

#33 October 2018 Cameraderie
Irving Penn (1917-2009)
Part IV: Fashion



This is the fourth of five articles on Irving Penn. This article covers his fashion photography.

Just as reminder, this is the Irving Penn Foundation website:

<https://www.irvingpenn.org/artwork/>

I encourage you to look at all the images there, in the eight categories: Portraits, Small Trades, Still Life, Fashion, Beauty, Nudes, Travel, and Documentary. All are worth studying, and I am discussing the first five, in five articles. The website also has an excellent biography and chronology of Penn's life and work.

Here is the link to the Wikipedia article on Penn:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irving_Penn

From the Irving Penn Foundation website, here is a statement of themes we can remember as we look at the sample images below and as you look at the rest of the fashion images on the Irving Penn Foundation website:

Throughout Penn's long career at *Vogue*, fashion was an essential part of his assignments. In the 1940s, using white paper backdrops and striking compositions to emphasize form, he introduced a concise style to fashion photography that departed from the ornate settings that had defined the genre. In addition to photographs made in the studio from 1950 to 1995, Penn traveled often to Paris to photograph the haute couture collections for the magazine. Until the end of his life, Penn used the same theater curtain found for him in Paris in 1950 as a backdrop to transform a remarkable variety of styles and designs into timeless images. From the start, Penn sought to express the sculptural form of clothing, a theme he explored in a special collaboration with [Japanese fashion designer] Issey Miyake.

[British Designer Edward] Molyneux Pocket Detail, Paris, 1950



Molyneux [pronounced "Molinucks," an obvious Anglicization of a French surname] paid great attention to detail. Hence, this shot of a pocket. According to Wikipedia, Molyneux was famous for his "impeccably refined simplicity." I chose this image of Penn's to show because he has taken on the challenge to make the pocket the center of the shot. The model's head is not in the frame, and her hand is hidden in the pocket. Does this image convey casual assurance, or mystery? How do you view it?

[Finnish model Agneta Bylander – aka] Mouche With Gold Neck Band, Paris, 1969



I have in mind to someday discuss famous models, but today I have just stumbled onto mentioning Mouche. I cannot readily find much information on her, but you can see a fairly unreliable collection of images of her at Google Images by searching on "Finnish model Agneta Bylander Mouche," including this one. Ignore the images that are obviously not her. Penn shows his typical use of deep shadow on her left side—sometimes I feel that he is "shining" the shadow on the dark side of his subjects' faces, rather than shining a light on the other side. A constant theme with many high-fashion models is the photographers' emphasis on the models' stunningly long necks; here Penn shoots Mouche wearing a neck band extending far below the end of her natural neck, heightening the effect. Reference here Richard Avedon's (#3, Feb. 2013) treatment of Audrey Hepburn's neck, not discussed in that article, but you can see many such shots if you search Google Images for "Richard Avedon Audrey Hepburn."

Issey Miyake Onion Flower Bud Coat,

Issey Miyake Seaweed Dress,

New York, 1987



New York, 1987



As the Penn Foundation quote above mentions, Penn explored the “sculptural form of clothing” in his photo shoots of Miyake dresses. These two shot are perfect examples of that project.