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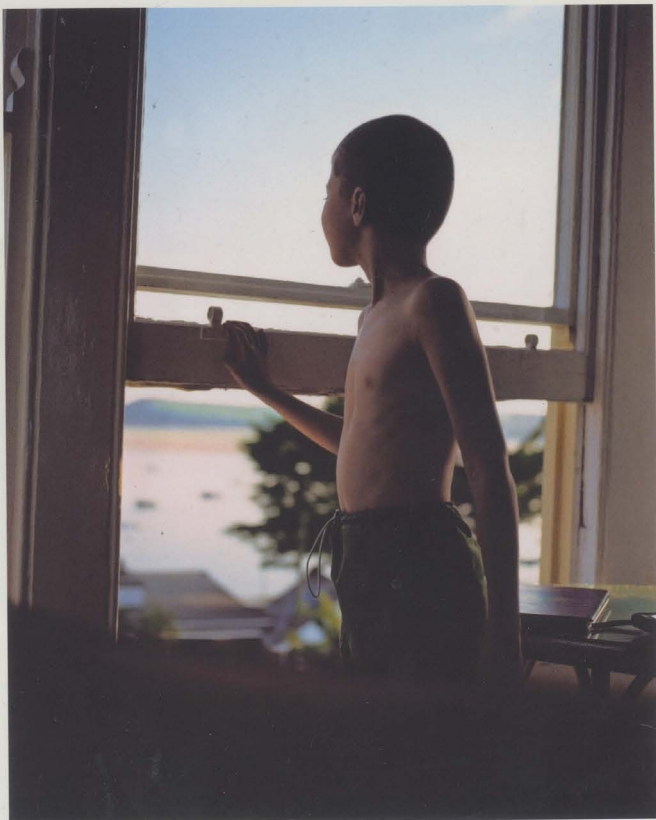
LICENTIATESHIPS AT FOCUS ON IMAGING

Profile: Association of Photographers

Mario Testino: knowing the man

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FEATURE

PHOTOGRAPHER PROFILE

Mario Testino: enchanter to the stars

Mario Testino, the celebrity photographer of the moment, has a large retrospective on at the National Portrait Gallery until 4 June. Nadia Marks worked with him in the 1980s, during the early part of his career, while she was Creative Director at *Company* magazine. They met up recently, and discussed his life and career to date

Mario Testino is famous, both for his fashion work and portraiture. He has photographed some of the world's most beautiful women, and his pictures are always met with approval by his models. His photographs of Diana, Princess of Wales, for *Vanity Fair*, are like no others. He captured in her the woman, not the Royal; by showing her relaxed, laughing and sexy. The way she looked in those pictures is how the world has chosen to remember her. Madonna's mother-and-baby

Below: Elizabeth Hurley, London, British Vogue, 1999. © Mario Testino.



sensibilities. The women he likes are like the women I like, although his women are a bit hard. I like a woman to be sexy, overt and a bit ... perverse. In Newton's pictures, you get the impression he is looking at something which he is not part of but, with mine, it feels as if I'm there. That's what I like. I want to feel part of what's going on. I like to sit down and talk to the people I'm going to photograph, like they are my friends, like I'm one of them. If I'm photographing a couple making love, I get involved as if I was playing a part, and not a voyeur watching dispassionately."

ORIGINS

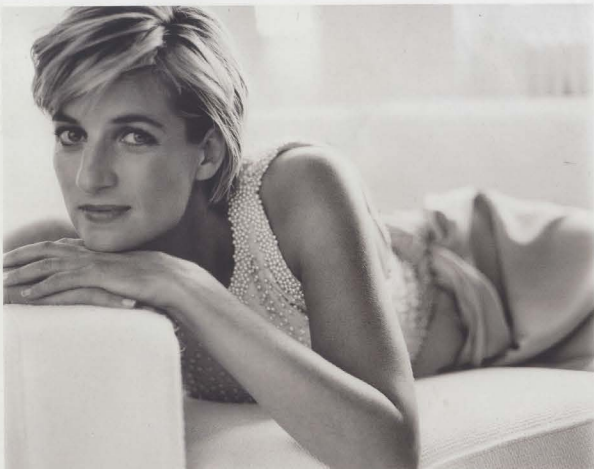
Mario was born in Peru in the 1950s, to a wonderful family, which gave him his love of life and sensuality. He went to the University of Lima to study economics, then law, but found these subjects uninspiring. He left Peru in search of excitement, and found it in London's Chelsea, at the end of the 1970s, where he fell in love with fashion and photography. "I came to Europe looking for freedom, and found it in London", he says.

"It is a place where you can be yourself. In Peru, if you walked in the streets in the outrageous clothes I was wearing as a teenager, people would just laugh at you. I love the English and their sense of humour. They are so dry and clever. Humour is very important to me, but the English sense of humour is intellectual, and you need to know them culturally to understand it."

