

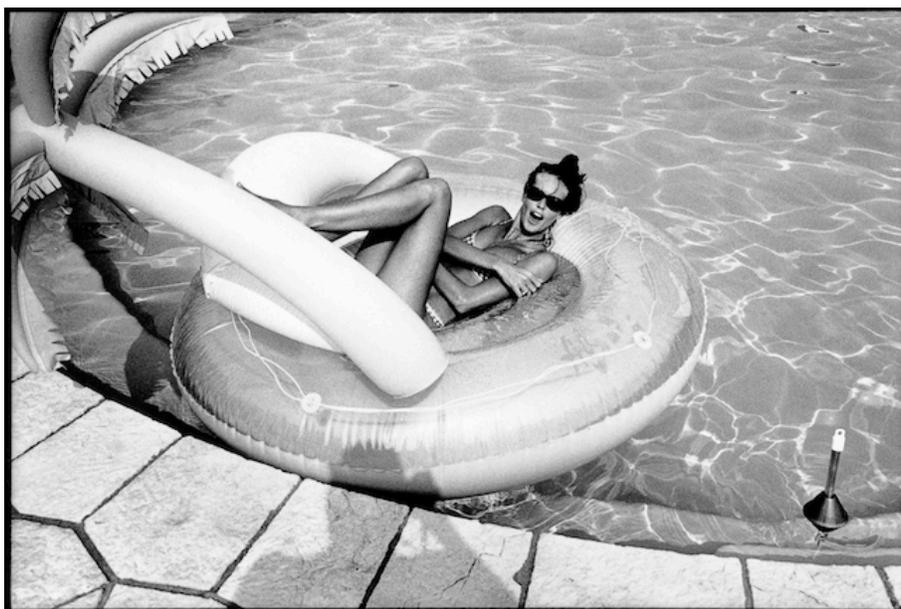
GAGOSIAN GALLERY

ARTTERRITORY

The Pool as a Fire

Jean Pigozzi's book, "Pool Party: Sixty Years at the World's Most Famous Pool"

Una Meistere



Jean Pigozzi. Elle Macpherson, 1991. Archival pigment print, 20 x 24 inches (50.8 x 61 cm). Edition of 15, plus 3 APs. © Jean Pigozzi. Courtesy of Gagolian Gallery

“I see the symbol of the pool as a place where people used to settle around the fire. It’s a central focus of fun activities, where people are very relaxed, tell stories, jump in the pool and have a good time. That’s why I did this book, it’s completely based around the pool, and only around the pool,” says Jean Pigozzi – photographer, art collector, philanthropist and one of today’s most extravagant characters on the contemporary art scene – when asked by Arterritory.com what is it about swimming pools that fascinates him, and could they be seen as a symbol of hedonism.

Rizzoli Publications has just released Pigozzi's book, “Pool Party: Sixty Years at the World’s Most Famous Pool”, while New York’s Gagolian Gallery has opened the doors to the exhibition “Johnny’s Pool” (through May 28). The book is a collection of more than 100 photographs taken alongside Pigozzi's legendary “blue pool” at his Villa Dorane, on Cap d'Antibes. On the cover, supermodel Elle Macpherson carouses on an inflatable pool toy, while the pages within feature practically every show-business star of the 20th and 21st centuries: Sharon Stone, Naomi Campbell, Mick Jagger, Michael Douglas, Jack Nicholson, Robert de Niro, Helmut Newton, Swifty Lazar, Jane Fonda, Elizabeth Taylor, Mick Jagger, Julian Schnabel, Larry Gagolian, Woody Allen, and even Bono, who writes in the book's introduction: “Villa Dorane seemed like a chapter F. Scott Fitzgerald didn’t live long enough to write, but you know he would.” Some of

the featured celebrities still lounge in Pigozzi's pool come summer, while others have, sadly, already gone to the great blue swimming pool in the sky.

Pigozzi has been taking pictures of his guests since the 1970s, and calls the swimming pool his “little sister” – a source of inspiration, a confidante, and a witness to life's most colorful moments. It's where he learned to swim, and if you believe the mythology, it's also the spot where he experienced his first kiss.

