MARIO TESTINO
SMILE!

OSCAR HUMPHRIES

When Mario Testino was growing up in Lima, Peru, he always felt different. He was an outsider at school, precocious and flamboyant; he was bullied, but by the time he graduated from high school he was elected class president—a testament to his ambition and his unique ability to charm and draw people to him. Much later, Alexandra Shulman, editor of British *Vogue* from 1992–2017, would sum up this ability to put people at ease: "The pleasure of being in his company gains him access where many others fail. As a portrait photographer Mario ensures that his subjects first relax, drawing away their anxieties as he distracts them with jokes and anecdotes, mimicry and admiration."[1] It was Renaissance art, seen in books and magazines, that first inspired the young Testino to consider a creative life, and ultimately to leave Peru. Later he would look at Old Master paintings in galleries around the world and look at how they composed groups or used light and shadow and bring this into his photography. Lima in the early '70s was a conservative and provincial place and it was inevitable that the young man, who would go on to become one of the most famous and successful photographers of his generation, would have to leave.

Arriving in London in the late '70s, with help from his family, Mario Testino found himself in a fashion capital at the height of the "punk" era. He enrolled in photography school and by 1978 was trying to make it in a city where all doors seemed closed to him and when, by his own admission, he had yet to find his own visual language or define his own original style. Much of this early work is lost, as the small publications he contributed to no longer exist. But the early work we have records of shot in the early '80s for *Per Lui* and *The Face* is rather static and rigid. "It was an art director who pointed this out to me in the 1980s when I was starting and things were not going so well. He said, 'You know what Helmut Newton's woman looks like, you know who Bruce Weber's boy and girl are. You on the other hand have lots of ideas but you don't know who your woman is.'"[2] It was about a decade later that Testino would find his own totally identifiable boy and girl—creating, with them, some of the most recognizable images of the 1990s and 2000s, many of which are included in this exhibition. By the end of the '80s Testino was beginning to shoot for *GQ* and other more mainstream titles, gaining traction and beginning to see his relentless hard work and dedication, a hallmark of his career, begin to pay off. "I would be up early every day calling up agents, editors, and stylists on payphones while all my friends were still asleep from the party we went to the night before."

By the early '90s he'd found his stride. Patrick Kinmonth, a long-time Testino friend and collaborator said of this transitional period: "Since the beginning of the 1990s, when he finally moved from being a talented newcomer to one of the most influential image makers, we have been exposed daily to his way of seeing. Testino boys and girls have stared at us from magazines, gazed out of books and smoldered down from loft billboards."[3]

"I wanted to make people smile. Both the models I was shooting, the people I was working with on set, and people who saw my photographs. Smiling was totally taboo when I got into the industry. Everything was dark and moody and, for me, boring. I wanted to have some fun. And we did!" It is this sense of fun, sexiness, color, and being at ease that came to define what we think of when we consider Mario Testino's best work. The subject—model, princess, or movie star—depicted at their best. Not the stiff idealized beauty of earlier fashion photography but something more dynamic with movement and color and, yes, smiles. Writing about what makes a great image in 2007 Testino said: "I think when it conveys a certain kind of well-being, of exuberance, sensuality, the enjoyment of a moment, collusion, intelligence, humor, a glimpse of that person as they are in private ... a lot of things at once. Beauty is so related to your state of mind, to your mood at that particular second."[4]

It was Testino's photographs of the late Princess Diana, commissioned by *Vanity Fair* and published twelve weeks before her death in 1997, that catapulted him from successful photographer with a

profile in the fashion world to an artist as famous as many of his subjects. As well as making Testino world famous, these images were the first candid portraits of a British royal. Before, Diana appeared remote and aloof—the untouchable princess in a gilded cage—but these very intimate images changed all that and made her look both relatable and, of course, beautiful. About the shoot day Meredith Etherington-Smith wrote: "Afterwards, she told me the day of the shoot, a day of loud music, laughter, and an informal catwalk performance by the Princess during lunch, was one of the happiest in her life."[5] It was just after the Diana shoot appeared that Mario Testino got his contract, through Anna Wintour, with American *Vogue*, and suddenly (though Testino himself would remind you that it took him twenty years to do it) he was everywhere. The color, the movement, the natural beauty, the sex appeal that he had championed and that is in much of his work, was most defiantly—in this post "heroin chic" era—in vogue. Campaigns for Burberry, Gucci, Dolce & Gabbana, Chanel, and other super brands followed.

Images from these campaigns and from the over 700 shoots (most of them covers) Testino did for *Vogue's* various international titles between 1994 and 2017 can be seen in the exhibition, as can work made for other magazines including *Allure & V Magazine*.

