



# **Just look at me**

By Brent Gregston

A June Newton retrospective sheds light on the career of this gifted photographer



By any measure, June Browne Newton is a remarkable photographer. But her talent has been overshadowed by the flamboyant career of husband Helmut, the King of Kink.

A Paris retrospective offers the chance to appreciate the unique quality of her work. The pictures span four decades of advertising, fashion, nude and portrait photography. Among them are sensitive and soul-searching portraits of Catherine Deneuve, Charlotte Rampling, Versace, William Burroughs, Sting, Roy Lichtenstein and Robert Mapplethorpe.

June, who is now 89, gave up a promising acting career to move to Paris with Helmut. Her second career began thanks to his bout of flu on a June day in 1970. Because they needed the money, he sent her in his place to do a publicity shoot for Gitanes cigarettes. Adopting the pseudonym Alice Springs (the name of a city in her native Australia), she went on to create ads for Jean-Louis David and shoot fashion spreads for magazines like *Vogue*, *Marie Claire* and *Dépeche Mode*. By 1974, she had done her first cover for *Elle*. She began to receive commissions for portraits of the celebrities of her age: artists, actors, musicians and a who's who of the fashion world.



Despite a close working relationship with Helmut, to whom she was married from 1948 until his death in 2004, June or "Alice" is strikingly different from her husband in her approach to portraits. Her pictures are naturalistic and surprisingly intimate. Underlying them is a powerful rapport with her high-profile subjects. "I used all the acting skills I had to make people relax, dwell within themselves and just look at me," she explains. Helmut and his wife did not "compete" with each other and never shot the same subject together at a sitting. But they did sometimes shoot portraits of the same people with fascinating results. Helmut's Charlotte Rampling is a nude sex goddess drinking champagne on a table. June's Rampling is a real woman, not an enigma. Helmut said he was only jealous of one of June's works, her portrait of Graham Greene – a penetrating glimpse into the hidden life of a "fugitive of fate."

June/Alice is also a master of double portraits in which two subjects interact. These include Drew Barrymore and her mother and Yves Saint Laurent and his dog Hazel. Saint Laurent cradles Hazel in his arms like a baby, adding a surreal contrast to his perfect elegance and his otherwise perfect apartment so full of art it resembles a museum. In another dual portrait, Brigitte Nielsen, ex-wife of Sylvester Stallone, hefts her sleeping baby into the air like a dumbbell.

Where Helmut Newton provokes with porno chic, Alice Springs channels the power and aura of her subjects. The look of a girl inadvertently hoisting her skirt on a Paris street – she looks directly at you over her shoulder with a perplexed frown – holds your attention longer than any of Helmut's leggy blondes. When their models take their clothes off, the difference in style is even more revealing. Consider June's portrait of black model Pat Cleveland – so slender and tall she described herself as a "rag doll, no tits" – relaxing at the comptoir of a Paris bar, mostly naked. Nothing is staged or romanticized. And nothing could be further from Helmut's glossy world of flesh and fantasy.

"I can see the truth and simplicity in the portraits of Alice Springs," Helmut wrote in the introduction to the book they published together, *Us and Them*. "As for myself, I recognize the manipulation and editorializing in my photographs."

*The Alice Springs exhibit is on view until November 4 at the Maison Européenne de la Photographie, 5/7 Rue de Fourcy, fourth arrondissement, Paris, tel. 33.1.44.78.75.00, www.mep-fr.org*