tried to make a life for herself by marrying her high-school sweetheart at the age of 16. Marilyn grew up in LA hearing tales of the stars from her mother who had worked in the

film studios before she became unwell. She often went to the movies with her on/off guardian and mother's friend, Grace and so Marilyn's fascination with glamour grew. The teenager's luck was to change while husband Jim Dougherty was away as a Merchant Marine in World War II. Modelling beckoned via the Army whose 'pre Marilyn' *Yank* magazine covers of her at work in a munitions factory led to her joining an agency. Castings with influential movers and shakers

ensued such as fashion photographer Andre de Dienes, his testament to this formative time can be seen in his memoir, *Marilyn*, published by Taschen (pictures reproduced here for the first time).

By 1945, sensing greater opportunity, the fresh faced 19 year old, inspired by film star Jean Harlow, bleached her hair blonde, filed for divorce and compiled with Dienes' help the portfolio that was to open movie dream doors. From an initial 20th Century Fox screen test and contract, her name was changed first to Norma then Jean, with her mother's maiden name Monroe. Eventually an executive named her Marilyn – and a star was soon born, though not without a dry spell when briefly unemployed, she panicked and posed for nude photographs in order to pay the rent. A year later and back in acting, with a talent agent as a mentor opportunity hit in the Marx Brother's film, *Love Happy*, followed by John Huston's *The Asphalt Jungle* and Barbara Stanwyck vehicle, *Clash By Night*. By 1953, her first lead role in the thriller *Niagara* coincided with what would become her iconic styling, while appearing later that year as showgirl Lorelei Lee alongside Jane Russell in

Gentlemen Prefer Blondes

created her first key on-screen moment, draped in pink and jewels, performing *Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend*. And who can forget her other indelible image stood over subway grating white halter-neck dress billowing, in classic Billy Wilder comedy, *The Seven Year Itch*?

Starring in the 50s with the greats, from Robert Mitchum (*River of No Return*), Jack Lemmon and Tony Curtis (*Some Like it Hot*), to Laurence Olivier (*The Prince and the Showgirl*), her mostly comedic roles belied her frequent stage-fright which she felt was rectified on performing in front of 10,000 American troops in Korea. Her prolific love life led twice more to marriage - to baseball star Joe Di Maggio and playwright Arthur Miller for whom she converted to Judaism. Miller's dramatic screenplay, *The Misfits* - ultimately echoed their marital breakdown – and became her last finished film. Delight at starring opposite her idol Clark Gable turned to distress at Gable's death shortly after filming ended - pre-empting her own a few months later. Sadly for Marilyn, the cumulative distress of two miscarriages - she was terrified of ending up childless - a pattern of depression and mix of medication had all taken its toll. Her last liaisons with the married President Kennedy and brother, Bobby, only served to fuel her downward spiral so that at 36, Marilyn died, officially classified as probable suicide.

Sunny, sweet and sexy on the surface, plagued with demons from the past beneath, she was by accounts often a paradox of siren and unpredictable little girl lost. A magazine cover ten years previously quoted Marilyn: "I was a lonely girl with a dream – who awakened to find that dream come true." Later in therapy, Marilyn had said to her psychoanalyst, "When

you've never belonged to any place or anybody, why wouldn't you want to be wanted by anyone that desired you?"

While ex husband Joe Di Maggio sent thrice weekly red roses to Marilyn's grave until his own death twenty years later, on her enduring appeal as an actress, director John Huston best summed it up: "She had no techniques. It was all the truth. It was only Marilyn." Inspiring film fans to artists ever since – Warhol to Madonna's *Material Girl*, Debbie Harry to Elton John's *Candle in the Wind*, is proof nearly 50 years on, that for many, Marilyn's flame still burns bright.



MARILYN MONROE ON SHOW

Warhol and the Diva Exhibition, The Lowry – A stellar collection of Warhol's iconic images in a newly curated series devoted to divas. 'He began his unique screen-print series of celebrities/performers following Marilyn's death, having never met her,' says curator Kate Farrell. 'His MM works are based on a publicity photo for the actress taken for her film Niagara, in 1953.' Amongst subjects including Liz Taylor, Jane Fonda and Mick Jagger, Marilyn is predominantly represented with four screen-prints from 1967, two paintings from 1978. See for yourself the memorable Marylins – and the best of the rest – exclusively at The Lowry Gallery, from 25 June 25 September – www.thelowry.com

Generation Pop, Manchester – Tinseltown photographer Frank Worth's black and white pictures of Marilyn in her peak (above left) with acquaintance Sammy Davis Junior – and other Hollywood related imagery – can be viewed for pleasure or purchase, at this award-winning gallery – www.generationpop.co.uk

Andre de Dienes, Marilyn, £24.99, published by **Taschen** available at www.taschen.com – Former secret diary, this twin volume memoir of never before seen colour pictures, as reprinted here for the first time, sheds unique insight into one of Marilyn's formative professional and personal relationships.

MM- Personal: From the Private Archive of Marilyn Monroe by Lois Banner – A treasure-trove of Marilyn's personal papers found in 2005 has been published in this touching compendium.