

There's No Such Thing as Too Much Marilyn

By ALEXANDRA CHENEY

Marilyn Monroe can be yours, for \$20, \$1,000 or \$15,000. To celebrate the 50th anniversary of Monroe's death, filmmaker, author and photo-journalist Lawrence Schiller is releasing several rarely seen photographs of the starlet from his archives.

Telling his personal story in photographs and words, Mr. Schiller worked with both Nan Talese's imprint at Doubleday and Taschen to simultaneously release "Marilyn & Me: A Photographer's Memories" and "Marilyn & Me: A Memoir in Words and Photographs." The books' releases, \$20 and \$1,000, respectively, coincide with Mr. Schiller's first solo exhibition in the U.S. at the Steven Kasher Gallery. The exhibition will open May 31 and run for one month, with prints ranging from \$3,500 to \$15,000.

We caught up with Mr. Schiller, 75 years old, via phone while he was in London promoting his books.

Were you concerned with "Smash" and "My Week with Marilyn" that Marilyn was thrust too deeply into popular culture before you were able to get your books out?

I do not pay attention to or am aware of normally what is going on in the entertainment industry. I have, for the last five years of my life, been devoting myself to building the Norman Mailer Center and Writers Colony in Provincetown, Mass. He was my friend and collaborator for 35 years. This is a very big endeavor. At the same time, four years ago I decided to write my autobiography.

Obviously Marilyn Monroe was a chapter in that autobiography. Last summer in June I saw the ads and the Michelle Williams story in Vanity Fair on "My Week

With Marilyn." There's no question that that triggered, in my mind, the fact that one year later was going to be the 50th anniversary of her death.

OK, but you were aware of Marilyn being in the mainstream culture again. Did that concern you since you were still in the process of putting your thoughts together?

No. Being a film director myself, I didn't want to absorb anything by osmosis. So in July, I started to polish this chapter. In November, I had just come back from a long trip and I sent the polished manuscript of about 28,000 words to Gay Talese and Colum McCann. They came back to me and said I had something really special. I've written five books, but I've never written a book that way. I've never written with my own voice, looked at the warts on my own face. In writing the autobiography, I was going to look at myself warts and all.

And what did you see?

I saw a book. I went to Benedikt Taschen, I wanted my book to have a foundation of text, not a foundation of pictures. I showed him a preliminary selection, I didn't want it to be illustrations but an emotional journey, a photographic essay. We had a layout by early January but I told Benedikt that I wanted to publish it as just a small memoir. He said, "I'm not in the return book business. I can't print out 30,000 books and sell them on consignment like the big book publishers." He said "I sell my books direct," he has a different business model.

So you sent the book to Nan Talese?

Without telling Gay Talese, I submitted the book to Nan, his wife, and she got back to

me within two days. The book was already set in type for Taschen. So I gave her edited manuscript.

She stepped up to the line. She published the book knowing there was going to be another book. We decided that there might be two markets here, the market for the \$20 book and the market for the \$1,000 book.

Do you think there is a \$20 market and a \$1,000 market?

Yes. The Cannes Film Festival has Marilyn on the poster. It's the 65th anniversary of Cannes and it's the 50th anniversary of her death.

Why did you choose to hold on to your story and images to release them now?

It's very simple. As a businessman, less is more. If you keep something off of the marketing you are building a form of exclusivity. If there's less of a product, there's more.

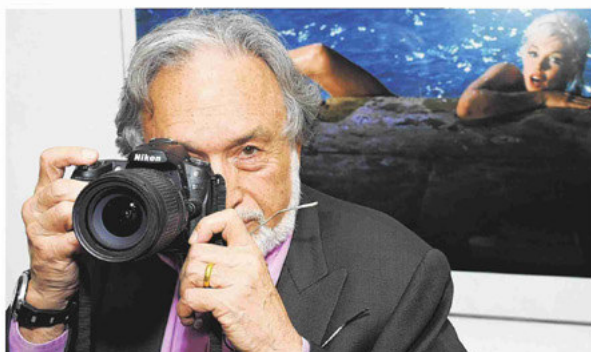
Why have your first solo exhibition [at the Steven Kasher Gallery] now?

I never gave up the copyright to my pictures. I lost many jobs, I was not hired on staff of magazines because they would want to pay me a lot of money, but they wanted the copyright to my pictures. I never gave it up, in 20 years of photography. But I've got to make a living. Marilyn may not even be my most successful photos.

Is there a particular image that you are most fond of, not necessarily your favorite, but one that transports you back?

There is one image, it is not her by the swimming pool, but it's the best picture I took. She is lying on the couch and Paula Strasberg is entering the frame and putting down some food.

It has exquisite composition, shows the glamour of the star, the mother hen, and it has a certain amount of movement, the lighting is perfect. It is as Henri Cartier-Bresson said, "the decisive moment."



Above: an image of Marilyn Monroe included in the new book 'Marilyn & Me: A Memoir in Words and Photographs' by Lawrence Schiller. Right, Mr. Schiller at Walton's Fine Arts Gallery in London last week. Below, two additional images of Monroe from Mr. Schiller's photographic memoir.