

VISUAL STUDIES RESEARCH INSTITUTE

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SPRING 2025 EVENTS

USC-LACMA History of Photography Seminar



Lee Miller: A Photographer at Work (1932-1945)

GAËLLE MOREL, PH.D.

Curator, Exhibitions and Public Engagement, The Image Centre, Toronto

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 26

5:30-7:00pm PST

SOS 250

The diminishment of women within the history of photography has largely been due not only to systemic misogyny, but also to their traditional exclusion from legitimate forms of professional recognition. During the early years of the medium, women practicing photography were typically classified as amateurs and passive consumers enjoying a feminine pastime. Since then, historians and fellow photographers have recognized women primarily as muses or models or positioned them as studio or darkroom assistants or underlings in the retouching and colouring of prints, assembly of photographic albums, and the selling of images. Women's work has often been thus devalued or ignored completely.

Lee Miller, A Photographer at Work aims to redress this process of invisibilization by exploring the intense and productive professional life of American photographer Lee Miller (1907-1977). This important historical figure has long been celebrated for her career as a model, her photographic collaboration with American artist Man Ray, and her close ties to the Surrealist movement in the 1920s. However, between 1932 and 1945 Miller operated a remarkable photography business. She was a renowned portraitist running her own studio in New York (1932-1934); a photographer for perfume and cosmetic brands in advertising (1932-1945); and a fashion photographer and war correspondent for the British edition of *Vogue* (1939-1945).

This short time span encompasses a complex history in which Miller moved between and linked her various practices. Her diverse professional activities, and the ease with which she stepped from one context to another, reveal a practitioner whose work was defined primarily by its exchange and commercial value. *Lee Miller, A Photographer at Work* follows the inner dynamics of managing a career in photography amid the myriad challenges facing professional women at the time.

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