

David Bailey

"Look Again"

BY SELINA DUFNER

David Bailey is one of the most renowned photographers of the world and, quite frankly, the fashion world wouldn't be the same without his work. The impact he had is undeniable. When I heard that he had written his autobiography "Look again", published on October 29th, it immediately went to the top of my birthday wish list. He was present throughout many different eras of fashion and captured supermodels like Donyale Luna and Naomi Campbell. There was no doubt that he has the most exciting stories to tell, so I was eager to get my hands on a copy of his book. Now, having read it, I can certainly say that it did meet my expectations.

"David hasn't got much of a filter. He says it as it is. And he's always been the same. This is him", says Danny O'Connor, an old friend of Bailey's. The same seems to apply to his photographs and that is what makes them so special. That "David hasn't got much of a filter" is refreshing as we are living in times where filters are everywhere. When talking about his first muse Jean Shrimpton, he stated: "I was photographing women the way I saw them on the streets. People could identify with Jean because I didn't make her look like a stuffed shop mannequin. Suddenly she was someone you could touch, or maybe even talk into bed." While Street Fashion Photography is an ongoing trend nowadays, it was almost an untouched territory back in the Sixties when Bailey casually took pictures of Shrimpton all over the streets of New York.

He had a unique way of viewing people and a personal approach of taking pictures: "I never really had a 'style'. The pictures I take are simple and direct and about the person I'm photographing. I spend more time talking to the person than I do taking pictures. The intensity comes from concentrating on them, nothing else. There's nothing else in the picture. They become the main thing; you impose your personality on them, I suppose. For me it's common sense, but other people ask, 'How do you do it?' You sort of advance on somebody and get closer and closer until they fill the frame. You know when you've got the picture. [...] I fall in love with people when I photograph them for that fifteen minutes or half-hour; they become the whole centre of the universe." It is obvious that he loved to engage with the person in front of his camera, which explains his preference of always working with the same models instead of trying out new ones. The simplicity and beauty of Bailey's pictures also appear to have had quite an effect on Manolo

Blahnik: "[...] And Bailey had taken pictures of - I won't say the ordinary girl - the beautiful street girl, and he was really lucky to have those clothes to go with it, and it was the first time I'd seen women treated like that - modern. You really knew what you were seeing. I said, 'Finally this is happening.' It was a directness. Beautiful in a very simple Mary Quant dress or whatever it is - one of those dresses of that time - [...]"

"Look again" is the perfect title for David Bailey's autobiography as it puts the magnetising aura of his photographs into words. You look at one of his pictures and can't help but look again and again because there is always a new detail to discover. At least that's how I feel. Bailey revealed in an interview that he thinks people don't look at pictures anymore. A hard copy is better sometimes to really appreciate the image and remember the moment, according to him. I have to admit there is some truth in it. It is much more fun to look at an old photo album than to scroll through the Gallery on your Smartphone, which is why I am very glad that I also received a Polaroid camera for my birthday.



Flower Lady
Illustrated by Cathy Hogan