

Deborah Turbeville: Photocollage 9 October 2024 – 23 February 2024

"Fashion takes itself more seriously than I do. I'm not really a fashion photographer."
- Deborah Turbeville in *The New Yorker*

Deborah Turbeville: Photocollage opens at The Photographers' Gallery this Autumn, from **9 October 2024 – 23 February 2025**. Presenting the work of the truly innovative American photographer, Deborah Turbeville (1932-2013), the exhibition will feature a selection of her personal vintage photocollages and editorial work.

Deborah Turbeville revolutionised the world of fashion photography, transforming it from its commercial clean standard into an art form. Turbeville deliberately distanced herself from the typical glamorous, polished aesthetic that dominated fashion at the time. Her signature dreamlike and melancholic style became recognisable with her earliest works in the 1970s: enigmatic female figures, cloudy skies, wintry nature and abandoned, decaying surroundings.

Turbeville's work for the fashion industry launched her career, which lasted over four decades. Between 1975 and 2013, her photographs were published in *Vogue*, *Harper's Bazaar* and *New York Times Magazine*. She also worked for fashion houses including Comme des Garçons, Guy Laroche, Charles Jourdan, Calvin Klein, Emanuel Ungaro and Valentino. At a time when fashion photography was dominated by men, Turbeville chose a path that ran counter to that of her male peers, like Richard Avedon, Irving Penn, Helmut Newton and Guy Bourdin.

Soft focus and overexposure brought a surreal and dusty tone to her black, white and sepia-toned work. Her models resemble ghostly apparitions as they wander through deserted buildings and landscapes. The exhibition includes her most controversial photograph, *Bath House, New York City*, 1975, part of a swimsuit photoshoot for *Vogue*, which featured five models, slouching and stretching in an abandoned bathhouse. The picture was so unlike the traditional fashion imagery of the time it prompted a public outcry.

Turbeville was undeterred and continued to produce images with an element of decay, saying "the idea of disintegration is really the core of my work."

Other works on show include images from Turbeville's 1981 American Book Award-winning series *Unseen Versailles*, and her first photocollage magazine, *Maquillage* (1975).

Turbeville's experimentation extended from the darkroom to the studio table as she unpicked the developing process. She ripped, cut and tore her photographs; manipulated, pinned and glued them. Her handmade collages are hybrid objects – as much diaries as book maquettes, sketchbooks as photographic novels – all from a pre-digital age.

Describing her work, she said "I destroy the image after I've made it, obliterate it a little so you never have it completely there."

Turbeville developed a highly personal artistic universe, which has been credited with transforming fashion imagery into avant-garde art. Although she did not achieve the same recognition as her male counterparts in her lifetime. *Deborah Turbeville: Photocollage* is a new opportunity to consider and celebrate Turbeville's ground-breaking contribution to the history of photography.

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Deborah Turbeville: Photocollage is organised by The Photographers' Gallery, produced by Photo Elysée in collaboration with MUUS Collection. The exhibition is curated by Nathalie Herschdorfer, Director of Photo Elysée, and Karen McQuaid, Senior Curator at The Photographers' Gallery.

The accompanying catalogue *Deborah Turbeville: Photocollage* is published by Thames & Hudson and available at The Photographers' Gallery's bookshop at £55.

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Press contacts

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For general information and enquiries about The Photographers' Gallery, including the archive, Print Sales Gallery or Bookshop contact: press@tpg.org.uk

Notes to editors

Deborah Turbeville

Deborah Turbeville was born in Stoneham, Massachusetts, USA in 1932. She moved to New York with ambitions to study drama when she was 19. Instead she was discovered by the fashion designer Claire McCardell, who hired Turbeville as an assistant and house model. While working for McCardell, she met Diana Vreeland, the famed editor of *Harper's Bazaar*. Their introduction led to Turbeville being offered a job as an editor at the magazine.

Disinterested in her editorial work at *Harper's Bazaar* and later at *Mademoiselle*, she began experimenting with photography in the 1960s. She took part in a workshop led by Richard Avedon and art director Marvin Israel in 1966. From there, she began her photographic career, mainly working for magazines like *Vogue*, *Harper's Bazaar* and *Mirabella*.

In 1981, Turbeville was commissioned by Jaqueline Onassis, then an editor at Doubleday, to photograph disused rooms in the Palace of Versailles. The book, *Unseen Versailles*, won an American Book Award, for its rare look into the Palace's off-limits decaying grandeur.

Turbeville published many books of her photography, including *Studio St. Petersburg*, *The Voyage of the Virgin Maria Candelaria* and *Newport Remembered*. Posthumous publications include *Comme des Garçons 1981*, a series of photographs she took during the 1980s in collaboration with the fashion house and its designer, Rei Kawakubo.

Turbeville died in 2013, having left an indelible mark on the world of photography. Her work is collected by major institutions worldwide, including the National Portrait Gallery, Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, the Getty Museum, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art.

The Photographers' Gallery

The Photographers' Gallery explores how photography is connecting, captivating and radically changing our world today. The Gallery's programme and spaces – from exhibitions, events and digital platforms, to the galleries, shop and café – all explore the beauty, complexity and future of photography. Right outside the Gallery, the very best of contemporary photography is shown for free, day and night, in Soho Photography Quarter.

Find out more at: thephotographersgallery.org.uk

Visitor information – The Photographers' Gallery

Mon – Weds 10am – 6pm

Thurs & Fri 10am – 8pm (Friday free from 5pm)

Sat 10am – 6pm

Sun 11am- 6pm

Tickets - your ticket covers entry to all exhibitions on the day of your visit
£10 / £7 concessions (members go free)
Advance online booking: £8.50 / £6 concessions

Also on show at The Photographers' Gallery from 9 October 2024 – 23 February 2025:
[Letizia Battaglia and Ten.8 - the archive](#)

In Soho Photography Quarter, [Sian Davey: The Garden](#) is on show until November 2024, free.

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