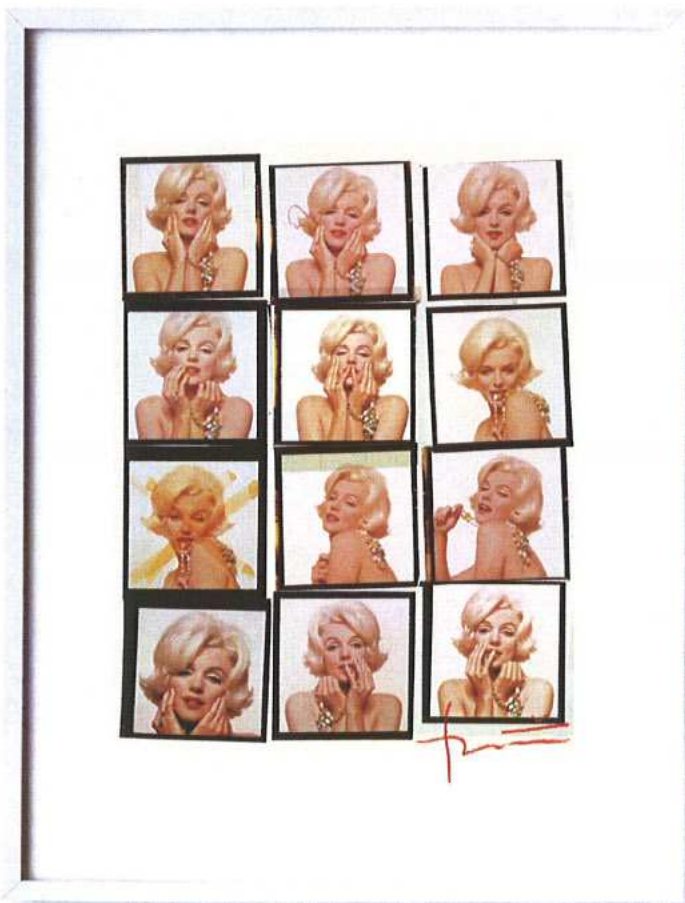
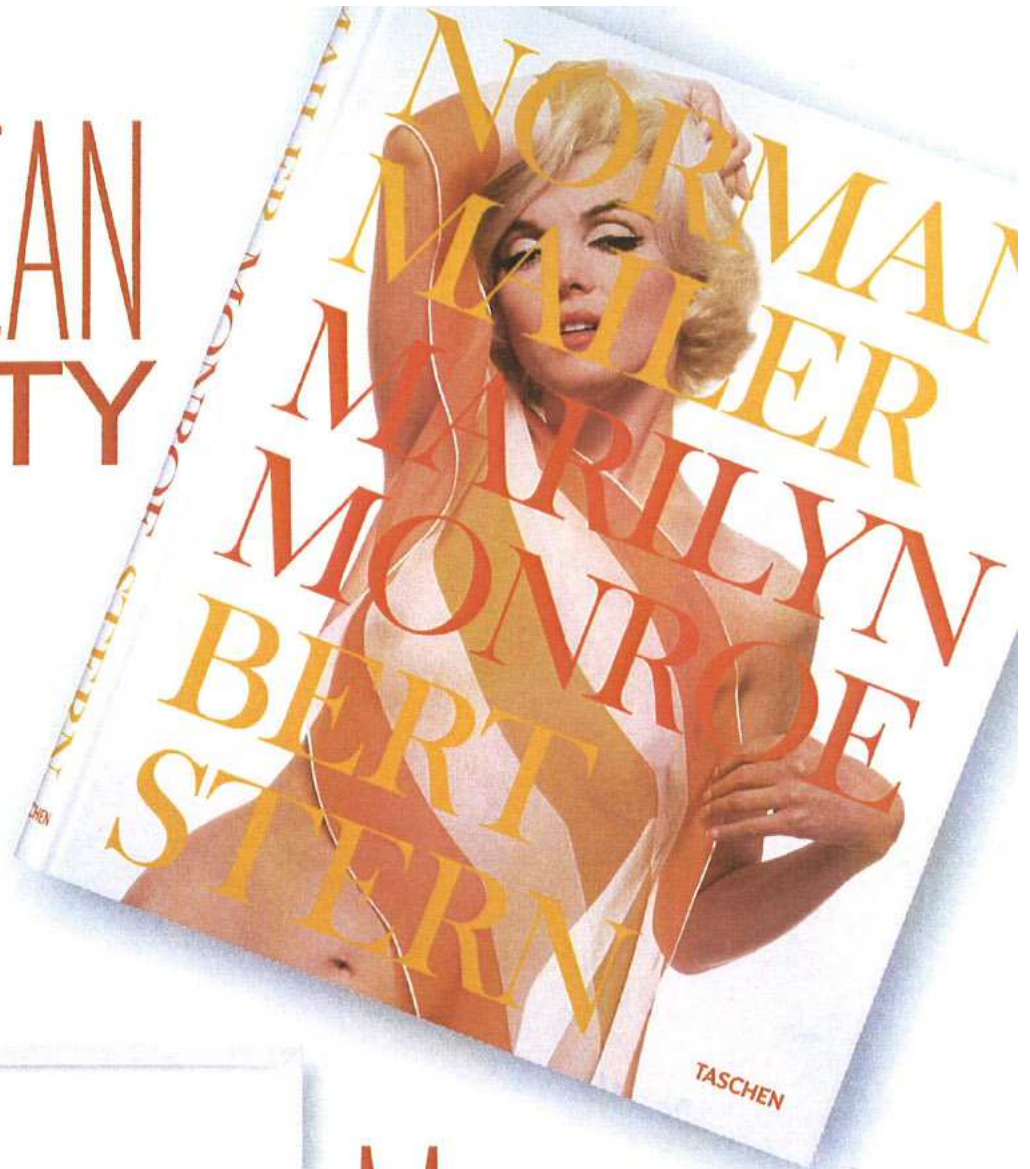


