

This exhibition presents the photographic work done by Miralda (Terrassa, 1942) for *ELLE* magazine between 1964 and 1971 while he was living in Paris. The artist produced these photographs, which have remained virtually hidden from the public eye until recent times, at the same time as working on his performances and objects.

## MIRALDA AND ELLE



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[LA VIRREINA]  
CENTRE  
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Ajuntament de  
**Barcelona**



Fashion photography holds a little-known but remarkable place in Miralda's career. It is little known because, strictly speaking, the artist's photographic work went mostly unpublished until recently, in 2022, when Ignasi Duarte—who recovered and researched this compelling visual collection for the first time—curated the exhibition *Do Not Cross: Unpublished Photographs 70s/80s*, at the Moisés Pérez de Albéniz gallery.<sup>1</sup> Still, fashion photography is immensely significant, not only for what it anticipates regarding Miralda's later work but also for his innovations in the genre of advertising photography.

After setting up home in Paris in the early sixties, Miralda established a regular collaboration with *ELLE* magazine, lasting from 1964 to 1971, when he worked on numerous photo reports about the collections presented each season. Throughout those six years of professional activity in fashion, Miralda concurrently developed his object-based pieces and his actions for the public space. Later, when he moved to New York at the start of 1972, he continued his photographic pursuit, as the exhibition *Do Not Cross* illustrates.

Miralda's French period is usually associated with three series of works. The first relates to *Soldats Soldés* (1965–1973), in which the artist incorporates—as a pacifist plea or perhaps even as a personal exorcism—hundreds of toy soldiers that he brings together "to tune" everyday objects, furniture, public monuments, advertising posters, or replicas of sculptures. The second series derives from his projects with Dorothée Selz when, under the name *Traiteurs Coloristes* (1967–1973), the "joint team" experimented with the connections between culinary practices and action art—for example, in *Dîner en quatre couleurs* (1970). Finally, there are what were named the Ceremonials, completed together with Selz, Joan Rabascall, and Jaume Xifra, among which *Memorial* (1969), *Fête en blanc* (1970), *Rituel en quatre couleurs* (1971), and *Fête de l'école laïque* (1971–1973) stand out. However, some collages and drawings from the mid-sixties—such as *Comme mamman* (1965), *Faux Lautrec* (n/d)<sup>2</sup> and especially *Yvette au telephone* (1964), and *Poitrine bien ferme et autre* (1964)—are worth noting to observe the subtle transfer of iconography between

fashion images and these other pieces that are encompassed in the field of art.

In any case, when trying to determine the characteristics of Miralda's fashion photography, including the distinctive contributions he adds to the genre, we find what might be his most notable peculiarity. Most fashion photography of the time, or at least the most stereotyped ones—the iconic post-card focusing on body, face, and dress—used to depict models in studios, using all the technical equipment and props of a controlled portrait and adding a set of clearly ornamental and secondary elements. Instead, Miralda takes these models out onto the street, to an uncodified and unpredictable space, demanding that they, the photographer, and the team make decisions that were never entirely aprioristic. Moreover, by turning the model into an urban *flâneuse*, she abandons the position of a mere object and, with her anomalous and unexpected presence, incorporates a narrative counterpoint, a strangeness into the places where she appears, so to speak.

This foray into the public space creates a series of semantic and collective short circuits as well as ones of usage that counter these enclaves—something Miralda explored later in many of his works. Even so, to see it in these images of a barely twenty-year-old artist is surprising.

On another level, the story that Miralda's fashion photography sheds on the city of Paris is not that of the tourist and photogenic city *par excellence*, but that of the lowly markets, the beltways, the peripheries whose life develops outside the bourgeois boulevards. Far from Haussmann's Greater Paris or the city of imposing museums and cathedrals, Miralda prefers the blind spots of official and historicist urbanism, places with great human density that are working-class and hard to appropriate as a cliché.

Yet another significant element, unrelated to the setting or staging, concerns the artist's interpretation of *haute couture*—the way he considers the sample collections of French fashion houses and the most notable designers of the moment. One can often find images by Miralda that are focused on the chromaticity or the seriality of the garments as he relates them



*Untitled*, 1965. Musée du Louvre, Paris. Private collection.  
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*Untitled*, 1968/2023. Massey Ferguson tractor park, Paris.  
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with features of the landscape that influence identical aspects, as if a dress were integrated into the environment and in dialogue with it, as if the neatly composed exclusivity of all those tailor-made suits were ironically questioned, a metaphor of sorts for the unique object facing its formal reproduction.

To be published, a photograph undergoes a selection process that amounts to a technique of sorting, framing, and focalizing the photo report previously conceived by the author. This process is prevalent in all editorial products, but it reaches greater proportions in fashion photography, where countless images are captured in very little time. When we look at the negatives that fully illustrate Miralda's photo reports, we can appreciate the chosen photograph alongside the numerous discarded images, thus gaining a broad vision of the photographer's intentions. The casual portrait suddenly becomes a visual performance, a traveling shot in which the author's intentions do not always correspond to corporate criteria.

Among Miralda's numerous photo reports in *ELLE* magazine, one stands out, perhaps due to its renowned starring model: the iconic Twiggy. Of working-class origin, Lesley Hornby—her birth name—revolutionized the beauty standards of her time with an eternal adolescent look: pleated miniskirts, heavy eye makeup, big glasses, false eyelashes, and striking knee-high stockings. In 1966, with no fame at all, she was named the 'face of the year' by the *Daily Express* newspaper, and soon afterwards, she left her native England to settle in Paris and later in the United States, following the same trajectory as Miralda.

Thus, when the artist photographed her for *ELLE*—they were both in their early twenties—Twiggy was at the height of her popularity. In the set of negatives that she stars in, the first global supermodel's fame is so explicit that she even overshadows the apparel that she displays for readers and potential buyers.

The sixties were also years of an unexpected effervescence of urban tribes, music, cinema, theater, television, and more. Specifically, the fashion phenomenon swayed between high and low culture throughout the decade. It suffices to cite two

seminal books from 1964. First, *Notes on 'Camp,'* by Susan Sontag, in which the essayist reports a sensitivity, linked to an aesthetic taste, that is characterized by having developed on social margins. Its epitome is a spirit of extravagance that, in turn, would define a manner of political dissent. Second, *Apocalyptic and Integrated,* by Umberto Eco, where the semi-otician analyzes antagonisms in popular culture, examining mass media icons as if they were historical figures or philosophical currents.

Miralda's fashion photography is part of this environment nourished by the street bustle and less regulated artistic territories. It is not surprising that absolutely legendary names appear when looking at the index of authors with whom the young Miralda shared credits at *ELLE*—Guy Bourdin, Helmut Newton, and David Bailey, one of the fathers of Swinging London.

In October 1968, Benet Rossell and Miralda filmed the movie *Paris, La Cumparsita*, for which they toured various emblematic sites in Paris—Place du Tertre, the Champs Elysées, the Louvre or the Les Halles market—transporting a natural size toy soldier in search of a pedestal to hold it. This anti-militarist and, at the same time, playful piece—in tune with the anti-war mobilizations unfolding throughout Europe and the United States—could easily close a circle that started with the artist's photo reports featuring the leading models of the moment—a symbolic and perhaps anthropological arc that describes Paris from its consumer whims to its old imperial dreams.

<sup>1</sup> <<https://galeriampa.com/miralda-do-not-cross-fotos-ineditas-70s-80s-04-06-22-23-07-22/>>

<sup>2</sup> See: <<https://www.macba.cat/es/buscador/tipo/obra/artista/20330>>

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