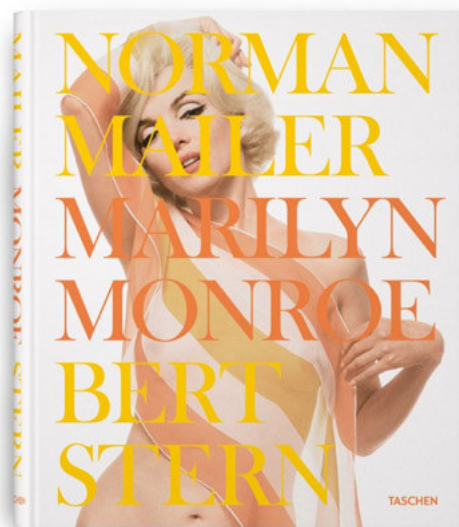


BOOK REVIEW: "MARILYN" BY NORMAN MAILER/BERT STERN (TASCHEN)

(Published by Taschen, £ 44.99) Hardcover, 10.6 x 12.8 in., 276 pages, ISBN 9783836530088

By Adrian Smith

Taken a mere six weeks before her untimely death, the Bert Stein photos of Marilyn Monroe have become legendary. With an estimated 2,500 shots taken over two weekends in a converted Bel Air hotel room, Stein attempted successfully to capture the true Marilyn, past the glamour and the Hollywood glitz. These photos were originally printed in *Vogue* and have remained in popular circulation ever since. In 1973 Pulitzer-winning author and journalist Norman Mailer was invited to write an introductory piece on Marilyn Monroe to accompany a book of photos, including some of those taken by Stein. Mailer had never met Monroe, and took everyone by surprise when he returned with over 100,000 words, having watched all of her movies, conducted interviews and more essentially, fallen in love. In death, as in life, Marilyn Monroe has a spellbinding effect on everyone.

Bert Stein's photos are perhaps well known for Marilyn being naked, covering herself with chiffon scarves. As he explains in his introduction: "*Vogue* wanted to dress Marilyn up... I still thought the right thing to do was to take her clothes off. The more they added, the more I tried to think of ways to reveal her. All she had to do was show one toe and it got me excited..."

This new book from Taschen, previously only available as a collector's edition, has been published to coincide with the fiftieth anniversary of her death. Hundreds of the photos from Stein's shoot are reproduced alongside Mailer's text, which is ostensibly a biography but also serves as a commentary on her life. Mailer attempts to get under the surface of Monroe, just like Stein was with his photos. He covers her life from her difficult childhood, her marriages, her depression and finally her death and the various theories around what really happened. Mailer adroitly summarises her power when he states: "She emanated sex, a simple street girl on still another back street, emanated sex like few girls ever did... libido seemed to ooze through her, and out of her like a dew through the cracks in a vase."

It is hard to believe that it has been fifty years since Marilyn Monroe died, and in many ways she is just as misunderstood now, an enigma, a puzzle that people still want to solve. She was contradictory; emanating fragility and being difficult to work with on set, yet representing a new kind of sexual confidence and freedom that would in part pave the way towards the sexual revolution of the 1960s. This book offers a glimpse into the psyche of Marilyn. One can spend hours simply pouring over the beautifully reproduced photos in this huge book, or read Mailer's accompanying text and discover new insight through his unique approach in constructing a biography. It is a book that can be dipped into again and again for years to come.

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