

Nina Katchadourian

VOGUE
BRITISH

Paris Photo: A Third Dimension

By Suzy Menkes on November 12, 2016

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Digital artistry is transforming the photograph into a richer and more complex multi-layered image.

The young woman's face is staring right at me: perfectly made-up skin, deep eyes, bow lips - but then, POW! Covering the photograph and caging the face are colourful straw bands in grass green, sky blue, yellow and red.

Photographic artist Julie Cockburn had made a collage of a found photograph. (Represented by the Flowers Gallery.) That single work sums up a definite storyline about fashionable images at Paris Photo. Celebrating its 20th year, contributors to this annual photography fair, which includes other venues across the city, have understood that there is more to photography today than a flat, printed image. There are textural effects in a digitised world.

"Body as a material – photography as a medium," are the words on the wall beside Valérie Belin's pigment print, framed with non-reflective glass to create striking visual and textural effects. (Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris.)

Although the main exhibition in the Grand Palais presents all kinds of photographic inspiration from landscape to portraiture, I looked particularly at fashion. That included classics, such as Norman Parkinson's "Young Velvets, Young Prices" from 1949: four women in softly felted hats, captured on the roof of the former Condé Nast building on Lexington Avenue in New York, against a background of skyscrapers. (Bernheimer Fine Art, Switzerland.)

But texture in those pre-digital days was missing – as it was in an otherwise fascinating black-and-white contact sheet of David Bowie posing for Helmut Newton in Monte Carlo; or the famous images by Bert Stern of Marilyn Monroe, "The Last Sitting", commissioned by Vogue in 1962. (Staley-Wise Gallery, New York.)

"Textural" images from modern photographic times come in many different guises – for example, Tina Berning and Michelangelo di Batista's mixed-media "Lindsey, Woven" from 2016 has the strange effect of eyes glinting through woven fabric while the model's sensual mouth is just seen through red and black streamers. (Camera Work, Berlin.)

Sometimes I was bringing my own imagination to modern techniques of reproduction. "Trace 24-33", a digital print mixing resin and glass, was a striking multi-media effect from Hiroshi Takizawa

(Polka,Paris), while Ljubodrag Andric's pigment ink print, "China #2", looks like a woven straw mat. (Robert Koch Gallery, San Francisco).

Occasionally, the three-dimensional effect was not a result of mixing fabric textures, but instead a trick of lighting and film - as in Paolo Roversi's 1996 chromatic print, "Yelena", in which three pairs of arms extend from the model's torso, like a Hindu goddess. (Pace, MacGill Gallery, New York.)

Two particular artists caught my eye. First was Nina Katchadourian, whose "Lavatory Self-Portraits in the Flemish Style" from 2011 is a series of photographs, digital images, and video, in which the artist takes self-portraits on her mobile phone wearing headdresses fashioned from paper hand towels, tissues and seat covers from airplane toilets. The single light offers stark but effective images. (Catharine Clark Gallery, San Francisco.)

The second, ultimate shock was from Ulla Jokisalo's ongoing "Headless Women" series (from 2013 onwards), which replaces the heads of graceful female models with those of a bird, hedgehog or other animals, using pigment print and sewing pins. (Gallery Taik Persons, Berlin.)

There is so much more than serene but familiar beauty at the Grand Palais, proving that Paris Photo has moved fast forward across its two decades.