

For the inaugural exhibition in the new building of the Nicola Erni Collection, photographs by Peter Lindbergh, Paolo Roversi and Peter Knapp are displayed together. Entering the building, however, one is confronted with Lindbergh’s monumental black-and-white images across the facing gallery wall, the eye inevitably falling on the prominently placed and striking portrait of Tina Turner. It is one of thirteen uniquely sized Lindbergh prints in the collection, and Nicola Erni and Peter Lindbergh composed the selection and chose the sizes of most of the photographs together.

Nicola Erni has always treasured the contact, collaboration and subsequent relationship with all three of the fashion photographers she lovingly calls her ‘beloved three P’s’, after their first names. But this nickname is not the only thing they have in common – all three dedicated their talent and passion to the field of fashion photography and – though from Germany, Italy and Switzerland respectively, chose Paris as the place to live and work. Lindbergh and Roversi forged a friendship from early on, and it was on Knapp’s invitation that Roversi arrived in Paris in 1972. In 2018, after years-long friendships with each of them, Nicola Erni brought these three legendary photographers back together again so that they could share their experience and dedication once more before Lindbergh sadly passed away in 2019.

What sets Peter Lindbergh’s fashion photography apart from his predecessors is that in his work fashion plays a secondary role. With his candid approach he forged a style in seeming opposition to the perfectly styled fashion world. His images resemble informal portraits – despite their commercial purpose. For him, fashion photography does not have to depict fashion, as fashion photography is much bigger than fashion itself¹ – it is a component of contemporary culture and the campaigns he shot changed the course of fashion photography. Women are invariably the main subject of his work. His vision of women is contemporary yet timeless. It is an approach to fashion photography that was by no means common, particularly at the beginning of his career.

Born on 23 November 1944 in Lissa, Poland, as Peter Brodbeck, Lindbergh grew up near Duisburg and was trained as a window dresser, which he also briefly practised as a profession in Berlin. In 1962, he attended the Hochschule für Bildende Kunst in Berlin, where he frequented the evening drawing classes, and later he studied design at the Werkkunstschule in Krefeld.² In 1969, he had his first exhibition, of his fine art, at the Galerie Denise René-Hans Mayer. Although until then he had trained as a painter, he decided to switch to photography. Lindbergh began working as an assistant to the German photographer Hans Lux, with whom he discovered an interest in fashion photography.³ In 1978, Lindbergh began publishing his work in *Stern* magazine and soon moved to Paris, where he achieved his international breakthrough.⁴ Lindbergh’s fashion work appeared in *Vogue*, *Harper’s Bazaar*, *Rolling Stone*, *Allure* and *Marie-Claire*. By the time he shot the 1981 catalogue for Japanese designer Rei Kawakubo’s Comme des Garçons label, he was given carte blanche for his assignments.⁵ He jump-started the careers of many leading models of the 1990s and 2000s. Lindbergh preferred to work with tall, slim – but athletic – and rather androgynous women,⁶ who typically direct their gaze at the viewer but hardly smile.

Lindbergh once attributed his work’s success to the fact that he shot primarily analogue, which gave him much more time to build real relationships without the pressure of digital monitors. ‘When you use a normal camera, you shoot and you’re alone with your subject and it creates intimacy. It doesn’t finish in two minutes, because you don’t know if it’s great, so you have to do even more. Then you have a lot of pictures. When “it’s a bit out of focus” it’s nicer.’⁷ To him, photographs in black and white were often more authentic than in colour, and portraits in particular appear stronger due to the reduction, though he did recognise the paradox that black and white was somehow closer to reality.⁸

In the mid-1980s, Lindbergh told Alexander Liberman, the legendary editorial director of Condé Nast Publishing, that he did not agree with the images of overly posed women featured in *Vogue*. So Lindbergh visited the beach in Santa Monica with the models Linda Evangelista, Karen Alexander, Christy Turlington, Estelle Lefébure, Tatjana Patitz and Rachel Williams. The photographs of the models, for which they wore men’s white button-down shirts, served as a contrast to the otherwise formal composition in fashion photography and its strict set of rules, which called for highly made-up models.⁹ Instead, Lindbergh showed the women scuffling and giggling together, in a moment of joy and authenticity that transcended cosmetics, retouching and extravagant fashion. With this photography, Lindbergh crafted an image of the self-confident, natural, strong woman. The pictures were initially rejected by Liberman and Grace Mirabella, then editor of American *Vogue*. Shortly thereafter, Anna Wintour arrived at the magazine as the new editor-in-chief, and when she discovered the photos in a drawer in the art department, she called Lindbergh and asked him to photograph her first cover for American *Vogue* in November 1988. Lindbergh’s January 1990 cover for

British *Vogue* featuring a black-and-white image of five models marked the creation of the famous ‘Supermodels’: Linda, Naomi, Cindy, Tatjana and Christy. Afterwards, just mentioning their first names was enough. And countless women identified with the natural look eschewing exaggerated make-up in Lindbergh’s photos. George Michael saw the cover and cast all of them for his ‘Freedom! 90’ music video, in which the models lip-synced the song. The A-list supermodels grew ever-more influential and famous. Lindbergh even played a certain role in the career of the model Linda Evangelista, who already stood out for her beauty: he advised her to cut her hair short, which she did, propelling her with the uniquely recognisable androgynous look to even greater success.

