

MASTERS OF EROTIC PHOTOGRAPHY

JAMES ELLIOTT

This monograph was originally published as part of a series on the world's twelve greatest erotic photographers. Few living photographers were included. The roll call included Elliott, Man Ray, Herb Ritts, Robert Mapplethorpe, Bill Brandt, David LaChapelle, etc

JAMES ELLIOTT & EROTICISM : COLOUR SENSE

Curated by Judith Lange

Imagine this scene : a super endowed girl all dressed in flaming red, in a tight latex body, her face hidden by a catmask, wearing stockings and six inch stilettos, walking the path, cracking a leather whip, whilst clutching in her other hand a fist full of bank notes. Other girls dressed up as black cats are following her, trying to capture her and once chained to a tree they rip off her clothes.

A cordon of police hold back the crowd whilst a Rolls Royce Corniche convertible pulls up with the master orchestrator James Elliott on board accompanied by two heavily busted models as they are showered with hundreds of pink balloons. End of the scene. It's title: "Glossy Glamourpuss and the Jealous Cats".

As Truman Capote said "Good taste is the death of art".

This memorable feline spectacle serves as an introduction to the glowing world of James Elliott, the most outrageous, courted and superpaid photographer in England, who wanted to open his show in this way. The show called 'Sex Money and Midsummer Madness' also introduced his video 'Voice Of A New Generation' with the music of Jean Michel Jarre.

Hedonist, eccentric and egocentric, James Elliott likes to describe himself as an artist innovator preferring the reductive term 'photographer'. Elliott, in effect, constitutes a phenomenon of erotic art without parallel: his creative visions are brash and exaggerated and however monstrous and shocking they may appear, result from a meticulous mental and technical preparation and an exploration of colour – solid as lacquer, shining and saturated – unique to this genre. In some of his particularly elaborate works Elliott has worked in his studio, darkroom and on his computer, for more than 400 hours, an entire summer.

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He has a predilection for over-endowed girls that seem to have walked straight out of a cartoon or calendar of pin-ups, a parody illustrating girls of generous proportions. Baby faces with big red voracious mouths, superlative curves, breasts like balloons, waspish waists, tight hips and firm, pert, full asses. It is no surprise that Elliott adores the big divas like Jayne Mansfield, Marilyn Monroe, Anita Ekberg and Sophia Loren.

Elliott showed a precocious artistic talent and erupted onto the erotic scene with his photo-sculptures shown in a London gallery to much applause and immediate success. From that moment his images toured the world and were snapped up by collectors - never more than ten prints were made from the originals - and they loved to pay head-turning prices for them.

His love for photography started in 1958, when Elliott was 7 years old when for a few pounds, not very much money, he bought his first camera in a supermarket. "It looked like a water pistol and I used it about as much" says the artist. Taught by nuns at a convent school, Elliott's first forays into photography centred around the theme of funerals, graves, sarcophagi, cemeteries and crosses. But his taste for the macabre was fortunately short lived.

After having read the famous photographic manuals of Andreas Feininger, classics of their genre, he decided to take up photography seriously and experiment with new techniques. He also took up developing and printing and experimented with the manipulation of colour and light in the studio. Throughout the whole arc of his career he has never stopped innovating and perfecting new technologies, exploiting most recently the possibilities offered by digital photography on computer.

Dissatisfied with the traditional manner of showing the erotic, Elliott looked to change physical reality, creating an alternative world, but at the same time carnal and tactile. Erotic works like 'Ashes Roses and Lace' and 'Pleasure and Pain' represent his photographic obsession with physical form, artificial colour and avant garde technologies.

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Contemporaneously, Elliott was nourishing his spectacular and extravagant personality as an artist. In interviews he made irreverent statements of the kind “The most important things in life are God, Glamour, Love, Sex, Money and Art.” Again, asked why he was dedicated body and soul to eroticism he replied “Because I love it and I do it extremely well.” And then he quotes a proverb “The best mountaineer is the man who loves climbing.”

His obsession for super-endowed girls he explains like this: “Girls of this kind were being treated apallingly by the media, you know, like little joke dolls, nudge nudge, a slap on the ass, wink wink, crap talk shows and so on. I found that bloody stupid. I always thought these girls were wonderful and deserved better. I have recreated them as works of art.”

If you look at his images like “Afterglow” and “Naked at the Red Table”, who could argue with him?

Asked the question as to what place in the history of art he would like reserved for himself, he replied: “Knowing my luck I will probably I will be remembered as the genius whose talent was wasted by huge breasted girls.”

**This monograph was realised by L'Espresso – the mass circulation Italian magazine specialising in culture, politics and economics.
It's a bit like an Italian TIME magazine.**

Translated into English from the original Italian text .