

FASHION: 1947-1957

My photographs don't go below the surface. They don't go below anything. They're readings of the surface. I have a great faith in surfaces. A good one is full of clues.

Richard Avedon, 1980

In 1945 Richard Avedon became staff photographer for Harper's Bazaar, a time in which the industry was dominated by static models operating as mannequins rather than personalities. Between 1945 and 1957 he created images that upturned this preconception of the model as clotheshorse and pioneered the use of narrative within fashion photography.



Dorian Leigh, Paris, 1949



Suzy Parker and Robin Tattersall, Paris, 1957

POINTS OF DEPARTURE:

1. In the 1940's and 50's Avedon's prerogative from Harper's Bazaar was to create a positive image of Paris to counterbalance the depression of rationing and inherent to France having acted the role of collaborator during the war. Avedon managed to wed this rehabilitation with his own interests in the model as both woman and performer.

- a. The image on the right is very resonant of the mad-for-France Hollywood movies also being produced at this time. In what ways could this image be described as filmic?
 - b. Both images imply a narrative that both existed before and will continue after the image is taken. How has Avedon achieved this through the composition of the pictures?
 - c. Look at the image of Dorian Leigh in front of the mirror. In what way does the composition of this image encourage us to look at the model as an individual rather than a generic type?
 - d. Avedon often refers to his fashion images and portraiture as performance. In what way do both of these images encourage us to look at the model as performing?
2. Look at the quote at the opening of this section. What do you think this quote means and what 'clues' can be read in the two images under discussion?
 3. Thinking of the photographs you see in fashion magazines today can you think of any examples in which his use of narrative can be seen reflected in contemporary fashion photography?



Homage to Munkacsi, Carmen, Paris, 1957



Jean Shrimpton, Paris, 1970

4. Munkacsi to whom the left hand image is homage is one of the few photographers who Avedon directly quotes as having influenced him. He was a photojournalist who amongst other things was

famous for his images of people in motion. Avedon however was far more aware of the objectivity of the photographer, of the choreography and performance innate to fashion. Munkacsí's work can therefore be read as both inspiration and point of departure for Avedon's work.

- a. Looking at the two images describe the differences and the similarities between them.
- b. How does taking the model out of the context of her surroundings affect our reading of the second image?
- c. In what ways do these two images map both the influence of Munkácsí throughout Avedon's fashion career and also Avedon's developing interest in motion to create a mode of fashion photography distinctly his own.