Lindbergh’s filmic approach to fashion stories was unique, and his way of shooting that of a director on set. He was also one of the first photographers to integrate narrative elements into fashion spreads, and thus the models often play the role of dancers, acrobats or actresses.¹⁰ With the 1990 photoshoot with Helena Christensen and Debbie Lee Carrington, which took place in El Mirage, California, Lindbergh broke new ground by telling a story based on science fiction within a fashion editorial. Later on, his inspiration would come from varied sources, such as the French sculptor Aristide Maillol, the Weimar Republic, the art of New Objectivity, Expressionist dance, and cinema, including films by his close friend Wim Wenders. The photograph featuring Amber Valletta with white angel’s wings in an urban setting, shot for *Harper’s Bazaar* in 1993, was inspired by Wender’s 1987 film *Wings of Desire*.¹¹ Lindbergh also acknowledged the influence of American documentary photography of the 1930s and 1940s, including by such luminaries as Dorothea Lange and Walker Evans.¹²

In other images, Lindbergh shoots at locations evoking late capitalist society – such as industrial factories or warehouses. For these, he was inspired by German film director Fritz Lang’s 1927 classic *Metropolis*.¹³ Dark, brooding scenes within industrial plants feature models operating the heavy machinery with sovereign composure. Symbols of comfort, luxury or even glamour seem to have held little interest for him, allowing Peter Lindbergh to create an exciting contrast between luxurious fashion and the chosen surroundings.

The models acted freely in front of his lens. The photographer took on the role of director, coordinating his subjects’ improvisation. His camera caught mere glances that would at times lose focus. In an interview, he described his way of photographing as follows: ‘I often feel as though the photos are taking themselves. This may sound a bit vague, but there are situations in which you have to summon up the courage to submit to the events and resist any form of control. It is at such a moment that the magical powers appear, when you hand over the control to the magic.’ He liked to shoot countless pictures, almost carelessly: ‘A lot falls into place almost by itself... Sometimes you have to stop looking into the camera for two minutes so as to let go of what you actually had in mind.’¹⁴ And Lindbergh himself would be the first to review them afterwards, mindfully choosing the right images, without letting anyone do a preselection.¹⁵

Ultimately, it is impossible to capture the incredible impact that Lindbergh’s work had on the fashion world of the late 1980s and how influential his photography is on later generations of photographers.

Fabiola Son

In loving memory of Peter – Nicola

1	Peter Lindbergh, in conversation with Felix Krämer, in: F. Krämer (ed.), <i>Peter Lindbergh: Untold Stories</i> (exhib. cat., Kunstpalast Düsseldorf et al.), Cologne 2020, p. 61.	8	Ibid., p. 63.
2	Klaus Honnef, <i>Peter Lindbergh: On Street</i> (exhib. cat., C/O Berlin), Munich 2010, p. 207.	9	Honnef, <i>On Street</i> , p. 11.
3	Martin Harrison, <i>Peter Lindbergh: Images of Women</i> , Munich 2013, p. 13.	10	Ibid.
4	Honnef, <i>Lindbergh: On Street</i> , p. 207.	11	Ibid., p. 15.
5	Lindbergh, in conversation with Krämer, p. 61.	12	Lindbergh, in conversation with Krämer, p. 63.
6	Ibid., p. 11.	13	Harrison, <i>Images of Women</i> , p. 14.
7	Peter Lindbergh, cited in Osman Ahmed, ‘Peter Lindbergh and the Birth of the Supermodel’, <i>Vogue</i> UK, 7 September 2019, www.vogue.co.uk/arts-and-life-style/article/peter-lindbergh-and-the-birth-of-the-supermodel , accessed 9 June 2021.	14	Lindbergh, in conversation with Krämer, p. 63.
		15	Ibid., p. 64.



Peter Lindbergh

Tina Turner, Los Angeles, 1996
Digital print
240 × 160 cm



Peter Lindbergh

*Estelle Lefébure, Karen Alexander, Rachel Williams,
Linda Evangelista, Tatjana Patitz, Christy Turlington,
Santa Monica, 1988*
Digital print
160 × 240 cm



Peter Lindbergh

*Naomi Campbell, Linda Evangelista, Tatjana Patitz,
Christy Turlington, Cindy Crawford, New York, 1989*
Digital print
240 × 160 cm



Peter Lindbergh

Helena Christensen, Debbie Lee Carrington,
Vogue Italia, El Mirage, California, 1990
Gelatin silver print
148.5 × 222 cm



Peter Lindbergh

Amber Valletta, New York, 1993
Digital print
240 × 160 cm each



Peter Lindbergh

*Michaela Bercu, Linda Evangelista,
Kirsten Owen, Nancy, France, 1988*
Digital print
160 × 240 cm

Lynne Koester, Paris, 1984
Gelatin silver print
120 × 180 cm