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Monroe the memorable

It's been almost 50 years since her death in August 1962, but Marilyn Monroe's legend lived on in films such as these.



Associated Press

CHARM: Monroe stars opposite Laurence Olivier.

'The Prince and the Showgirl' (1957)

"My Week With Marilyn" depicts the making of "Showgirl," which costarred Monroe with Laurence Olivier, who famously told her: "All you have to do is be sexy, dear Marilyn."



File photo

RESPECTED: With Clark Gable in an Arthur Miller tale.

'The Misfits' (1961)

The last feature completed by Monroe and costar Clark Gable was a box-office flop but was critically acclaimed.



20th Century Fox / L.A. County Museum of Art

SASS: Monroe as fortune hunter Lorelei Lee.

'Gentlemen Prefer Blondes' (1953)

One of Monroe's best-remembered films featured her performance of the song often associated with the blond bombshell, "Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend."

Iconic to the end

A new book blends Marilyn Monroe photos shot weeks before her death with a 1972 Norman Mailer essay.

LIESL BRADNER

The suite at the Hotel Bel-Air where Bert Stern photographed Marilyn Monroe for her famous "Last Sitting" in 1962 no longer exists. It is now part of the elegant La Prairie Spa — rather apropos, as the often difficult star was well known for making people wait while relaxing in a hot bath. In 1972, Pulitzer Prize-winning author Norman Mailer took refuge a few steps away in one of the secluded bungalow-like rooms to soak up the ambience while writing his biographical essay on the tragic celebrity.

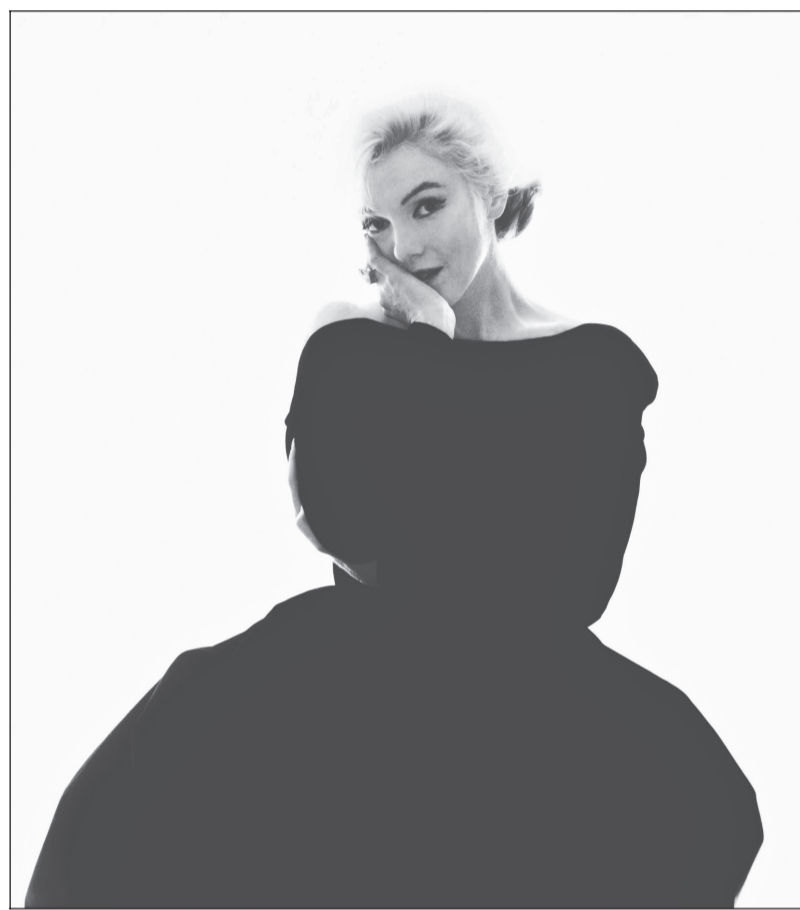
Mailer, Monroe and Stern have been brought together by producer, director and screenwriter Lawrence Schiller in 278 grand, glossy pages for "Norman Mailer, Bert Stern: Marilyn Monroe" (published by Taschen, a limited edition signed by Stern starts at \$1,000).

Mailer's original text published in 1973 has been edited here and accompanies Stern's historical photos taken just six weeks before the star's death on Aug. 5, 1962. To commemorate the 50th anniversary of her passing next year, Schiller, who photographed the skinny-dipping Monroe on the set of "Something's Got to Give," pitched the idea to publisher Benedikt Taschen, likening Mailer's words and Stern's photos as two miter gears coming together.

