



# Revolution in Paris

WORDS AND MAIN IMAGE: Geoff Brokate

IMAGES: Marilyn Stafford

The photography of Marilyn Stafford lay largely unnoticed for 30 years, an amazing thought when you consider Albert Einstein and Édith Piaf were among her subjects. But with fashion weeks around the world set for this month, we feature the images that portrayed a seismic shift in the life and styles of women around the world



PARIS  
48.8566 N  
2.3522 E

Marilyn Stafford's photographs depict a time when celebrity culture was finding its feet and fashion was shifting from elegant styling for the privileged few to ready-to-wear clothing for all.

Born in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1925, her photographic career began in New York in 1948, in surprisingly grand style, when friends making a documentary film about Albert Einstein asked if she would come along and take some shots of him. Stafford's friends taught her how to use their 35mm reflex camera in the back of the car.

While happy with her work that day, photography was never Stafford's first love. To her mind, her only career was as a performer, and she had soon moved to Paris, finding work as a singer. Unfortunately, it was a short-lived dream, and with her voice damaged while working at the Chez Carrère dinner club, she was left to consider photography as a rather more serious option.

Thankfully, Stafford had a knack of being in the right place at the right time, and while in Paris she met the

legendary photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson, the man who pioneered candid street photography. Cartier-Bresson took her under his wing, providing Stafford with a priceless mentorship.

The beauty of her work was to fuse changing fashions with changing attitudes. During the 1950s, Parisian high fashion was set aside for the wealthy elite and featured stunning pieces shot in glamorous locations. But Stafford recognised the shift towards ready-to-wear and department store garments, freeing the models from the confines of the studios and fashion shows and shooting them on the streets of Paris.

By the mid-1960s she found herself in London, where the counter-culture movement was having a huge impact on

**"I REMEMBER ONE WOMAN WAS PUSHED TO THE GROUND OUTSIDE THE SHOW, THE TICKET WAS SNATCHED FROM HER HAND AND THEY JUST CALMLY WALKED IN ON HER TICKET. IT WAS BRUTAL"**



the fashion industry. She went to work documenting the birth of British counter-culture, where life was transformed and pop culture born.

Stafford's photographic career wasn't simply confined to fashion and portraiture either. Believing herself to be more of a documentary-style photographer, she travelled the world covering humanitarian issues and raising awareness. During the 1950s and '60s, she highlighted the plight of Algerian refugees as well as of life in Lebanon.

Now 92, Stafford is dedicated to making the photography world a more fair and equal place for female photographers, and has launched the Marilyn Stafford FotoReportage Award, which funds women photographers to document the major social or environmental issues of our times.

"I have always felt that photography is a medium to help make the world a better place rather than a way to earn a living," she says. "Wherever possible I have tried to take the kind of photographs that would bring people's attention to issues and, possibly, show solutions."



**In front of a Louvre sign**

"This photograph was taken at a bus stop. I wanted a background that represented Paris and the reference to the Louvre does that. The model is wearing a garment that was referred to as The Little Chanel Suit. Chanel is very famous for liberating woman's bodies from the restrictive clothing that had gone before. This skirt, instead of being very tight, was slightly flared, so you could walk in it. If you look at the model she is standing in a very artificial way, women don't stand like that, but she knows her craft and she's trying to show you the qualities and some details of the garment.

"The work was very demanding, I worked long hours. After the shoots I had to go to the labs to develop the negatives into the night to send out to editors who were expecting the photos the next day. At times I had to send them by plane, I would have to drive out to the airport for an overnight delivery.

"Covering a fashion show can be like a war zone. The reason for that is people will kill each other to get in. I remember one woman who worked for *The New York Times*, she was pushed down at the entrance, with her ticket in her hand. While she was lying on the ground somebody came and snatched the ticket from her and just went in with it. I mean, it's brutal."

**Édith Piaf**

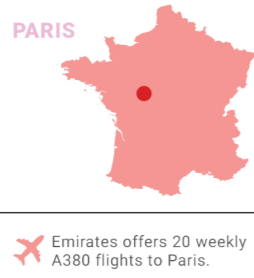
"Soon after arriving in Paris in the early 1950s, I found a job singing with a small music ensemble at Chez Carrere, an exclusive dinner club off the Champs-Élysées. It was the only club that Princess Elizabeth and Prince Philip had been permitted to attend while on an earlier visit to Paris. I was joined on stage by a male American singer who soon became the *beau* of Piaf. Each night after her performance at a theatre nearby she came to collect him, accompanied by an entourage of friends. I was invited to join them and spent many hours in her company. As I was not yet a working photographer, these few pictures are memories of that lovely yet unpredictable time.

