

Art and design

## Lawrence Schiller's best photograph: Marilyn Monroe

"You're going to make me famous," I said. "Photographers can be replaced," replied Marilyn'



Marilyn Monroe in 1962 ... Lawrence Schiller's best shot. Photograph: Laurence Schiller/1996-98 AccuSoft Inc. Click on image to enlarge.

### Interview by Sarah Phillips

The Guardian, Wed 30 May 2012 14.11 BST

I first photographed Marilyn Monroe in 1960. I was 23 and not yet a very good photographer. By 1962, when [Paris Match](#) magazine asked me to shoot her again, I had won awards and was better – but I had a bigger ego, too.

She was filming what would be her last movie, [Something's Got to Give](#). I read the screenplay in advance, and discovered that in one scene she would jump into a swimming pool and then pretend to have no clothes on. I saw Marilyn before the shoot and she was upset that she was getting \$100,000 for the movie while Elizabeth Taylor was getting more from the same studio. She said something like: "What would happen if I jumped in with a bathing suit on, and actually came out with nothing on?" Her press agent said: "You're kidding." She wasn't. I was cocky in those days and said: "You're already famous – now you're going to make me famous." "Photographers can always be replaced, Larry," she said.

When she jumped into the water with her bathing suit on, I looked at her as if she were an athlete. My adrenaline was going. She was moving so quickly there wasn't time to focus the camera, so I had to anticipate what she would do next. In a lot of my pictures of Marilyn, her body is always to one side, because I needed to have room for what she might do with the rest of the shot. This was always my

favourite. I still get a little laugh inside me when I look at it.

When the shoot was over, I rang the magazine and it hit me: wow, she did it! I realised at the same moment how desperate she was. When she had nothing left, to prove that she could still get more publicity than anybody else, out came the birthday suit again.

Marilyn approved certain pictures, and they went all over the world. I had no ethical qualms about that; she could have changed her mind. But **I had no sense of history** and threw the rest away.

She was fired from the film and died several months later. I couldn't believe it. I rushed to her house, then the mortuary and went into journalistic mode. I was there to capture events. A photographer owes it to history not to get emotionally involved. My 10-year-old daughter said of this picture, "It says everything but shows nothing." Even a child could work out the innocence and desperation it captures.

#### CV

**Born:** Brooklyn, New York, 1936.

**Studied:** Studied architecture and business in California. Self-taught photographer

**Influences:** [Yousuf Karsh](#), [W. Eugene Smith](#), [Elliott Erwitt](#)

**High point:** Becoming a filmmaker. I directed [The Executioner's Song](#), based on my interaction with a murder.

**Low point:** In 1990, I gambled all my money on a film about Chernobyl and lost everything, including my wife.

**Top tip:** Don't be like all the other monkeys. Find a way of expressing your own personality.

• **Lawrence Schiller is at [Walton Fine Arts, London SW3](#) until 23 June. [Marilyn & Me](#) is published by [Taschen](#).**

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