

camera

INTERNATIONAL

a m e r i c a n e d i t i o n



Noelle Hoeppe

Noelle Hoeppe has always worked with female models, setting them in disquieting scenes as if from stills or photograms from secret films. Her pictures tell no tales, and show nothing more than the presence of a face or a body, either wholly wrapped up within itself or engrossed in some act from which we viewers are excluded. Her images allude to shady ceremonies or ambiguous scenographies, the intensity of which entirely derives from the intangibilities they are charged with. What is remarkable is that part of the same mystery also appears in her portraits of celebrities and fashion photographs. There, on the contrary, the purpose is supposedly to reveal, if not to advertise, what must be shown according to the implicit or explicit terms of the assignment. Isn't it the true signature of an artist to remain faithful, whatever the constraints, to his or her private world? Even her most concise portraits — close-ups on faces such as that of Liv Ullman or Margaux Hemingway — are marked, as if unsettled, by the gesture of a hand. Far from emphasising a familiar posture, the hand has become a vehicle for strangeness. In its turn, it enters the game of shadows and light, a game which lends an expressionistic touch to Noelle Hoeppe's pictures and takes her portraits beyond the mere expression of an individual's identity. Wherever characters appear in medium shot, the decor, the clothing, and the posture immediately make them fit into an intricate network of

tentative plots. Mirrors, especially, play a major part. Not only do they disclose a somewhat uncertain double, but they also lure the viewer's eyes astray. Here, the mirror's image is not narcissistic, but rather, it is indiscreet, even ominous. A straight-on close-up portrait may easily turn into a mask, folding in upon itself or hiding behind a deliberately contrived pose. But the mirrored image — the hidden face — is vulnerable, for it exposes itself to voyeuristic stares. The touch of strangeness which appeals to us in those images is in great part provided by this staging of eyes: the eyes of the model which, at times, seem to be inviting the viewer's stare, and the eyes of the viewer, our own stare, drawn in spite of itself to the object of its desire. The viewer is trapped by this spell: there is no way our glance could slip from one of those pictures... Last, the clothing, since in some cases it is fashion photography we are dealing with. They are worn with the same somewhat provocative indifference suggested by the models' eyes. They become accessories women have made their own, in keeping with the fiction evoked by the images. They use them as props to heighten their power to fascinate. This is beyond the domain of vain fetishes. The clothes have become extension of their own bodies, in turn revealing it or veiling it, depending on the desire or the requirements of the moment...

Régis Durand