

EDWYNN HOUK GALLERY

PRESS RELEASE



ERWIN BLUMENFELD

Vintage Fashion

November 3, 2011 – January 7, 2012

Opening reception

Thursday, November 3rd, 6-8 pm

Edwynn Houk Gallery is pleased to present its first exhibition of works by the renowned fashion photographer, Erwin Blumenfeld (1897-1969), from November 3, 2011 through January 7, 2012 with an opening reception on Thursday, November 3rd from 6-8pm. This important exhibition will feature a rare group of 35 vintage prints from one personal collection that has been in tact since the artist's death in 1969 and will provide an opportunity to view the original, groundbreaking works by Blumenfeld that have proven to influence the course of fashion photography.

Erwin Blumenfeld is considered to be one of the early pioneers of fashion photography alongside George Hoyningen-Heune, Cecil Beaton, and Horst P. Horst. It was not only his employment of experimental techniques in the darkroom, Dada and Surrealist influences, and groundbreaking street work, but Blumenfeld's unique and masterful combination of elegance and eroticism that transformed fashion into high art and paved the way for Richard Avedon, Irving Penn, Herb Ritts, and other photographers who enjoyed such prominence and recognition in the history of art.

In addition to holding the record for the most covers of *Vogue*, Blumenfeld's works were abundantly reproduced within the pages of *Cosmopolitan*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *Life* and *Vogue* during the 1930's, 40's and 50's. Many of the images from these shoots will be featured in this exhibition and have since become icons of the history of fashion photography. Some have never been seen before. But all of the prints showcase not only Blumenfeld's innovation as a photographer of fashion but also his spectacular skill as a printmaker. In his retrospective examination of Blumenfeld's work, William Ewing writes, "His highly original and visionary work was a seamless blend of the negative and positive: *taking* the picture in the studio and *making* it in the darkroom."

In the studio, Blumenfeld often employed mirrors, glass, and backgrounds reproduced from paintings, images of cathedrals, or mosaics of magazine covers. He often used veils, which could distort or elongate the figure, confident that a woman partially concealed was more erotically charged than one seen fully nude. He also believed the printing of the image was as every bit as important as the process of capturing it, and like Man Ray, he was tirelessly inventive in the darkroom, deploying a variety of optical and chemical tricks, including multiple exposures, solarization and bleaching. The exhibition includes a number of his Kodalith prints, in which the contrast between the black and the white is even starker, ideal for the graphic needs of the magazine and its advertisers.

Blumenfeld was born in Berlin in 1897, and as a young man he moved to Amsterdam. It was there, while keeping a leather goods shop, that he began to experiment with photography and became involved with the Dada movement. He would use the shop's storeroom as his darkroom, and would display his photographs in the windows. Success in the leather business eluded him, but his confidence with photography grew, and when he relocated to Paris in 1936, he set out on the career that was to make him famous. While initially the fashion magazines were reluctant to employ him, the more avant-garde publications like *Photographie* regularly featured his work. Finally, with the crucial support of the British photographer Cecil Beaton, who was closely affiliated with Condé Nast, Blumenfeld was awarded a contract with *Vogue* in 1938. In the summer of 1941, just after his release from an internment camp during the German occupation of France, Blumenfeld and his family emigrated to New York. By the 1950's he was the most accomplished and highest paid fashion photographer in the world.

For additional information or images, please contact the gallery at 212-750-7070 or at info@houkgallery.com.