

Gösta Peterson

Photographs 1960s-1970s

April 13 - June 29, 2023

Reception Thursday, April 13 from 6 to 8pm



Gösta Peterson / Rudi Gernreich's "Total Look" for *The New York Times Magazine*, August 21, 1966

gallery hours: Thursday-Saturday, 11-5 and by appointment

**DEBORAH BELL PHOTOGRAPHS
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

GÖSTA PETERSON *Photographs 1960s-1970*

April 13 - June 29, 2023

For the first time since his death, an exhibition of fashion photographs from the 1960s and 1970s by the trailblazing photographer **Gösta (Gus) Peterson** will be presented. The exhibition will be on view from April 13 through June 29, 2023 at **Deborah Bell Photographs, 526 West 26th Street, Room 411 (between Tenth & Eleventh Avenues), New York City**. An opening reception will be held on Thursday, April 13 from 6 to 8pm.

One of the most innovative and progressive fashion photographers of the 20th century, Peterson (Swedish-American, 1923-2017) is known for breaking barriers and challenging conventional approaches to fashion photography of the time. His playful, graphically rigorous compositions were widely published in the editorial pages of *Harper's Bazaar*, *Mademoiselle*, *The New York Times*, *Elle*, *Marie-Claire*, and *British Harper's Bazaar*, among many other major periodicals. His work is characterized by bold, graphic compositions, improvisation and play, and special effects he devised, such as photographing with the shutter open while "drawing" on and around his subject with a strobe light. He approached high fashion with irreverence and an unconventional sense of humor while photographing clothes by the most influential designers of the late 20th century, including Pierre Cardin, Comme des Garçons, Fendi, Rudi Gernreich, Halston, Ralph Lauren, Pucci, Sonia Rykiel, and Yves Saint Laurent.

Peterson launched the careers of several famous Black models, including Naomi Sims and Barbara Summers. His photograph of Naomi Sims on the cover of the August 27, 1967 *Fashions of the Times*, the Sunday supplement to *The New York Times*, made fashion history for being the first cover of a major fashion magazine with mixed-race readership to feature an identifiably Black model. And Peterson photographed Twiggy for her first modeling assignment in New York, the pictures appearing in *The New York Times Magazine* of April 16, 1967.

Photographer Arthur Elgort, who assisted Peterson in 1968, told the art historian Martin Harrison, "He was great; improvisational, off-the-cuff." As Harrison explains in his book *Appearances: Fashion Photography Since 1945*, "Gösta Peterson preferred to come to a fashion sitting without any preconceptions...and while many successful young fashion photographers today appear to be indebted to the casual 'snapshot' element of his work, few apply it with his integrity."

With few exceptions, Peterson insisted on shooting real people with quirks and personality in place of trained fashion models, rejecting assignments from editors at *Vogue* who would not grant him that freedom. Peterson admitted to Harrison, "I was famous -- or notorious -- for finding girls who didn't look like fashion models." As he explained in a 1983 interview, "There's nothing worse than an

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over-trained model who's lost all sense of her body's personality."

Peterson thrived in the atmosphere of freedom prevalent in the 1960s and 1970s, when photographers and art directors were far more experimental. Roger Schoening, Art Director for *Mademoiselle* from 1961-1978, and for *Vogue* from 1979-1988, remarked, "I never send Gus out on a job that I don't wonder what he's going to come back with. Is he going to give me fashion pictures or a W.P.A. portfolio?...I can never get a simple fashion picture from him. It always looks like it belongs in an art gallery. There's something – just little details, gestures, looks -- that creep in and divert you from the clothes." Bea Feitler, the former Art Director for *Harper's Bazaar*, *Ms.*, and *Rolling Stone* declared in the 1960s, "The most interesting fashion pages now – the ones that say the most about our times – are Gösta Peterson's for *Mademoiselle*."

Peterson frequently partnered with his wife, the legendary Patricia Peterson, fashion editor of *The New York Times* (1957-1977) and Vice President of the exclusive department store Henri Bendel (1977-1989). Their famous ads for Bendel's appeared in *The New York Times* almost every Sunday from 1978 to 1986, and set new standards for creativity and innovation in the advertising industry.

Gösta Peterson's influence extended to his contemporaries in the field, including Diane Arbus, Duane Michals (who considered him "underrated"), and Bob Richardson; the jazz artist Charles Mingus; and the fashion and beauty entrepreneur and model Linda Rodin. Deborah Turbeville often credited Peterson as a mentor and for influencing her decision to become a photographer.

Peterson began his career as a fashion illustrator in Sweden after his education in art and graphic design at the renowned Anders Beckman Skola in Stockholm, where he majored in illustration and advertising graphics. After military service from 1943-44, he accepted a full-time position with the Gumaelius Advertising Bureau, the third-largest advertising agency in Stockholm. In March 1948, at the age of 24, Peterson moved to New York "with poor English," by his own account, "but enough to find every jazz club in town." He secured illustration assignments right away, but found himself becoming restless "hanging over a drafting table" all day and began to photograph on the streets of New York City with a Rolleiflex he had received as a going-away gift from his colleagues at Gumealius. Before long, he was accepting freelance work from magazines.

Peterson's photographs are held in museum collections worldwide, including the Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Victoria & Albert Museum, London; Worcester Art Museum, Worcester, MA; and private collections such as The James Moores Collection, Liverpool, England (formerly Pulsynetic, London).

Gallery hours for the exhibition are Thursday through Saturday, 11-5. For further information please contact the gallery by phone at 212-249-9400, or by email at info@deborahbellphotographs.com. High-resolution scans are available to the press.