

Ritts photos full of glamour, superstars

PARIS (AP) — You could say Herb Ritts has it easy. The celebrity photographer's address book would make most society hostesses weep with envy.

Although his pictures helped define the image-conscious '80s and '90s, his lens is more than a peephole into a world of big names and egos. It also distorts celebrities, sometimes stripping them of their mystique and turning the famous into the unfamiliar.

An exhibition of Ritts' work — his first in Paris — is on view at the Fondation Cartier until March. Some 15,000 people have seen the show since it opened in December.

Chance and connections propelled Ritts into the world of celebrity photography in the '70s. He got to know Richard Gere through someone who was dating the actor at the time.

A drive in the desert led to a flat tire and an impromptu photo session in a service station.

The result? A photo of a steamy Gere in a white vest, his arms over his head and a cigarette dangling from his mouth.

"I can't remember whether I told Richard to put his arms over his head or whether I just clicked when he stretched. And he really smoked a lot. He was like that, a handsome kid and very sexy," the Los Angeles-based photographer told Francois Quintin, associate curator at Fondation Cartier, in an interview for the show's catalog.

At the time, Gere was an unknown. A year later he was a star, and Ritts' photos were being used as publicity shots.

His access to celebrities, even at their most fragile moments, gives Ritts an edge. He has photographed Christopher Reeve, wired up and immobile in a high-tech wheelchair. In another photograph, Elizabeth Taylor is sporting a crew cut and the scar resulting from her brain surgery.

Ritts sometimes uses the camera to distort. Michelle Pfeiffer is posed as Cary Grant, almost unrecognizable with slicked-back black hair and sardonic smile. Glenn Close is pho-

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Francois Quintin
associate curator at Fondation Cartier

tographed in heavy stage makeup for her role in "Sunset Boulevard."

Demi Moore, shot with shaved head buried in outstretched arms, could be anyone.

The 100 black-and-white photographs on display include Madonna on the cover of her 1986 "True Blue" album; jazz great Dizzy Gillespie with exaggerated cheeks; and "Fred With Tires," a 1984 photo of a hunky, muscle-bound man lugging heavy tires.

"Ritts is not someone who attacks subjects in a direct, aggressive manner, but in a very glam, sugared manner. He deals with fundamental problems," Quintin said.

Supermodel Naomi Campbell is posed as a traditional pinup, her head coquettishly turned, legs outstretched.

"We look at her and are happy and forget that black women were never pinups," Quintin said. "In taking this photo, Ritts is very conscious of the fact that he is creating an image that has virtually no precedent."

Picasso name paints new autos

■ Director of Picasso Museum criticizes selling the name of the artist.

PARIS (AP) — Pots and pans in China, underwear in Southeast Asia, trucks in Chile, and now, a car from France. Hard to believe they're all Picassos.

In name only, of course. The Paris-based Picasso Estate, which represents the artist's heirs, spends millions yearly fighting the illicit use of what is arguably the most famous name in 20th century art.

Which is why many French were shocked when the estate gave its blessing — for a price it refused to reveal — to the new Citroen Xsara Picasso, a snappy, high-sitting town car billed as practical and fun to drive.

Putting the name to the car "is a strategic decision designed to prevent other companies from stealing the name and using it," said Claudia Andrieu, the Picasso Estate's legal adviser.

"It's the family's approach to battling fakes," she said in a telephone interview. "A do-nothing attitude leads to exploitation."

Some purists, however, are horrified by what they see as crass commercialism.

"Assimilating genius with a mass-produced consumer item is scandalous," wrote Picasso Museum director Jean Clair in the daily Liberation.

Clair said he was offended by Citroen's latest ad campaign, which depicts a tough-looking museum guard restraining a visitor from touching a nude bather in Picasso's "Figures au bord de la Mer" (Figures At the Shore).

The visitor then is presented a Picasso he can touch — the new

Xsara. Clair said the ad ridiculed the Picasso Museum, belittling the guards as they try to protect its priceless collection of Picasso masterpieces.

Comparing the museum employees' meager salaries to the hefty royalties earned by Picasso's heirs, he went on to question the family's motives for "selling their father's name even though their fortune appears to have sheltered them from need."

The Picasso Estate represents the interests of Claude and Paloma Picasso, the children of Francoise Gilot; Maya Picasso, the daughter of Marie-Therese Walter; and grandchildren Marina and Bernard Picasso, born to the artist's son, Paul.

Andrieu said the family was not offended by the ad and stood by its partnership with Citroen.

About 15 companies manufacturing products, including candles and lighters, have bought the rights to the name, but thousands more use it illegally, Andrieu said.

"There are underwear and inflatable dolls in Southeast Asia, trucks and spare parts in Chile, mobile homes in Britain and thousands of products in China alone," she said.

She said the family, with the notable exception of designer Paloma, who has developed her own line of beauty products and home furnishings, had no intention of turning Picasso into a brand name.

Andrieu said the family chose to work with Citroen because of the company's long-standing image of excellence in design.

"We're better off with a partner of our choice where we have a say in things," she said.

Citroen says polls showed that people associated "creativity, invention and modernity" with Picasso.

"Our polls show that name

recognition for Picasso is enormous, and that's what we wanted in launching the new model around the world," said Citroen spokesman Frederic Lepeytre.

The new Xsara Picasso also is more affordable than the real thing. Models cost between \$19,600-\$25,000.

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