

ESTHER HAASE HAUTE COUTURE IN MOTION

BIRGIT FILZMAIER

Adventure, travel, the circus, animals, and costumes ... images that have inspired the fantasy of the German photographer Esther Haase since her early childhood. A dream world that has become the stage for her fashion photographs. A stage where models move, in the truest sense of the word: dances, turns and rotations, gestures and glances—a choreography that is characteristic of Haase's work.

Various lifelines merged into Haase's passion for fashion photography: her parents' home, where Haase was surrounded by art and photography and where she could give free rein to her fantasies; her father Fritz Haase, who was a professor for photography and communication at the Hochschule für Künste Bremen and who ran a renowned advertising agency together with his wife, Sybille; Haase's passion for movement, which in her early years led to a professional ice-skating career and later to classical dance studies; her best friend, whose father was a fashion designer; her father's fashion photography students, for whom Haase always posed as a model; and her early encounters with famous photographers, who were commissioned by her father for advertising campaigns, including Helmut Newton and Bruce Weber.

No wonder Haase decorated her walls as a teenager with pages from Italian *Vogue*. And no wonder that none other than Helmut Newton became instrumental in defining her destiny. On a trip to Monaco with her father and his students,

it was Haase who called up Helmut Newton asking for access to the legendary Monte Carlo Beach Club. This unique location inspired Haase spontaneously to learn more about how a camera works, and then she turned the tables: it was no longer her modeling for her father's students, in fact, this time the students posed for Haase. And with this portfolio of photographs taken at the famous Monte Carlo Beach Club Haase successfully applied at the Hochschule für Künste Bremen.

Her photographic breakthrough came in 1998 with a story about Cuba, which was commissioned by the German magazine *Stern*. It turned out to be a remarkable fashion editorial with "pictures full of eroticism, passion, love, and melancholy" and with the "magic of the fleeting moment."¹ Since then, Esther Haase has been considered one of the most prominent German fashion photographers of our day.

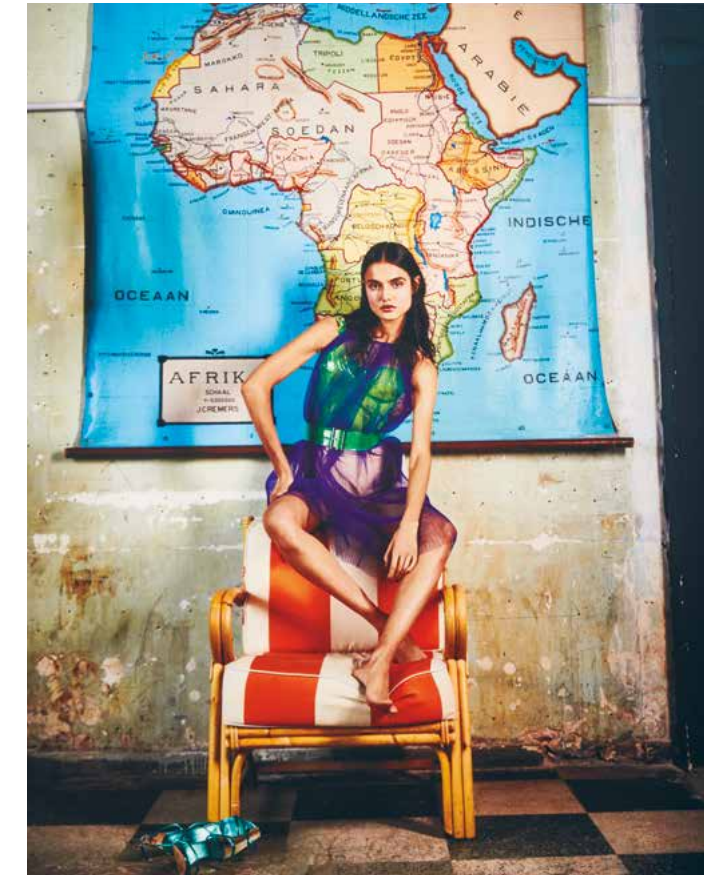
For two decades, Haase has frequently covered Parisian haute couture for the French magazine *Madame Figaro*. In her editorial for the February 2018 issue,² Haase turned haute couture into *haute fantaisie*: A daylight studio in Paris and an old Cuban bar formed the stage for her photographs with the Spanish model Blanca Padilla. Haase herself describes her fashion shootings as "staged reportages," that are cinematographically arranged and illuminated. Like in a film, she sets up and tells a story, and accordingly the model slips into a role

and fills the haute couture robes with vibrant life—comparable to a ballet performance in which certain specifications have to be fulfilled with the performance on stage, however, being driven by emotion and movement. The stage, the setup, the light, and the composition versus spontaneity, expression, and movement—this is where the dancer in Esther Haase shimmers through, who always plays music on set. "Music sets you free," says Haase. "Music synchronizes the photographer and the model to the same rhythm and beat." Haase also learned the importance of discipline through her dancing career, and that is what she needs on a set like the one for the *Madame Figaro* shooting: the haute couture robes are only provided by the couturiers for a few hours; that means logistics, precise timing, coordination, good preparation, and a synchronous orchestration of up to twenty people on set—while, at the same time, concentrating, keeping calm, connecting with the model, creating the right atmosphere, and taking the perfect picture, without having a second chance later on because the couture gown has already been picked up again and the next one delivered.

