



SARAH MOON

BEYOND
TIME AND
SPACE



The Clock, France, 1999
Toned silver gelatin print

After studying art from 1960 to 1966, Sarah Moon, born Marielle Warin in France in 1941, worked as a model for various haute couture houses and fashion companies in Paris and London. Under the pseudonym Marielle Hadengue, she began photographing her colleagues during this period and attracted particular attention for her advertising images shot for Biba, a fashion house founded by the British fashion designer Barbara Hulaniki in Swinging London in the 1960s.

Moon left the modeling business entirely after 1968 and launched her forty-plus year career as a freelance photographer for editorial pieces and advertising. Her clients included magazines such as *Marie Claire*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *Nova*, *Vogue*, *Elle*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Magazin*, and *Stern*. Fashion campaigns for Cacharel, Dior, and Comme des Garçons, Yohji Yamamoto and Issey Miyake followed. In 1972, Sarah Moon was the first woman to shoot photos for the Pirelli calendar. Moon's photography also enchanted audiences beyond the fashion world with landscapes and cities, animals, and still-life shots.

In the 1980s, she began to conquer the medium of film as well. She shot over 150 commercials for cosmetics companies including l'Oréal, Cacharel, and Revlon, and she also made pop videos and numerous feature films and documentaries such as *Mississippi One* and *Henri Cartier-Bresson. Point d'Interrogation*. Her work was displayed in major exhibitions on fashion photography, and some of her own publications became sought-after collectors' items.¹

Since the 1970s, Sarah Moon has influenced a new imagery: idiosyncratic and fantastically enraptured, appearing both magical and romantically melancholic at the same time. Sarah Moon's fashion photographs have nothing to do with the fashion photographs stored in our collective memory, that is to say, as mirror images of glamor and a shimmering world of commodities or as records in a documentary snapshot aesthetic. Rather, they appear to be beyond time and space.

The Nicola Erni Collection is displaying 13 black-and-white and color photographs taken in the period between 1996 and 2007 and which are characteristic of Sarah Moon's work: blurry, coarse-grained, black-and-white, and sepia-toned fashion photographs, and seductive, muted, but sometimes also glowing, colored fashion images with sensuously velvety surfaces whose rich layers of pigments catch the eye and lure the viewer into a world of dreams, legends, and fairy tales. In so doing, her pictures have a still and abstract effect. The fashion writer Barbara Vinken states that they draw us out of the timelessness of the simple present, of the absolute moment, into a dense world of images in the depths of time.²

In images such as *Fashion 01* (Issey Miyake), 1996 and *Fashion 05* (Gaultier), 1998 the shapes of the clothes appear soft and transient, yet almost abstract and minimalistic. Here the clothes are transposed into picturesque tableaux, and, similar to those depicted by Paul Cézanne, volume is dissolved into surface. The different planes of the image appear to fuse. There is not a depth of image but rather the two-dimensionality of the image is suggested. And the colors of the foreground and background play within one another—and the viewer spontaneously begins to question whether the shooting situation was like that in reality.

Sarah Moon loves the architectural shapes of the clothes created by Japanese fashion designers and their silhouettes that draw attention away from the contours of the body and instead mask the body with voluminous folds (*Adriana* (Junya Watanabe), 2000). As a type of homage to the respective fashion designer, the models' body silhouette becomes indistinct. In contrast to the work of her colleagues, such as Helmut Newton and Guy Bourdin, women in sexy and provocative poses do not dominate Sarah Moon's images. Hers are rather ethereal, fragile, and graceful beings who appear to

1 Exhibitions such as *FashionPhotography*, Amsterdam 1980; *Shots of Style*, London 1985; *Appearances*, London 1992; books include *Vrais semblants*, Paris 1993; *Sarah Moon 1, 2, 3, 4, 5*, London 2008.