"I had never thought of taking photographs of Piaf. I doubt she would have agreed to it if I had. However, one day we all went together to The Grand Hotel for tea and I ended up taking some photos of her. It was very spur of the moment and I think that's why it happened. I wasn't really thinking as a photographer as I pressed the shutter but I have it all anyway – it's in my memory."



**TALKING FASHION**  
Know your label

BRAND	PRONUNCIATION
HERMÈS	"err-mez"
YVES SAINT LAURENT	"eve-san-law-run"
GIVENCHY	"ji-vaughn-she"
CARTIER	"car-tee-yay"
MOSCHINO	"moss-kino"



**With children in Montmartre**

"I'm oriented toward documentary photography and I love the streets of Paris, so I thought let's take the model and her clothes into the street and photograph them in the places I love.

"This photograph simply started as a street scene as I liked this sign in Montmartre. I wasn't thinking consciously that I was going to use children in this shot, but before long they came over as they were curious and wanted to see what was going on. They were open and playful and naturally began interacting with the model. I just went with it.

"This was the '50s and we didn't have a crew with stylists and make-up, just the model and me. It was very down to earth. The model would get dressed and put on her own make-up before we left.

"You don't have to take fashion so seriously, although you can't say that explicitly because it's big business. As far as I'm concerned I'm playing around with the seriousness of fashion. That's why I took the clothes from the studios and fashion shows to bring it out onto the street, where it belonged."



**Joanna Lumley**

"London throughout the 1960s was an interesting period for clothing. I think of Mary Quant, Vidal Sassoon and other young designers who were creating wonderful new clothes. There was the mini-skirt, of course, bobbed hair and people were walking around in jeans. Traditional formality had simply been swept away.

"My aesthetic was grainy black and white images because I didn't have lights or flash. I think it gives a certain feeling and mood, that's what made my work stand out.

"This photo came about as I was working for a very large New York fashion paper and the story was on one of England's most important fashion designers, Jean Muir. The paper was doing an article on Muir and her new collection. At that time Joanna Lumley was one of Muir's best house models. Lumley was young, beautiful and easy to photograph. She went on to become a very successful British actress and has stood up for many humanitarian causes. She continues to inspire – and is still very beautiful."

**Biba**

"Biba began as a tiny boutique in Kensington owned by Barbara Hulanicki and her brand went on to become an important symbol of swinging London. Biba is well known for beautiful clothes and were one of the first to make designer clothes accessible to the public. They eventually opened up a huge department store on Kensington High Street and the interior was spectacular. It was Art Nouveau décor with added psychedelic wallpaper.

"I adore this photo, it's my all-time favourite. So much is happening that you actually have to take the time to look at it in order to see the different aspects. The model is in the foreground wearing her designer clothes with a coat that blends into the wall perfectly.

In the mirror is reflected another model, she's wearing a brown lace dress that Biba was famous for. Meanwhile, two dogs are asleep on one of the designer garments surrounded by chaos. In the background there is a very bored sales girl with an ironing board, smoking a cigarette. I guess it reveals some of the truth behind the glossy image of the fashion industry." ✕



**Twiggy**

"By the late 1960s Twiggy had become a British cultural icon and was landing covers for all the major fashion magazines. If I remember correctly, in 1967 she was voted British Woman of the Year. She went on to try acting, singing and even fashion design but in the end she is remembered not for what she did but for who she was.

"Twiggy (real name Lesley Lawson) was very sweet and young, like a little kitten. She had big eyelashes and was wafer thin. She set a precedent for contemporary supermodels and was a forerunner of the androgynous look that is so popular now. She was incredible at promoting herself.

Now we are used to women putting themselves into the limelight with people like the Kardashians and Paris Hilton, but at the time she was a totally new sensation.

"This photo was taken at a press call in a workroom at a fashion house in London. She was giving interviews about Twiggy being Twiggy. There were a lot of photographers there and I was sitting on the floor, being crushed among the other photographers. That's why that shot was taken from a low angle."

