

Erwin Blumenfeld - Biography 1/4

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| <p>1897 26 January: Birth of Erwin Blumenfeld in Berlin, Germany, to Emma (Cohn) and Albert Blumenfeld; second of three children (Annie, b. 1894, and Heinz, b. 1900)</p> <p>1903 Enrolls at the Askanisches Gymnasium in Berlin. Meets Paul Citroen.</p> <p>1907 Takes up photography on receiving a camera as a gift. Experiments enthusiastically with a chemistry set and a magic lantern.</p> <p>1911 Photographic self-portrait as Pierrot, using a mirror to obtain simultaneous frontal and profile views.</p> <p>1913 Finishes his formal education and leaves with secondary school certificate. Gives up thoughts of further education on the death of his father; the family is virtually bankrupt. Starts a three-year apprenticeship in the women's garment trade at Moses & Schlochauer in Berlin.</p> <p>1915 With his best friend from school, Paul Citroen, begins to frequent the Café des Westens, favourite meeting place of the Expressionists; meets a number of the key figures, including the poet Else Lasker-Schüler and the artist George Grosz, who will become a lifelong friend.</p> <p>1916 Meets Lena Citroen, cousin of Paul Citroen, with whom he has conducted a lengthy correspondence; they become engaged soon after. Writes poetry and draws, and plans to become an actor.</p> <p>1917 Conscripted into the German army in March; sent as an ambulance driver to the Western Front; wins the Iron Cross (Second Class) for bravery; also serves for a brief interlude as a bookkeeper in the army's "Field Brothel 209" near the Belgian border.</p> <p>1918 On home leave in June plans to desert to Holland but is arrested and imprisoned before he can put his plans into effect; released, he is returned to his unit at the Front; there he learns of the death of his brother, Heinz, near Verdun. At war's end he returns briefly to Berlin; in December he goes into self-exile in Holland in order to join his fiancée, Lena.</p> <p>1919-22 Makes various attempts to secure a livelihood, including working for a bookseller; joins Paul Citroen, who has set himself up as art dealer, but abandons this attempt when it becomes evident that there is virtually no market in Holland for contemporary art. Becomes "a Sunday painter", makes collages and drawings, and participates in the Dada Movement along with Paul Citroen. Photographs family and friends strictly as an amateur. Continues to write poetry and also composes short stories.</p> <p>1921 Marries Lena Citroen and honeymoon in Berlin. Produces „Charlie“, his best known collage.</p> <p>1922 Birth of his first daughter, Lisette.</p> <p>1923 1 June: Goes into the leather goods business, opening a shop at 116 Kalverstraat under the name "Fox Leather Company".</p> | <p>1925 Birth of his son Heinz (Henry).</p> <p>1929 August: Arrested on Zandvoort beach for allowing a strap of his bathing suit to slip; this dashes chances of Dutch citizenship, for which he has applied.</p> <p>1932 Birth of his son Yorick. Moves premises further down the street to 151 Kalverstraat and discovers an operational darkroom on the premises; begins to photograph female customers (for the most part portraits but also some nudes) both out of rekindled interest in photography and with the idea of making money. Exhibits at the art gallery, Kunstzaal van Lier, Amsterdam. Submits work to the Ullstein Verlag publishing house in Berlin for appraisal, without success.</p> <p>1934 Second exhibition of photographs at Kunstzaal van Lier. Still photographer on Jacques Feyder's Pension Mimosas (1935).</p> <p>1935 Bankruptcy of Blumenfeld's leather goods store, Fox Leather Company. Moves his portrait studio to the Keizersgracht. His first few photographs are published in the French magazine <i>Photographie</i>. Exhibits at the Esher Surrey Art Galleries in The Hague. His work is included in a group show organized by Paul Citroen at the Nieuwe Kunstschool (New Art School) in Amsterdam, along with Grosz, Umbo, Man Ray, Moholy-Nagy, Arp, Delaunay, Léger, Mondrian, Schwitters and others. Meets George Rouault's daughter Geneviève, a dentist, on a visit to his shop; she arranges to exhibit his work in her waiting room near the Opéra in Paris.</p> <p>1936 Leaves Holland and settles in Paris with the aim of becoming a professional photographer. Geneviève Rouault helps him secure clients for portraits. Photographs Georges Rouault and Henri Matisse, among other well-known Parisians. Takes on advertising work: Mon Savon, Dop Shampoo, Pathé Marconi and other clients. Exhibits his portraits at Galerie Billiet, Paris. Rents a studio at 9, rue Delambre, where he continues with his personal work in addition to his commercial activities.</p> <p>1937 First magazine cover: <i>Votre Beauté</i> (February). Photographs published in <i>Verve</i> (Winter 1937 and Spring 1938) and again in the annual <i>Photographie</i> (also in 1938 and 1939); some 50 photographs are also sold to the U.S. magazine <i>Coronet</i>. Makes one of his best-known images, <i>Nude under Wet Silk</i> (possibly 1936). Photographs Aristide Maillol's <i>The Three Graces</i> and other of this sculptor's works. Photographs Carmen, Rodin's female model for <i>The Kiss</i>. His 1933 photcollage of Hitler is exhibited in a group show in Berlin but is withdrawn following a protest by German ambassador.</p> |
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Erwin Blumenfeld - Biography 2/4