2 Barbara Vinken, "Jetzt war gestern. Die Mode in den Fotografien von Sarah Moon," in: *Sarah Moon. Now and Then*, exh. cat., Haus der Photographie, Deichtorhallen Hamburg, Heidelberg/Berlin 2015, p. 103.

be beyond their time. She succeeds in creating such intimate images primarily because she is shy herself and acts as a feminine accomplice. In most cases, the faces of the models, if they are not cropped and are visible, are bright and indistinct, suggesting to the viewer an atmosphere of loneliness, melancholy, and contemplation. (*Fashion 10 for New York Times*, 1998).

Sarah Moon often depicts her models from the back, distancing them from the viewer as if it were not a question of individuality but more one of establishing an emotional aura and intensity, and a tacit invitation to viewers to imagine a story for themselves. The worldly does not appear to exist in her photographs; our high-speed present finds no place in Sarah Moon's enraptured visual world. The graceful beings appear to be disconnected from their time.

The visual worlds of Sarah Moon lack any sign of glamor in the poses, styling or the physical prints. When Sarah Moon works in black-and-white, then she does so with polaroid material whose characteristic streaky border is clearly visible on the prints. She does not retouch the images, removing marks like scratches or imperfections on the negative. Rather, she prefers to leave these accidental elements where they are. Sometimes, the photographs look sombre with a melancholic undertone. By contrast, in the color photographs, she uses color as a means of alienation and exaggeration. The luminosity of color, according to Sarah Moon, creates "distance, humour and abstraction"³ as well as vitality.

Some of her images look like gleaming silvery Daguerre originals from the early years of photographic history, others like photographs from the 1920s or 1930s. The photograph, *The Clock*, 1999 is an example of the formal relationship with the era of the Roaring Twenties: the type of woman with short hair, her clothes loosely flattering the contours of her body. When looking at this image, it is easy to see that Sarah Moon was inspired by the films of Fritz Lang or Russian directors of the period.

As poetic and romantic as her works appear, they are certainly on the track of a particular reality: a transient moment, the boundary between being and passing away, the irretrievable instant when in a gesture or silhouette, in a special incidence of light, an emotional aura and intensity appear. She invites us to experience a few soulful moments with her. And so it comes as no surprise that Sarah Moon gives herself plenty of time for her shoots and works in slow motion, waiting for the decisive moment that her friend and colleague Henri Cartier-Bresson deemed and extolled as vital for taking a good photograph.

When we visited Sarah Moon in November 2014 in her 19th-century villa, profusely overgrown with ivy, located in a peaceful courtyard garden residential complex, set back from a noisy boulevard in the former artists' quarter of Montparnasse, the house seemed to mirror her imagery—it was a dreamy place in the middle of busy Paris, melancholy and disconnected from time. The privilege of being able to experience the artist so intimately and personally gave us the opportunity to immerse ourselves more deeply in her world. The many impressions we took away are a gift for which we are deeply grateful to the artist.⁴

Ira Stehmann

³ Text by Ingo Taubhorn, "Eine Annäherung an das Werk von Sarah Moon," *ibid.*, p. 15.

⁴ I would like to extend my gratitude to the Michael Hoppen Gallery for making this visit possible.



Pour Alaïa, France, 2009
Toned silver gelatin print



No birds allowed, France, 2000
Toned silver gelatin print



Garden Party, France, 1998
Toned silver gelatin print



Pour Ten Magazine, France, 2007
Pigment print



La robe à pois, France, 1996
Pigment print



Fashion 04 (Yohji Yamamoto), France, 1996
Pigment print



Fashion 05 (Gaultier), France, 1998
Pigment print



Fashion 10, for New York Times, France, 1998
Pigment print



Fashion 06 (Gaultier), France, 1998
Pigment print

Fashion 01 (Issey Miyake), France, 1996
Pigment print





L'Ange du studio, France, 2001
Pigment print



Adriana (Junya Watanabe), France, 2000
Pigment print