The Nicola Erni Collection houses the most significant holdings of the artist's work in the world. "It is the definitive collection, in all these prints I see my hard work, the work of the stylists and editors who worked with me on them, and also the eye of the collector—who chose these prints, which

Carmen Kass, Allure, Los Angeles, 2009
Image: 180 x 252 cm

All works are chromogenic prints

Nyasha Matonhodze and Edie Campbell, Allure, New York, 2011
Image: 120.5 x 180 cm

Kate Moss, National Portrait Gallery, London, 2002
Image: 180 x 225.5 cm

is another kind of editing. It makes me very proud of all of us really," says Testino. Each work in this exhibition is, by Testino's admission, the result of collaboration. Something the artist regards as essential. In *Gucci, Los Angeles,* 2002 we see the ideas of both Testino and Carine Roitfeld at play. "We came up with shaving the 'G' onto the girl together, it was very controversial at the time, people went crazy when the campaign came out." This highly charged sexuality runs through much of the work Testino made with Roitfeld, whether for Gucci or under her tenure as editor of French Vogue. In *Exposed, Kate Moss, British Vogue, London, 2008,* one of Testino's most famous photographs, we see the hand of his great friend Lucina Chambers, formerly the Fashion Director of British *Vogue.* "Lucina and my work was very romantic, classical, but also about adventure. We went all over the world together." Whilst Mario's style is all his own—his sense of color, of composition, his gift for groups or single portraits, it is also true that he got the best out of whichever editor he was working with, and they got the best out of him. "It comes down to chemistry," he says. Mario Testino's inspirations and influences are many, though his work is almost never nostalgic. He was always looking for the next stylist to work with or the next big model. He launched the careers of Gisele Bündchen, Edie Campbell, and many others. He has always focused on the now, or

the next, and to push things forward rather than looking back and that is evident in his work. When he came to London it was Cecil Beaton whose work he first became inspired by, indeed the first photograph he bought was a Beaton. Newton, Avedon, and Penn are all photographers who he greatly admires, and whose work he owns. Contemporary art became an obsession of Testino's in the 1990s when he first had the means to collect it in a serious way. When making commercial exhibitions he favored contemporary art venues showing at Timothy Taylor Gallery, Yvonne Lambert, and Phillips, for example, rather than at photography galleries. The size of some of his prints has a direct connection to the work of Struth, Demand, and Gursky—contemporary artists working in the medium of photography—whose monumental works he collected. "I also wanted to make my prints big because most of them I shot for magazines. When you hold a magazine in front of you it takes up most of your field of vision. I did big prints so to get the same impact and effect."

Finally, however, when thinking about Mario Testino's work one must return to his relationship with his subjects. His extraordinary ability to make people happy and relaxed. These works, included in this catalog and the exhibition it celebrates, are a testament to that gift. His friendship with Kate Moss is a profound one, both personally and professionally. The photographs they made together are some of his

very best, and many of the greatest images of Kate were taken by him. "Mario took me to another level. He really is the one who changed the way people thought about me as a model. Before his pictures of me I was just seen as a grungy grunge girl. And he was like 'ooh. I've seen her out! I know she's not just that.' He'd spotted me in a pair of glamorous heels—and he was the first to start taking pictures of me in that way .... I don't think anybody saw me as any kind of sexy sort of model before he did. Then other people started working with me like that. It's uncanny how he can portray a particular model by her walk, like a signature ... and that amazing smile he can turn on at any given moment like a switch."[6] Looking at Testino's work we should be grateful to the man who, by picking up the payphone in London all those years ago, hustling for work, managed to bring color and fun back into fashion photography, and of course, to smile!

