

Charlotte Cotton: from *The Photograph as Contemporary Art*



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In the mid-1990s, the moral implications of subjective photographic realism were centered not in the art world but in the sphere of fashion photography. ... [A]s photography developed its standing in the art market (although still invariably priced lower than painting or sculpture) and contemporary art became more fashionable, it was inevitable that stylistic signs from art practice would find their way into fashion photography. In particular, the rise of intimate photography offered a spur for the injection of a gritty realism into fashion images. Starting in the late 1980s, mainly with photographers, stylists and art directors based in London, what soon became known as “grunge” fashion photography began to appear on the pages of lifestyle magazines. Inspired by books such as [Nan] Goldin’s *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* and [Larry] Clark’s *Tulsa* and *Teenage Lust*, the emerging fashion photographers of the 1990s and their supporters sought to divest their medium of the faked glamour of high-production fashion shoots that had been prevalent in the mid-1980s, and instead represented fashion as it was customized and used by young people. Thinner and younger models were cast, heavy make-up and hairstyling were abandoned, and exotic locations were replaced by bare studios and unglamorous, often suburban interiors. In its perpetual search for the new, the fashion industry as a whole soon began to absorb these anti-commercial gestures into its advertising and glossy editorial pages, prompting increased media criticism that accused the fashion world of promoting child abuse, eating disorders and drug-taking. In May 1997, then President Bill Clinton made an infamous speech that brought the term “heroin chic” into general currency. Clinton was primarily attacking advertising campaigns that used gaunt, unsmiling models who, he claimed, glamorized drug addiction at a time when heroin was becoming a fashionable social drug. On the whole, contemporary art photography escaped the censures faced by

fashion photography (although Clinton did cite the work of Dan [sic] Goldin in his speech). ... Without the authenticity of the photographer's biography, without the possibility of presenting the sad and emotionally ugly flip-side of intimate life, fashion photography, with its obvious commercial remit, was bound to be the target of social campaigners.



Juergen Teller: Go Sees

Out of this climate, two photographers emerged in the art world. The German artist Juergen Teller (b. 1954) had begun to traverse the fashion and art worlds long before Clinton's condemnations. Already by the early 1990s, his photography had started to command high status within the fashion industry. His subsequent representation of his casual-looking fashion photographs, taken with a 35mm camera, alongside unpublished still lifes and photographs of his family in books and exhibitions had also started to meet with some critical appreciation. But at first, although Teller's capacity for creating intriguing photographs and for editing his work eloquently was not in question, the privileged lifestyle of his cast of models and pop stars was perhaps thought too glamorous to be treated seriously by the art world. But, in 1999, Teller produced his *Go Sees* project, which included a short film,



a book and various exhibitions, and it struck the right chord for art-world endorsement. A "go-see" is when a model is sent to meet a photographer by her agent with the hope of future bookings for fashion shoots. Over the course of a year, Teller photographed the models who came to meet him, simply and vividly recording the unglamorous, false hopes of the girls' lives. This project demonstrated his capacity to do much more than be a refreshing yet still consumable creator of fashion imagery, and showed that he could also critique this industry. He has continued in this vein in more recent years. In his book *Märchenstüberl* (2002) Teller has pushed his frank, even brutal photographic sensibility even further. This work includes—significantly given the fashion context in which he first gained recognition—his turning the

camera onto himself.



Corinne Day: Under Exposure, Vogue UK, 1993

Despite their rare and sustained confrontational spirit, Corinne Day (b. 1965) wisely chose not to re-present her fashion photographs of the early 1990s in the arena of