"I told him we could illustrate Mailer's text in a very unique way and bring out something in Bert's pictures that had been there before but not showcased properly," said Schiller at the book's lavish launch party last week at the recently renovated Hotel Bel-Air, where guests included Quincy Jones, Chris Tucker, Julie Newmar and Penelope Ann Miller.

"It feels weird," said Stern, 82, on his return to the lush, hallowed grounds. "The ghost of Marilyn coming back 50 years later." His last visit was in 2008 to photograph another troubled actress, Lindsay Lohan, for New York magazine. They re-created several of Monroe's nearly nude photos from that famous portrait sitting.

"I didn't want any clothes. I wanted things — jewelry, scarves, objects," said Stern of the Monroe session. As usual, she showed up three hours late but thinner than he had expected. The 36-year-old Monroe sipped on her favorite Dom Pérignon champagne, picked up a few scarves from off the bed and giddily danced around while Stern snapped away.



Photographs by BERT STERN Taschen

BACK IN BLACK: In "Norman Mailer, Bert Stern: Marilyn Monroe," the actress as captured by Stern at Hotel Bel-Air in 1962.



SULTRY: Monroe wore more jewels than clothes at the shoot.

"She was in a terrific mood, a lot of fun," Stern said. "She wanted to be in Vogue."

Stern sent that first set of provocative images to the editors, who thought her hair looked too messy and wanted more fashion shots, so Stern and Monroe met again. Marilyn dressed in more sophisticated evening wear including a black Dior gown and impersonated Jackie Kennedy in a brunet wig and pearls at one point. Jackie's hairdresser, Kenneth Battelle, even styled her hair appropriately.

"She got fed up with the dresses and wanted to go back to less things," recalled Stern, who didn't want a glitzy showbiz photo. An admirer of Edward Steichen's black and white portrait of Greta Garbo, he wanted something more intimate, that definitive, immortal picture.

"It was a once-in-a-lifetime event. I knew I'd never shoot her again."

Marilyn died while the Vogue layout was going to press. They edited out the fashion copy and ran an obituary for the September issue.

Considered one of the original "Mad Men," Stern got his start on Madison Avenue in the 1950s with his revolutionary "Driest of the Dry" campaign for Smirnoff vodka, inverting an Egyptian pyramid in a martini glass.

"I don't consider myself a photographer," he said. "I'm a designer with a camera."

When asked if any actress today could compare to Monroe, Stern immediately responded: "Naomi Watts. I thought she should've played Marilyn in that new movie. [Michelle Williams] was Marilyn-ish, but she didn't have that kind of freedom and naturalism that Marilyn had. She was a free spirit. She was full of ideas, sexy, funny and clever."

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'Descendants' big winner, but 'Tree' wins big

L.A. Film Critics Assn. cites the former as best picture, but the latter dominates.

JULIE MAKINEN

Alexander Payne's "The Descendants" was named best film of 2011 by the Los Angeles Film Critics Assn., but judging by the other awards the organization announced Sunday, the group seemed to have as much or more overall passion for Terrence Malick's "The Tree of Life."

"Tree" was runner-up for best film, and Malick was honored for direction. Emmanuel Lubzcki won as cinematographer for the movie, and Jessica Chastain, who played opposite Brad Pitt, won for supporting actress in recognition of her work on "Tree" and five other movies in 2011.

The choice of "The Descendants" apparently generated strong reactions within the group. Justin Chang, a critic for Variety who is among the 56 members of LAFCA, tweeted after the voting was over: "The Descendants has won best picture... Until then, I thought our choices were fairly respectable."

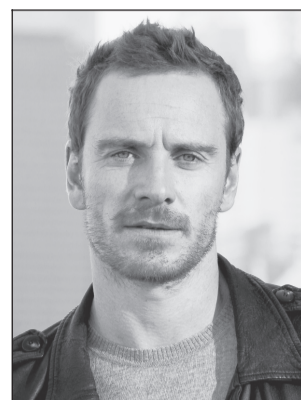
The L.A. critics follow the New York Film Critics Circle and the National Board of Review in announcing their "best of" list for 2011, but little consensus seems to be emerging in the major categories of best picture, director, actress and actor. The New York Critics chose the silent film "The Artist" as best picture, while the National Board of Review selected Martin Scorsese's "Hugo."

The L.A. critics didn't hand any awards to "The Artist" and only one to "Hugo" — to Dante Ferretti for production design.

In the L.A. Film Critics awards, "The Descendants" writers — Payne, Nat Faxon and Jim Rash — were runners-up for screenplay, beaten by the Iranian film "A Separation," written and directed by Asghar Farhadi. The film, an exploration of class differences and modernity versus traditionalism, arrives in U.S. theaters at the end of December. "A Separation" was runner-up for foreign film, losing to "City of Life and Death," a Chinese film about the Japanese occupation of Nanjing in the 1930s.