Noémie Lenoir, French Vogue, London, 2008
Image: 180 x 140 cm

Daphne Groeneveld and Hailey Clauson, Allure, New York, 2011
Image: 180 x 249 cm

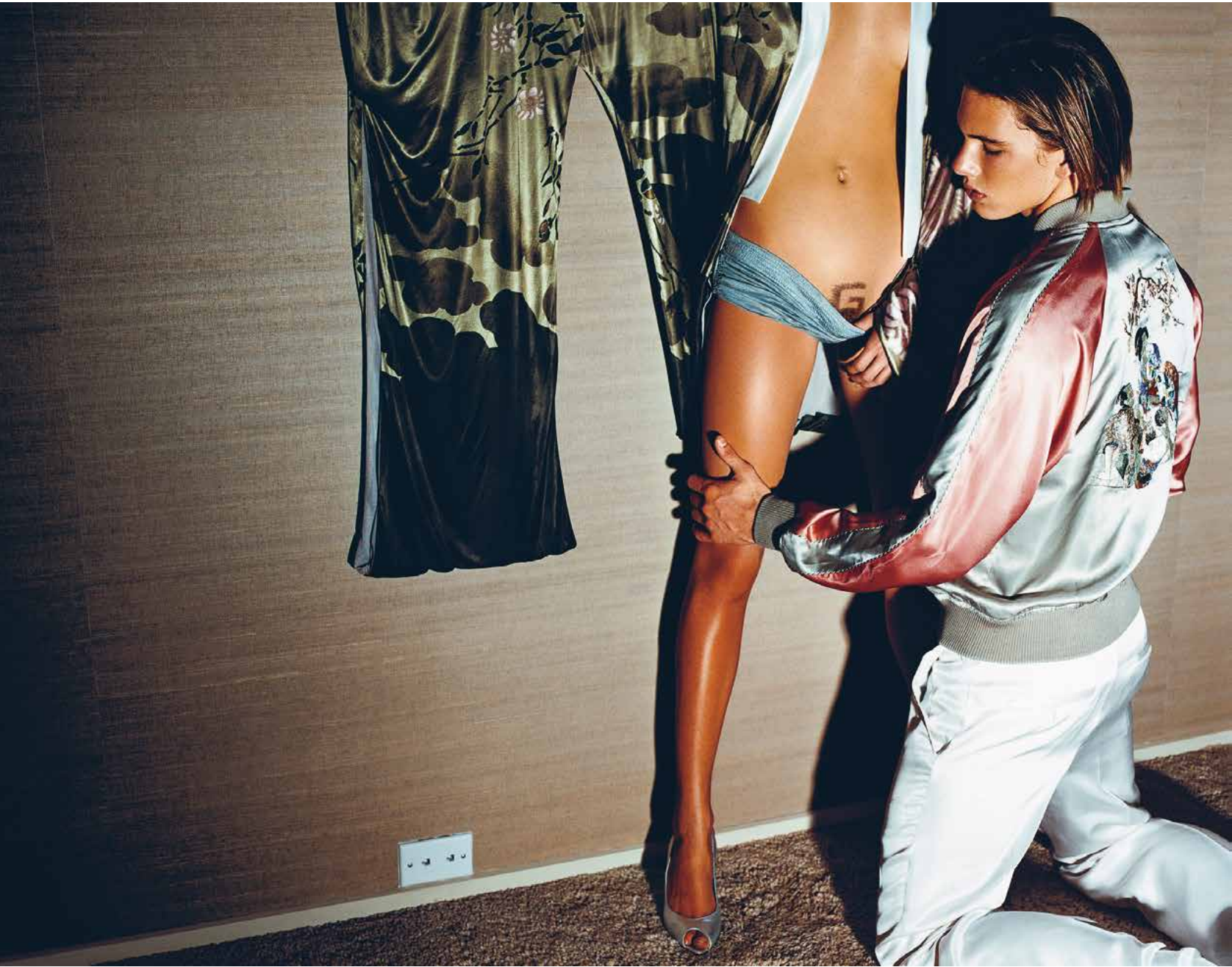*Chanel, Patricia Schmid, French Vogue,* Paris, 2006
Image: 180 x 135.5 cm

