

visual arts

by Karen Love
and Karen Henry

Estranged from Beauty, None Can Be: The Work of Lee Miller and Lesley Dill

Presentation House Gallery will open the new century with photographic work by two women artists: the legendary photographer Lee Miller and contemporary artist Lesley Dill.

Lee Miller lived a life immersed in images, from her father's dark room to her own illustrious career as a photographer and journalist. As a beautiful young woman in 1927, she was photographed by Edward Steichen for *Vogue* magazine and *Vanity Fair*. In 1928, she left America for the heady haute couture of Paris, where she became a student, model, collaborator, and lover of surrealist photographer Man Ray – and the subject of many of his famous images. Miller contributed to the development of Man Ray's famous solarizing technique, and he immortalized her lips in the painting *Observatory Time – The Lovers* (1934) and her eye in *Indestructible Object* (1929). She also starred in Jean Cocteau's film *Le Sang D'Un Poète*.

An excellent and astute photographer in her own right, Miller's career developed steadily amid numerous love affairs. Man Ray was devastated when in 1934 she married an Egyptian businessman and moved to Cairo, where she photographed the countryside. One photograph, *Portrait of Space* (1937), was said to have inspired Magritte's painting *Le Baiser*. After three years, Miller returned to Europe and the artists' circle that inspired her social and aesthetic creativity. She was painted by Picasso (*Portrait of Lee Miller*, 1937), as well as by her second husband, Roland Penrose. She photographed Charlie Chaplin, Colette, Max Ernst, and the circle of artists and writers who were her friends. All the while, the war was developing in Europe.

Miller was working as a fashion photographer for *Vogue* when she began to photograph scenes of the Blitz in England and ultimately applied



Lee Miller, self
portrait, 1932

for military accreditation as a war correspondent. Her photographs and vivid written descriptions of the Front became regular features in *Vogue* throughout the war and its aftermath. She was there for the liberation of Paris and in the camps at Dachau, and travelled through Austria and Hungary chronicling the war's human and physical destruction.

After the war, Miller became ill and turned increasingly to alcohol, although she continued to take specific photographic assignments, largely of artists. Her last work was on *Antoni Tàpies* in 1973; she died in 1977 in Britain.

Lee Miller was a muse to many, but it is as an artist and journalist that she left her mark. The "indestructible eye" that haunted Man Ray also chronicled an era of creativity and destruction in the mid-century. Miller's practice was informed by the artistry she developed during her early years with the surrealists and with photographers such as Edward Steichen. One photograph, *Tanja Ramm under a glass dome*, 1931, may have been inspired

by an earlier self-portrait by Claude Cahun, who was the subject of another exhibition at Presentation House Gallery in 1998. Miller's intense involvement in life, and her facility with the tools of her trade, led to her unflinching documentation of the war, which is unrivaled in its concise, head-on account of the horrors of WWII. Her images have left an indelible mark of this time on our collective memory. The exhibition is called and will include 96 photographs dating from approximately 1929 to 1964.

Also on view will be the video *The Lives of Lee Miller* by Antony Penrose, made for Channel 4 TV (UK) in 1986. On Saturday, January 15, at 2 pm, Tony Penrose will give a lecture titled *Lee Miller: Muse and Surrealist Artist*. Penrose is the son of Lee Miller and Roland Penrose. He is the author of the highly acclaimed definitive biography of Lee Miller; the director and producer of a documentary on Miller for Channel 4 TV (1988), and a cofounder of the Lee Miller Archive. A farmer, managing an