

ART

# THE BURDEN OF BEING BOURDIN

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The theme of model as muse will be thrown around a lot this month (Kate Moss in a gold lame toga creation already comes to mind). But the relationship between photographer and model is more than an excuse for a garden party; as dramatized by Antonioni's *Blow Up*, it's an historically complex dynamic, with the model not just the object of adoration and contemplation, but of camaradery, projection, and anxiety. When it comes to the rather dark persona of late French photographer Guy Bourdin—who, among contemporaries Chris von Wagenheim, and Helmut Newton, propagated the neo-glam look of the late 1970s and 1980s—the relationship between photographer and model was notoriously neurotic and compulsive, and verging on abusive. Without a doubt, Bourdin struggled with personal demons. You need not look further than to his work, in which leggy, typically nude models had their heads cropped off; or they posed submissively, their faces hidden; or sort other violent thing afflicts them in the course of the editorial narrative.

*Tomorrow Unseen: Guy Bourdin* opens at The Wapping Project in London, with works lent by Phillips de Pury and Bourdin's son and heir, Samuel Bourdin, and curated in collaboration with Bourdin's frequent muse, Nicolle Meyer, who modeled in countless numbers of the photographer's French *Vogue* editorials and nearly all of his risqué Charles Jourdan shoe ads. We sat down with Meyer to talk about the complicated and dark life of Guy Bourdin, as well as the gentle side that those who were not his muse did not get to see.

MC: At what point in Bourdin's career did you start working with him?

NM: I worked with him from 1977 and 1980, and it was a very intense period where with did a lot of Charles Jourdan ads, *Vogue* editorials, [and a] Pentax calendar. I worked with him in what was considered the peak years of his career, where he produced a very intense body of work and iconic images within [that] body of work.

MC: What was your first encounter with Guy Bourdin?

NM: I was 17. I was a dancer and then I was with a little modeling agency in Paris—I'm American-French [and] I moved to Paris when I was 12—and they sent me to Guy on a go-see, but I hadn't much to show—I had one or two test shots. He was very nice, very gentle. He looked at my photo from my [agency] card and then I got a call about a *Vogue* editorial at the end of the week.





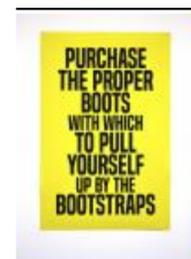
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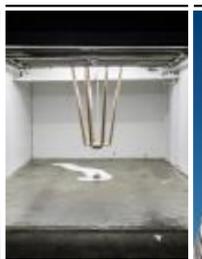
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