The lead actor award went to Michael Fassbender for his work in multiple films this year, including "Shame," "Jane Eyre," "X-Men: First Class" and "A Dangerous Method." (Apparently, it pays to be in lots of movies: Chastain, in addition to "Tree," was lauded for her performances in "The Help," "The Debt," "Take Shelter," "Texas Killing Fields" and "Coriolanus.")

The supporting actor



CHARLES SYKES Associated Press

LEAD ACTOR: Michael Fassbender won for his work in four 2011 films.



VALERY HACHE AFP/Getty Images

SUPPORTING ACTRESS: Jessica Chastain won for six movies.

award went to Christopher Plummer for his performance as an elderly man who comes out of the closet in "Beginners."

For the second year in a row, the L.A. critics chose a South Korean woman for lead actress. This year it was Yun Jung-hee for her role in "Poetry." Last year, it was Kim Jye-ha for "Mother," about a woman's search for the man who framed her son for a murder.

"Rango" was named best animated film, Werner Herzog's 3-D "Cave of Forgotten Dreams" was chosen as best documentary, and the Chemical Brothers won for music/score on "Hanna."

The creative team behind the Sundance breakout "Martha Marcy May Marlene" — Elizabeth Olsen, Josh Mond, Sean Durkin and Antonio Campos — received the "New Generation" award.

All in all, the awards represented a strong showing for Fox Searchlight, the specialty division of 20th Century Fox that released "Tree of Life," "The Descendants" and "Martha Marcy."

The 37th annual Los Angeles Film Critics Assn. ceremony will be held Jan. 13 at the InterContinental, Los Angeles. As previously announced, Doris Day will receive the 2011 career achievement award.

The coming week will see a flurry of more film awards activity, as the Screen Actors Guild announces its nominations for its annual awards on Wednesday and the Hollywood Foreign Press Assn. reveals its nominations for the Golden Globes on Thursday.

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'The Help,' 'Hugo' among AFI honorees

Special awards go to the French silent film 'The Artist' and the 'Harry Potter' movies.

JULIE MAKINEN

A wide-ranging mix of feature films was chosen Sunday for the American Film Institute's AFI Awards 2011, the organization's almanac that records the year's outstanding achievements in movies, TV and other forms of the moving arts.

The top 10 AFI movies of 2011 are "Bridesmaids," "The Descendants," "The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo," "The Help," "Hugo," "J. Edgar," "Midnight in Paris," "Moneyball," "The Tree of Life" and "War Horse."

On the television front, honored were "Breaking Bad," "Boardwalk Empire," "Curb Your Enthusiasm," "Game of Thrones," "The Good Wife," "Homeland," "Justified," "Louie," "Mod-

ern Family" and "Parks and Recreation."

Special awards went to the French silent film "The Artist" and the "Harry Potter" series of pictures, which concluded this year after eight movies. The special awards are given for achievements in the moving image that don't otherwise fit into AFI's criteria, which state that movies must be in a narrative-fiction format and have significant creative and or production elements from the U.S.

The awards are selected by a jury of scholars, film and TV artists, critics and AFI trustees. Among those on the film jury were Tom Pollock, former vice chairman of MCA and chairman of Universal Pictures; actress Whoopi Goldberg; and film historian Leonard Maltin.

AFI will honor the creative ensembles at an invitation-only luncheon Jan. 13 at the Four Seasons Hotel.

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FAST FAME

What three-time Oscar nominee was once known as Issur Danielovitch Demsky?

To explore the Los Angeles Times' Hollywood Star Walk online, go to projects.latimes.com/hollywood/star-walk/



Kirk Douglas, who celebrated his 95th birthday Friday.

RHAPSODIES IN BLU-RAY

A pair of new Blu-ray releases might make the perfect gifts for the cinephile on your list. Gary Cooper, Fredric March and Miriam Hopkins star in Ernst Lubitsch's "Design for Living," a pre-code comedy adapted from Noel Coward's play "Brief Encounter." The 1933 classic centers on a beautiful commercial artist courted by a dashing painter (Cooper) and a dashing playwright (March) that she meets on a train trip to Paris. Another train-centered film fan favorite, Alfred Hitchcock's 1938 comic thriller "The Lady Vanishes," stars Margaret Lockwood as a woman traveling across Europe when she encounters a spinster (Dame May Whitty) who seems to disappear. The Blu-ray includes a high-definition digital restoration of the film, audio commentary by film historian Bruce Eder and excerpts from François Truffaut's 1962 audio interview with Hitchcock.



UCLA Film and Television Archive

WIT: Miriam Hopkins is among "Design for Living" stars.