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GAGOSIAN GALLERY

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Big picture
Women,
by Richard
Avedon

Hannah Booth



PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF GAGOSIAN GALLERY, NEW YORK. STYLING: HANNAH BOOTH. HAIR: JEFFREY MATTHEWS. MAKEUP: JILL BLACK. SET STYLING: HANNAH BOOTH. © THE ESTÉE LAUDER FOUNDATION

Models rarely stayed still for Richard Avedon. They leapt across the page, as Jean Shrimpton did in 1970 in an ethereal dress by Pierre Cardin (far right). Or they defied gravity, as Veruschka does in this 1967 picture (right), floating *en pointe* as her Bill Blass dress billows around her.

In return, he adored them. Of Veruschka, he once said, “Her skin is litmus paper for her feelings. She’s all made up and ready and, as we sit together, her skin gets very warm in colour, and then suddenly it drains. The second the colour leaves her face, I know she’s ready to work.”

For Avedon, models weren’t static beauties; they were athletic, full of energy and movement. One of his favourite models of the 1950s, Suzy Parker, once said, “He’s the most wonderful man in the business, because he realises that models are not just coat-hangers.”

Avedon started working for Harper’s Bazaar in 1945, where he remained for 20 years before defecting to Vogue along with the magazine’s new editor, Diana Vreeland. He stayed there until 1988, carving out a parallel career in political and social reportage. He documented the emerging civil rights movement in the American south, and photographed students and activists during the Vietnam war.

Avedon always worked to one side of, rather than behind, the camera, a means of encouraging dialogue between photographer and subject. In his eyes, the two were equals: “If each photograph steals a bit of the soul, isn’t it possible that I give up pieces of mine every time I take a picture?”

Avedon: Women is at the Gagosian Gallery, London W1, until next Saturday; gagosian.com for details.