Villa Dorane was built in 1953 by his father, the founder of the automobile company Simka, the year after Jean was born. The swimming pool, however, was installed under Jean's directive, and like all of the furnishings in the villa, was designed by the acclaimed architect Ettore Sottsass. When Jean's father died, Jean was just twelve years old. He came to his inheritance upon reaching the age of 21, which erased, for life, any existential prose from his daily schedule. During his school years, he was accused of everything, including laziness. Nevertheless, he was admitted to Harvard.

When Pigozzi was diagnosed with dyslexia as a child, he began to record his daily life through photographs; and he has been hitched to the camera ever since. Considering that he spends his days in the orbit of glamor, he has become one of the premier photographers of the elite way of life in his times. Pigozzi calls his photographs “sophisticated snapshots”, and can often be seen in them himself.

By all means, the swimming pool has always been a powerful sign of popular culture. Glamorous, enticing, and at the same time, a bit unnerving, it has often been the stage for some of life's darker passions. Pronouncing his love for California, in the 1960s David Hockney iconicized the swimming pool in a series of paintings (1964-1971). The artist was surprised to discover that in California, almost every house has an outdoor swimming pool; it's not a luxury item as it is in Great Britain, where it's too cold to use them year-round. As Hockney remarked: “Water in swimming pools changes its look more than in any other form... its color can be man-made and its dancing rhythms reflect not only the sky but, because of its transparency, the depth of the water as well. If the water surface is almost still and there is a strong sun, then dancing lines with the colors of the spectrum appear everywhere.” Having taken two weeks to make, the painting “A Bigger Splash” (1967) is the central work of the series. “When you photograph a splash, you're freezing a moment and it becomes something else. I realize that a splash could never be seen this way in real life, it happens too quickly. And I was amused by this, so I painted it in a very, very slow way,” Hockney would later write.

Reflections of Hockney's work can be seen in the film “Bad Education” (2004), by Spanish director Pedro Almodóvar, but it is directly referenced in last year's film “A Bigger Splash”, by Luca Guadagnino, and starring the uniquely luminous Tilda Swinton. In the film's refined visual presence, scenography, and plot-line, it is the swimming pool that becomes the central touchstone – in turns both testifying to its hedonistic status, and framing the story's points of culmination. The pool truly is a magical communal space in and around which the main characters assemble in the beginning of the film – flaunting elegant clothing and sunglasses from the House of Dior – and again at the end, when the pool is at the center of tragedy.

Other cinema classics featuring swimming pools are the Jacques Deray film “La Piscine” (1969), starring Romy Schneider and Alain Delon, and its eventual remake by François Ozon (“Swimming Pool”, 2003), featuring Charlotte Rampling and Ludivine Sagnier.

In the 1941 film “Two-Faced Woman”, the swimming pool scene reveals a completely different Greta Garbo – one made of flesh and blood, wearing a swimsuit and a rubber swim-cap. In literature, there is no more iconic swimming pool as the one described in F. Scott Fitzgerald's “The Great Gatsby” (1925). The pool becomes to Jay Gatsby a symbol of his illusory dreams coming true, and at the same time, of their coming to an end.

Ah, yes, there's also at least one song (and probably more) about a swimming pool – “Pull Marine” (1983), by the French bard Serge Gainsbourg, which is sung by Isabelle Adjani as she wears her favorite navy sweater...

And now Pigozzi's swimming pool has officially been added to this list of “famous pools in popular culture”. Except, of course, for the fact that his pool is not a stage set, nor a figment of someone's imagination or literary vision; it is a part of reality. It's a snapshot that has been transformed into both a work of art and a sign of the times. Its subjects are just simply there (albeit in a very vibrant way).

Ironically, along with celebrity hot-shots and VIPS, some of the most colorful paddlers in Pigozzi's pool are inflatable animals. As he told the *The Wall Street Journal* with a chuckle: “I couldn't afford to have a \$30 million Koons in the pool, so I got these.” Looking at Pigozzi's images of his floating pool toys, one could dispute who is best at transforming playthings into icons...