the art world. Day's starting point in photography was as a fashion model, when she began to take photographs of her model-friends, who then used her images in their portfolios. This brought her to the attention of the art director at *The Face* magazine in London, who responded to the lack of pretension or conceit in Day's pictures. With her knowledge of life on both sides of the camera, Day used the commissions she received to debunk the glamorous myth-making of fashion photography. Her antagonism towards the fashion industry meant that her movement into art was enhanced by her biography rather than made difficult. She was rare because of her seeming lack of commercial ambition for her fashion photographs; moreover, her casual start in photography was as artless as could be wished for, by now almost a prerequisite for photographers of intimate life. Day declined offers to transfer her best-known fashion images—those of Kate Moss—into the art world, perhaps acknowledging that what stood as a radical gesture in the context of a magazine would be lost in a gallery. Instead, she published a personal chronicle of her life in the late 1990s, focusing on the period when she suffered a life-threatening seizure that led to hospitalization and the discovery of a brain tumor. In *Diary* (2000), images of days in hospital leading up to a successful operation to remove the tumor and her recovery appear like staccato notes through the book's sequence of photographs of the highs and lows of her social circle. The style of the book and accompanying exhibitions followed what by then were established patterns for the presentation of intimate photography. The only texts in the book, apart from endmatter, were the handwritten titles to the pictures, reminiscent of Larry Clark's *Teenage Lust*. In terms of content, Day's willingness to photograph vulnerable and intimate moments in her and her friends' lives meant that the scope and depth of human emotion narrated in *Diary* fit well within the tradition established by Nan Goldin.



Wolfgang Tillmans: *Lux and Alex Holding Cock*; *Lux and Alex Sitting in the Trees*, *Lux and Alex Holding Each Other*

Wolfgang Tillmans has been inaccurately described as someone who started out in fashion photography and then made a switch to fine art. In fact, Tillmans demonstrated from the outset a confident understanding of the potential shifting of

the meaning and currency of his images by experimenting with a range of contexts including magazines, art galleries and books. In the early 1990s, the anti-commercial stance of youth magazines meant that these were exciting, and the most accessible, vehicles for a young photographer's work. Tillmans's photographs of friends, clubbers and ravers from the early 1990s, often using a snapshot aesthetic, found a relatively natural home in the pages of London-based *i-D* magazine. But his investigations were driven by something much more interesting than the challenge to get his pictures seen. Tillmans takes the reproducibility of the photographic image and makes it dynamic to construct a narrative: he mixes postcards, tearsheets, ink-jet prints and color prints in an array of sizes that creates an exciting, challenging non-hierarchical way of looking at photographs. His installations, in which his back catalogue of images are like raw matter shaped into new rhythms and interrelations for each site, bring another level of immediacy to the experience of his photography. The move, as typified in Tillmans's work, away from the more traditional and rarefied presentation of images in frames hanging in a line on gallery walls became one of the hallmarks of exhibiting art photography.

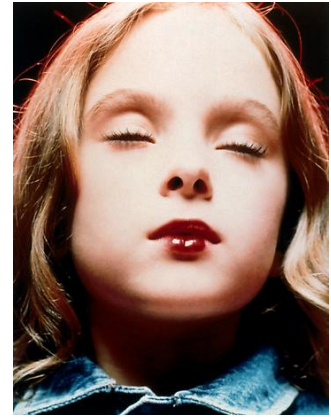
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Inez van Lamsweerde and Vindoodh Matadin

Dutch artist Inez van Lamsweerde (b. 1963) and her partner Vindoodh Matadin (b. 1961) create photographs for both art and fashion, which in the 1990s shared an aesthetic of digitized perfection while presenting troubling narratives. In their

series *The Widow*, a prepossessed girl is shown immaculately styled into a complex character invested with religious, funereal and fashionable qualities. The process of realizing such intense and mannered art works is close to the working practices of fashion. Van Lamsweerde and Matadin develop intricate storylines and character descriptions before arranging the styling of a shoot, and take great care in the casting of the actors and models. They have, since the early 1990s, used digital technology to refine their otherworldly visions yet further. Fashion requires that they work fast and perpetually change, meeting and often raising the experimental capacities of the industry. Their art projects aim higher (and take longer), unconstrained by the commissioning process and requirements of fashion. There is a sense, however, that the frequent reinvention of a photographic style or approach that fashion requires has acted as a liberation for their art to explore new visual territories, their use of tableau photography being just one among several aesthetic modes in which they have worked in the past ten years.



Inez van Lamsweerde and Vindoodh Matadin: The Widow