- 1938 Meets Cecil Beaton, who helps him secure a contract with *Vogue*, the two become life-long friends. First of many images appear in French *Vogue*, October 1938. Photographs Rouen Cathedral.
- 1939 May: Takes his best-known Parisian fashion photograph, showing model Lisa Fonssagrives on the Eiffel Tower. Work for *Vogue* continues through June but contract with *Vogue* not renewed; sails to New York to investigate possibility of work for *Harper's Bazaar*, secures a contract with the magazine to cover Paris fashions. Returns to Paris on the eve of the war, but fails to make plans to flee. When war breaks out, interned in French camps, Montbard-Mernagne, Vernet D'Ariège and Catus, as an alien.
- 1941 Flees from France. Arrives in New York, where he is immediately put under contract by *Harper's Bazaar*. Finds an apartment at the Hotel des Artistes, 1 West 67th Street, where he remains for the rest of his life. Shares the studio of Martin Munkacsi for almost two years. Maintains production of his personal work, with particular interest in the subject of the nude. First colour cover in December *Harper's Bazaar*. In the 1940s and 1950s his work will appear in *Look, Life, Coronet, Cosmopolitan* and *Popular Photography* in the USA and in many foreign publications, including *Lilliput* and *Picture Post* (UK) and *Graphis* (Switzerland).
- 1943 Secures a duplex studio at 222 Central Park South where he will remain for the rest of his life. His 1933 photocollage of Hitler is used as an Allied propaganda leaflet and is dropped in its millions over Germany by the American Air Force.
- 1944 Leaves *Harper's Bazaar* and begins work as a freelancer with *Vogue*, once again thanks to the intervention of Cecil Beaton. Over the next 15 years produces scores of *Vogue* covers and works for *Seventeen, Glamour, House & Garden* and a number of other mass-market fashion and photography magazines. Begins to build a lucrative business in the sphere of advertising with such clients as Helena Rubinstein and Elizabeth Arden.
- 1944-55 Produces dozens of cover images for Condé nast and other magazines.
- 1947 A selection of personal work included in *In and Out of Focus: A Survey of Today's Photography*, curated by Edward Steichen at the Museum of Modern Art, New York.
- 1948 Work included in *Seventeen American Photographers* at the Los Angeles Museum (now the Los Angeles County Museum). Begins to travel extensively in Europe, North America, Mexico and The Caribbean.
- 1950 Produces what has become his most famous cover image, that of the January issue of *Vogue*.
- 1952 Begins long involvement as photographer for the Oval Room of the Dayton Department Store, Mineapolis, which gives him considerable creative freedom.
- 1954 Buys a house on the dunes at Westhampton Beach, Long Island, New York.
- 1955 Relationship with *Vogue* comes to an end; last of his *Vogue* covers (though he works for the magazine sporadically after this date). Starts work on his autobiography. Kathleen Lévy-Barnett becomes his agent; the business expands considerably. Buys his own colour printer for C-prints but finds the colours unstable.
- 1962 Experiments with film out of interest and with an eye to commercial possibilities.
- 1963 Secures his final major client, L'Oréal. The Westhampton House is washed away in a storm.
- 1964 Marina Schinz becomes his assist and begins to edit the autobiography.
- 1969 Complets the autobiography. Selects the images for his proposed book, *My One Hundred Best Photos*, and organizes the juxtapositions. Fatal heart attack when in Rome; he is buried there.

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