AMERICAN BEAUTY

Marilyn Monroe died 50 years ago this year. A new commemorative book brings together Bert Stern's extraordinary photographs of her, taken just before her death, with text from Norman Mailer's 1973 bestseller *Marilyn: A Biography*.
By Tom Hyde.



Marilyn Monroe appeared in 33 films and is best remembered for being typecast as the dumb blonde in films like *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* and *How to Marry a Millionaire*. It's sometimes forgotten that she won a Golden Globe for her brilliant parody of just such a ditzy doll, Sugar Kane Kowalczyk, in the Billy Wilder-directed classic *Some Like It Hot*.

Marilyn may be more famous in death than she was in life. Notable for her marriages to baseball star Joe DiMaggio and playwright Arthur Miller, she was rumoured to have had affairs with US President John F. Kennedy and later, his younger brother Robert. Since her death, stories and images from both her personal and professional lives have transformed her into an eternal American icon.

Marilyn was born out of wedlock to Gladys Monroe on 1 June 1926. She was named Norma Jean Baker, Baker being the name of her mother's first husband, not her father. It's believed her real father was C. Stanley Gifford, an employee of Consolidated Film Industries, where Gladys Baker worked.

Above: The new limited-edition *Norman Mailer, Marilyn Monroe, Bert Stern*. Courtesy Taschen.

Left: "Contact Sheet" by Bert Stern. Courtesy Taschen, *Art Edition B*, 1962.

Right: "Marilyn Beads" by Bert Stern, 1962.

QUOTES FROM MARILYN: A BIOGRAPHY

"She was our angel, the sweet angel of sex, and the sugar of sex came up from her like a resonance of sound in the clearest grain of a violin."

"She was not the dark contract of those passionate brunette depths that speak of blood, vows taken for life, the furies of vengeance if you are untrue to the depth of passing, no, Marilyn suggested sex might be difficult and dangerous with others, but ice cream with her."

"She was never for TV. She preferred a theatre and those hundreds of bodies in the dark, those wandering lights on the screen when the luminous life of her face grew ten feet tall."



Six weeks before she died, Marilyn posed for New York photographer Bert Stern, who was on assignment for *Vogue*. He shot more than 2,500 images of her. Stern, who lives today in New York, published a selection of those shots in a book entitled *The Last Sitting*. He told *Taschen* magazine recently:

"I was on a flight to photograph Elizabeth Taylor in Rome and could not sleep. Out of nowhere Marilyn Monroe came into my mind. I began to fantasise about making a photograph of her as memorable as Edward Steichen's immortal black-and-white portrait of Greta Garbo, maybe the greatest photograph ever taken of a movie star. I thought about nothing else for the rest of the flight." The shoot took place in a suite at the Hotel Bel-Air in Los Angeles (see story page 26).

A decade after she passed away, Lawrence Schiller, a friend of writer Norman Mailer, encouraged the prize-winning novelist to produce a retrospective on Marilyn. Mailer was nothing if not provocative, yet he won two Pulitzer Prizes, one for *The Naked And The Dead*, his novel of World War II – later declared one of the best 100 novels in the English language by a panel of British critics – and for *Armies of the Night*, his fictionalised account of a Vietnam War protest in Washington, DC.

What resulted from his research into the life of Marilyn Monroe was not an academic biography so much as an interpretative one that became an instant bestseller. It was the life of Marilyn as seen through the eyes of Norman Mailer – a biography unlike any written before and accompanied by photographs taken by different photographers, including Bert Stern.

Published in 1973, *Marilyn: A Biography* was launched in spectacular fashion at the Beverly Wilshire Hotel in Los Angeles. Among those at the launch were directors Billy Wilder and John Huston and Marilyn's former co-stars of *Some Like It Hot*, Tony Curtis and Jack Lemmon.

The book was instantly controversial. Some critics praised it highly, others wondered what all the fuss was about. It infuriated feminists and became the subject of a *60 Minutes* television programme. It was more than a year on the *New York Times* bestseller list.

One critic wrote: "The words seem like a pretentious jumble as you read them, but then the minute you put the book down, all that tangled-up nonsense begins to come clear. Like poetry, Mailer weaves words that at first seem an awfully convoluted way of saying something. But after you step away, you realize that it could not have been worded any better."

The new limited-edition *Norman Mailer, Marilyn Monroe*, Bert Stern, published by Taschen, is a collector's piece that commemorates the 50th anniversary of Marilyn's death. Distributed here by New Holland Publishers, each of its 1,962 numbered copies is signed by the photographer.

Text has been added by Lawrence Schiller and J. Michael Lennon, another friend of Mailer's and author of a forthcoming biography of the writer. Altogether, the content is as mesmerising as its subjects. ①

Left: "Crucifix 2" by Bert Stern, 1962.

Reviewing the contact sheet, Marilyn used a marker to cross out the images of herself she did not like.