

Sam Haskins

Photographer / British / Born 1926, Died 2009 / Famous for: His books (esp. *Five Girls*, *Cowboy Kate*, *November Girl*, *African Image* and *Haskins Posters*), liberating nude photography from cliché, pre-photoshop multiple imagery, calendars (esp. for Pentax), a life long influence on visual thinking in fashion photography and as a master black and white printer.

This is a condensed Biography. For a full list of publication and exhibition dates see Sam's entry in Wikipedia:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sam_Haskins

The Wikipedia content is also available in German and Japanese.

A link to the unabridged version of this biography can be found on the 'About' page of Sam's blog:

<http://www.samhaskinsblog.com>

Sam Haskins was a British photographer born in South Africa in 1926. The final phase of his life as a photographer, from 2002, was spent with his wife Alida in Australia after running a studio in London for 35 years. His career started with art studies in Johannesburg and in post-war London. He then operated what was probably the first independent commercial photography studio in South Africa. It was here, in a light industrial space in down town Johannesburg that Sam produced his four seminal, creative black and white books of the sixties; *Five Girls*, *Cowboy Kate*, *November Girl* and *African Image*.

Five Girls published in 1962 was a ground breaking contribution to the liberation of serious nude photography from its previously classical strictures. The girls were either friends, family or art students. Sam did of course work with top models but was famous for the natural 'IT girl' charm found in his unknown models.

Cowboy Kate became one of the style defining books of the sixties and remains to this day one of the most important black and white books of post war creative photography. Jonathan Heaf, writing as Senior Commissioning Editor at GQ Magazine said about *Cowboy Kate* "...one of the most recognisable and most referenced photographic books ever published" "every art director's shelf looks empty without it". *Cowboy Kate* won the prestigious Prix Nadar and went on to sell roughly a million copies worldwide. 'Kate' as the book is referred to, saw the first use of pure visual narrative in a creative photography book and was also the first to use (highly manipulated) grain as a conscious creative element in print making.

November Girl explored a melancholic theme of heartbreak and technically advanced the use of montage first explored in *Cowboy Kate*. Creatively this work laid the foundations for the complex in-camera multiple-imagery work done mainly in colour after Sam moved to his Chelsea studio in London.

African Image, published in 1968, was a passionate tribute (and farewell) to Africa, particularly the sub-Saharan tribal art. Andreas Feininger said, "African Image is the graphically most powerful picture book that I know..." *African Image* won a medal from the Israeli Museum for the best representation of a culture.

Sam moved to London in 1968 and in 1973 published *Haskins Posters* a highly successful large format book printed with images on one side of thin card allowing the pages to be removed and used as posters. *Haskins Posters* won two gold medals from the One Show in New York, one for photography and the other for book design.

Sam's position as both a mainstream photographer (taking straight photographs without montage techniques), and recognition as a creative graphic artist and illustrator, was made

explicit in 2001 when Graphis published its 'Masters of the 20th Century'. The book features Sam's work as one of only two photographers alongside contemporary graphic artists.

During the long years in London the main outlets for his creative photography were, four books - including *Photo Graphics* which won Kodak book of the year and also coined a term with the title which has since become widely used - and a "magic lantern" slide show with over 500 images synchronised to music with Sam operating the projector. He also made over 30 calendars for leading international clients, especially Pentax.

The slide show always reflected Sam's latest projects thus allowing him to maintain a dynamic dialogue with fellow visual professionals and photography fans around the world. This was pre-internet social networking with up to 2,000 people at a time looking at images on a big screen followed by Q&A sessions that sometimes continued late into the night.

In 2001 a serendipitous meeting in London led to a period of 6 years with many assignments for leading fashion magazines in London, New York, Paris, Tokyo and Sydney. Sam had never been a formal part of the fashion 'pack' but his work (especially *Cowboy Kate* and *November Girl*) had always been 'referenced' by fashion photographers and creative directors. He relished the fun of being 'discovered' by the fashion world in his mid seventies and the opportunity of working with a new generation of 21st century stylists, models and fashion editors.

From 2006 Sam once again turned his attention to books and exhibitions. First he re-published *Cowboy Kate* in a 'Director's Cut' edition in 2006. Then in the same year The National Portrait Gallery in Canberra held a retrospective show which included the first airing of Sam's portraits of other artists. From 2007 Sam, assisted by with his son and grandson, worked on 'Fashion Etcetera' a style oriented thematic slice through his archive. The book was published in September 2009 with an exhibition at Milk Gallery in Manhattan. *Fashion Etcetera* provides a unique and rich insight into a remarkable career that consistently created iconic images for five decades from the 60s. Sam suffered a stroke on the morning his exhibition opened in New York, September 19, 2009 and died on November 26th 2009.

While he is justly known as one of the great 20th century photographers of the nude, its a narrow definition of his contribution to the art. As a photographer Sam was moulded by the influences of his youth, which essentially characterise his work as being an escape to a beautiful, sensual world which is dynamic, imaginary, flirts with illusion and is designed to please the eye and amuse the mind. Sam's photography was unapologetically celebratory of women, beauty, art, nature, graphics, illustration, design and the raw pure magic of photography itself.