Karolina Kurková, American Vogue, Capri, 2003
Image: 180 x 143 cm

Doutzen Kroes, Allure, New York, 2008
Image: 180 x 239.5 cm

Doutzen Kroes, Allure, New York, 2008
Image: 180 x 237 cm

Gucci, Los Angeles, 2002
Image: 180 x 230 cm

Gucci, Carmen Kass and Louise Pedersen, Los Angeles, 2002
Image: 180 x 239.5 cm

Natalia Vodianova, American Vogue, Vienna, 2006
Image: 240 x 180 cm

Sasha Pivovarova, Allure, New York, 2010
Image: 119.5 x 180 cm

Gemma Ward, French Vogue, Los Angeles, 2004
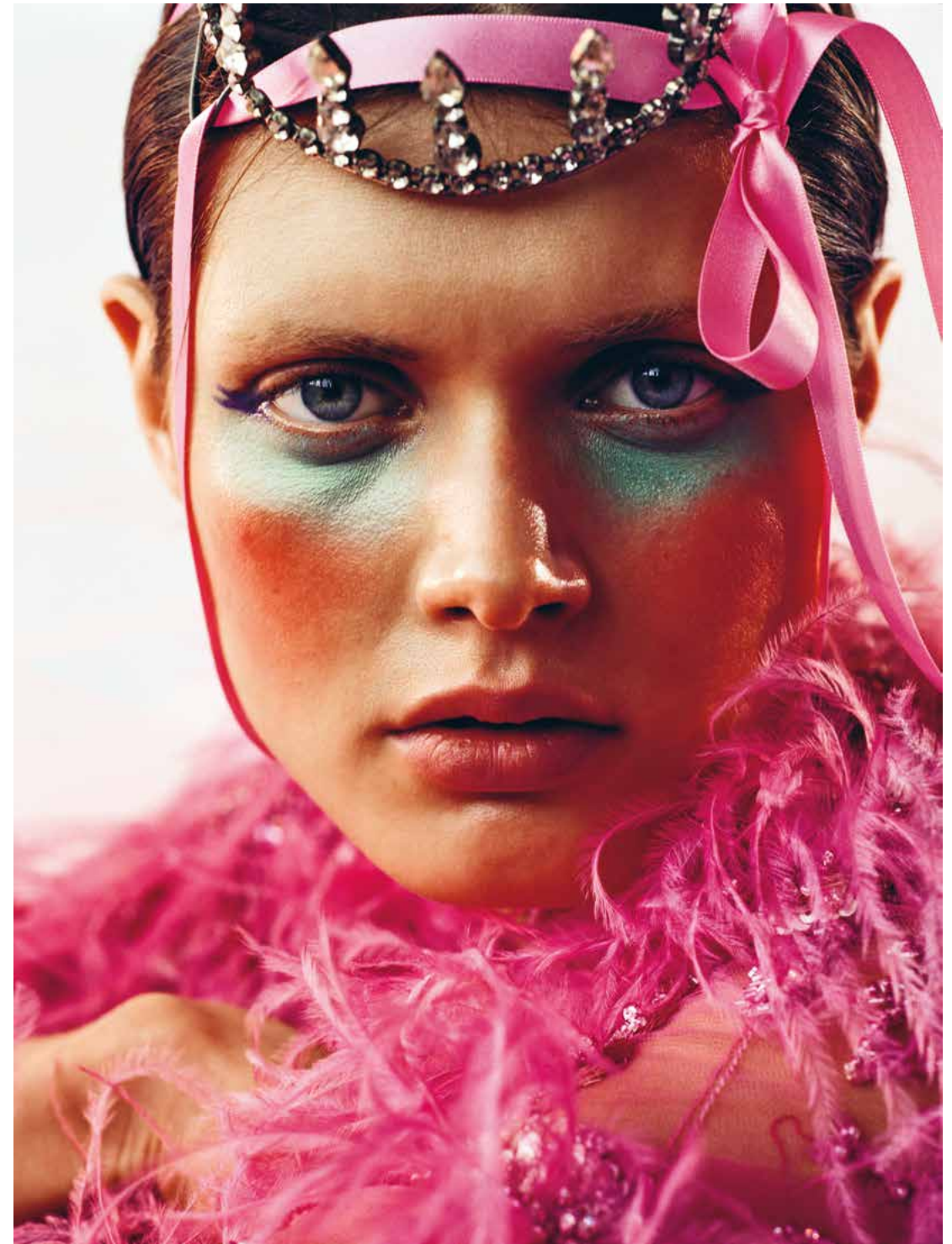Image: 180 x 237 cm

Jaunel McKenzie and Yasmin Warsame, French Vogue, London, 2003
Image: 224 x 180 cm

Élise Crombez, British Vogue, London, 2003
Image: 222 x 180 cm

Malgosia Bela, British Vogue, Paris, 2000
Image: 240.5 x 180 cm

Kate Moss, French Vogue, London, 2003
Image: 180 x 142 cm

Kate Moss, British Vogue, London, 2008
Image: 239.5 x 180 cm

Natalia Vodianova, *British Vogue*, London, 2009
Image: 136.5 x 180 cm

Natalia Vodianova, *British Vogue*, London, 2009
Image: 133 x 180 cm

Emma Stone, *American Vogue*, New York, 2012
Image: 240 x 180 cm

Emma Stone, *American Vogue*, New York, 2012
Image: 240 x 180 cm

Exposed, Kate Moss, British Vogue, London, 2008
Image: 237 x 186 cm

Kendall Jenner, American Vogue, Paris, 2017
Image: 120 x 89.5 cm

Carolyn Murphy, V Magazine, New York, 2011
Image: 120 x 80 cm

Gisele Bündchen, French Vogue, Paris, 2015
Image: 180 x 139 cm

Cara Delevingne, Allure, New York, 2014
Image: 238.5 x 180 cm

Gigi Hadid and Ashton Eaton, American Vogue, Santa Barbara, 2016
Image: 180 x 268.5 cm