Mario found work in one of London's fashionable restaurants, while taking a short course in photography. He started to take pictures, and show them around all the glossy magazines. "I like people, I love beauty and I have always been mad about clothes, so doing fashion photography was perfect", he comments.

STRUGGLE

He struggled in London for a few years, travelled to New York and back, but was always determined to succeed. This was the time when Mario and I worked together, tirelessly doing tests for covers, fashion and beauty; working as a team to create new and innovative images. As soon as a bright new model arrived on the scene, hungry for test pictures,



Above: Diana, Princess of Wales, London, Vanity Fair, 1997.

Below: Gisele, Aurelie and Renata, Rio de Janeiro, Allure, 1998. Both © Mario Testino



Mario and I would be setting up a shoot.

Some of our pictures were published, some rejected, but we were always optimistic and full of encouragement for each other; I constantly reassuring him of my belief that one day soon he would be a star; and him – seeing women as strong,

independent, and glamorous, but always feminine – telling me one day soon he would shoot for me the definitive cover for *Company* magazine.

UNIQUE STYLE

In the early 1990s, Mario took himself off to Paris, and it was there he began to develop and

produce his studies of male nudes, which became the blueprint for his unique style of fashion photography. These pictures were radically different from the then prevailing macho-aesthetic of male nudes, by photographers such as Bruce Weber.

"I wanted to portray men who

were in touch with their feminine side, as well as their masculinity", he says. "I think there are two sides to sexuality. I see women as men, and men as women, and I appreciate and love both. We all have both masculine and feminine sides in ourselves, and nothing is absolute."

Mario applied the technique he'd developed for male nudes to women in fashion, and he captured the imagination of magazine editors. His first big break came from the American magazine *Glamour*, where the fashion editor loved his nude studies, and commissioned him to do a fashion shoot.

He was then hired to contribute to the relaunch of *Harper's Bazaar* in 1992, along with leading fashion photographers Peter Lindbergh, Paolo Roversi, and Patric Demarchelier. His pictures are unmistakable. "I discovered", he says, "how to produce pictures of sexy, beautiful women, who looked great in clothes."

MADONNA'S FEELINGS

Madonna has said that he always manages to capture something of a person which you want to reach out and touch, take a bite out of. When asked to comment on this observation, Mario says "I think this is because I make people feel comfortable, and allow them to express themselves.

"If I photograph someone in the nude, I tell them, 'imagine that you are being photographed by your partner', then they relax and are natural. When you look at that picture, you feel like you can reach out and touch that person. You want to live that moment, because it feels real. I become passionately in creating something that appears real."

PRINCESS DIANA

"When I did the pictures of Princess Diana, I wanted to capture the real person and not the Royal. To begin with, she sat on the sofa, very formal and stiff. I said to her, 'No! Not like that. Just relax!' I threw myself on the sofa to show her, and she did the same. She kicked off her shoes, and that was it. The real person came through.

"The truth is that it's very hard to achieve a happy, relaxed photo which looks like you haven't done anything. It takes a lot of effort. I work everything out to the last detail and make it



Above: Madonna, Miami, Ray of Light, 1998. © Mario Testino.

perfect, and then I destroy it, so I can make it look real. I'm obsessed with reality but, to achieve this, you have to be contrived. It's a contradiction, but it works.

"I like to feel secure that I can make my subjects look their best, make them look happy and beautiful. I look for that in everyone I photograph, and try and reflect it. I search for the best in people. In many ways, models are much easier to photograph, because you can change their hair, their make-up, and create a new look with no problem. With real people, you have to work with what they have and look for the best."

"Being Peruvian influences the way I see women. I love sexy, glamorous women, of the kind I was surrounded by when I was

growing up. The English like their women very understated, no make-up, and in their grandmother's clothes. I like my women made-up, with great hair and in glamorous clothes.

"I would love to photograph the new generation of Royals, like Prince William, and the children of Caroline of Monaco, and other European monarchs. I'm fascinated by the idea of Royalty. I love the whole concept of tradition, something which is long lasting; because my world and the industry I work in is so ephemeral. I would love to do a book on the subject."

Mario is undoubtedly the preferred photographer of the stars; not only because of his personal charisma, but also for the simple reason that he makes them look even more beautiful

than they already are.

"When I first started photography", he says, "I said to my mother, when you see my name in *Vogue*, I will have arrived." Today, at the top of the list of magazines he works for are five *Vogue* titles: British, American, French, Italian and Russian. Mario Testino has arrived, and he is here to stay.

Nadia Marks

Mario Testino: Portraits shows at the National Portrait Gallery, with over 120 photographs of icons of fashion, film, music and style, such as Kate Moss, Gwyneth Paltrow, Liz Hurley, Eva Herzigova, Sigourney Weaver, Elle McPherson, Naomi Campbell and Prince Charles. Until 4 June.