In Haase's work preparation is as much part of the process of taking a fashion photograph as the shooting itself. This preparation process includes the props, which in the case of the *Madame Figaro* shooting, Haase found after hours of browsing through the famous Parisian *Maison Gaetan Lanzani*—a place

Destination Unknown (Schiaparelli Haute Couture)
Image: 120 x 94 cm

Blanca (Maison Margiela Artisanal designed by John Galliano)
Image: 120 x 94 cm



like a treasure chest full of curiosities. Among them Haase discovered a pink flamingo, whose long legs remind her of the elegance of haute couture. She also found a brown leather suitcase covered with old hotel labels, a reminiscence of the glamor of traveling to exotic places, like Cuba, in the past. However, not only props but also color plays a major role for Haase in setting the stage: pastel shades, bright-colored painted backdrops, checkerboard patterned floors, and green velvet cushions. Each picture had to exist in Haase's imagination before the haute

couture gowns by Givenchy, Chanel, Schiaparelli, Dior, Valentino, Victor & Rolf, and Elie Saab were delivered and the fashion shooting began. Color, texture, structure, different materials, and precisely selected props—with these compositional elements Haase prepares her presentations of haute couture, wrapped in a nuanced colorfulness that is so characteristic of her work.

Whether haute couture in Paris or recently photographed fashion editorials in Mongolia and China, Haase's work always bears its own signature,

the typical stylistic devices of which are blurred movement, delicate shades of color, staged settings, and precise compositions. Despite this, Esther Haase's fashion photographs have a spontaneous expression, direct, fresh, full of verve, sometimes sexy, and sometimes even erotic. Colorful. In motion.

Summarized in one sentence, her mentor, the doyen of German fashion photography F.C. Gundlach, once wrote: "What gives the impression of being a spontaneous snapshot is the result of hard work and boundless energy."³



Peek a Boo (Giorgio Armani Privé)
Image: 120 x 93 cm

Blanca and her Pink Flamingo (Chanel Haute Couture)
Image: 120 x 93.5 cm

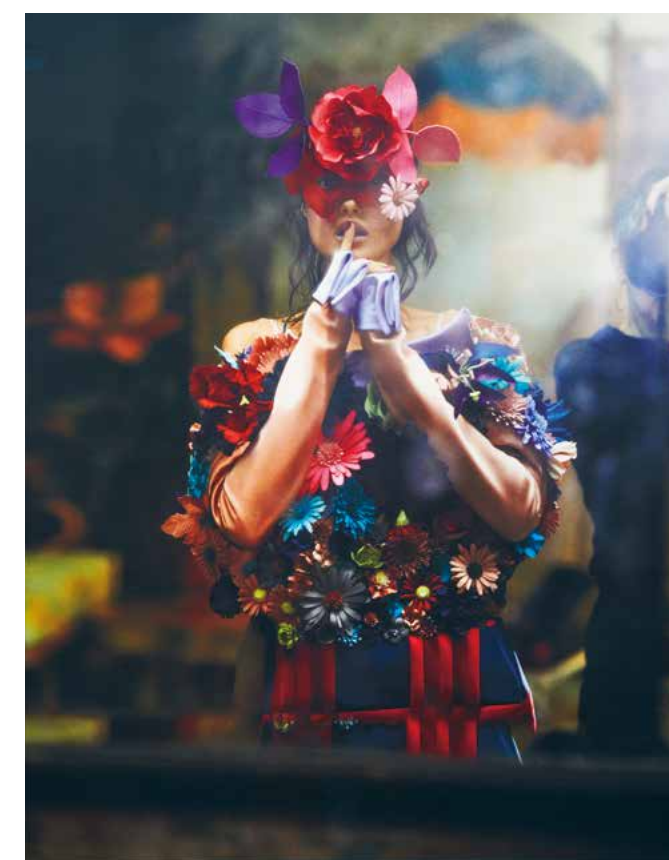


CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT)
Dancing Girl (GivENCHY Haute Couture)
Image: 120 x 93.5 cm

Portrait (GivENCHY Haute Couture)
Image: 120 x 93.5 cm

Glamorous Walk (Valentino Haute Couture)
Image: 93.5 x 147 cm





(CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT)
Blanca in the Studio (A.F. Vandevorst)
Image: 120 x 93.5 cm

Chessmate (Alexandre Vauthier Haute Couture)
Image: 120 x 93.5 cm

Thinking of Cuba (Giambattista Valli Haute Couture)
Image: 93.5 x 147 cm

The Red Dress (Elie Saab Haute Couture)
Image: 120 x 93.5 cm

The Mirror (Viktor & Rolf Haute Couture)
Image: 120.5 x 93.5 cm