Natalia Vodianova, British Vogue, Moscow, 2008
Image: 133 x 180 cm

Carolyn Murphy, French Vogue, Paris, 1998
Image: 120 x 95 cm

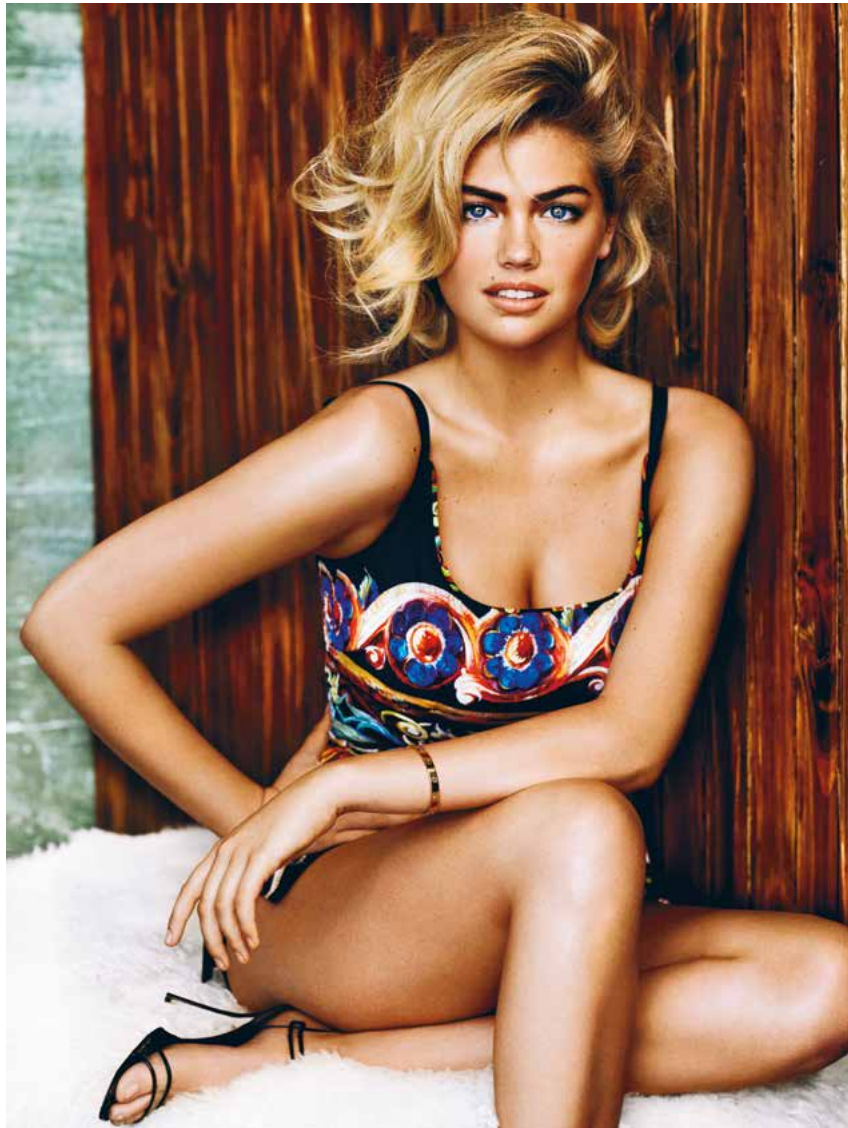*Dior, Linda Evangelista*, Paris, 1997
Image: 120 x 95.5 cm

Kate Moss, *French Vogue*, London, 2004
Image: 180 x 269.5 cm

Gisele Bündchen, *Allure*, Rio de Janeiro, 1998
Image: 120 x 95.5 cm

Bryan Clay and Raquel Zimmermann, *American Vogue*, Los Angeles, 2008
Image: 180 x 252 cm

Jennifer Lopez, V Magazine, Los Angeles, 2011
Image: 180 x 291 cm

Kate Upton, American Vogue, Punta del Este, 2013
Image: 180 x 134.5 cm

Lupita Nyong'o, American Vogue, Kenya, 2016
Image: 180 x 133.5 cm

Helena Christensen, French Vogue, London, 2002
Image: 180 x 138.5 cm

Daria Werbowy, British Vogue, Morocco, 2004
Image: 134.5 x 180 cm

Daria Werbowy, British Vogue, Morocco, 2004
Image: 180 x 135.5 cm

Daria Werbowy, British Vogue, Morocco, 2004
Image: 180 x 141 cm

Daria Werbowy, British Vogue, Cusco, 2007
Image: 180 x 260 cm