



IF ONLY THESE WALLS
COULD TALK

PHOTOGRAPHY BY

Maryam Eisler

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ESSAY CONTRIBUTIONS BY

BRANDEI ESTES & HELEN HO

Simon de Pury

My love story with Helmut Newton and with Photography started when I first saw the iconic image of Charlotte Rampling sitting on the edge of the table in suite 10 of Le Nord-Pinus in Arles. Newton's women are strong, self assured and certainly no wall flowers. Maryam Eisler is herself a strong and powerful lady. Her work is seductive and sensual. While she is revisiting Le Nord-Pinus, a legendary Hotel that is rich in history, like only the greatest artists, she transforms her inspiration into her truly own original version of the Sublime Feminine. I can't wait to go back to Le Nord-Pinus where the walls will talk more than ever! For this exhibition and book Maryam Eisler has created her most haunting and best work yet!

Simon de Pury
Auctioneer, art dealer, curator, photographer and DJ

FOREWORD

Brandei Estes

Having known Maryam for a number of years and sharing a passion for photography, I have always looked forward with great anticipation to her series and exhibitions; this homage to Le Nord-Pinus in Arles delivers in spades.

Centred around the fabled Nord-Pinus hotel, Maryam explores the masculine and feminine tensions that the city has seen and lived over centuries. From Pablo Picasso's beloved bullfighters to Helmut Newton's erotically charged iconic 1973 portrait of Charlotte Rampling in Suite 10, Maryam's work is inspired but equally singular in vision. Through her lens and this body of work, we are presented with a female gaze that is very much her own; not so much challenging the male gaze that has come before her but adding her own distinct chapter to the multi-storied hotel.

The Sublime Feminine has been a constant protagonist in all of Maryam's work; from the Catskills to the American West, Carmel to Mexico and Capri to Arles to name a few of the locations Maryam has travelled to for her craft, her interest and representation of the strength, beauty and sensuality of the female form is always at the forefront. Here the works are equally playful and sensual; much like the hotel and the city themselves.

An inspired and yet totally singular body of work clearly rooted in photographic, artistic and cultural references, Maryam's series is a joy to behold that I hope you enjoy as much as I do.

Brandei Estes
Sotheby's, Director, Head of Photographs, EMEA
London, June 2022

THE LEGEND REVISITED

Maryam Eisler

Oh, but for the joys of meandering through corridors and spaces once trodden by the greats of art, culture, music, entertainment and literature. If only the walls in these unpretentious spaces could talk!

What would they say of Le Nord-Pinus?

Now almost mythical in its historiography, this grand hostelry which once lodged Napoleon III overnight on June 3rd 1856, is based in one of Arles's oldest squares, *La Place du Forum*, still anchored deep in its Roman origins. Today, Le Nord-Pinus boasts the ghostly presence of some of the greats such as Picasso, Cocteau, Callas, Chaplin and Hemingway. The hotel just happens to be located next to the *Café du Forum*, outside of which Van Gogh famously painted at night, aided solely by the light of gas lamps, his now renowned '*Terrasse du Café le Soir*', in mid-September 1888.

My own foray to Le Nord-Pinus occurred in Autumn of 2021, centred around photography and post-pandemic creative escapism. Chasing iconic spirits in and around the locations, with Suite 10 featuring high on my wish list. This particular room overlooks the square, viewed through the beautiful *fer forgé* terrace railings, themselves sanctified in contemporary photographic history by Helmut Newton's soul-stirring 1973 shoot with Charlotte Rampling in the very same suite in which famed bullfighters (like Dominguin) geared-up for a date with fate.

Can you hear the roar of the crowds? Do you see Rampling holding that empty wine glass exposed to Newton's gaze, sat in front of that very same mirror, lit-up by its ornate Empire ormolu console? And those wrought iron beds, stamped with their emblematic NP! Now just imagine my excitement, like a kid in a candy store, having been granted the privilege to repeat those vivid moments in a different time and with a new visual narrative. Not in replication or duplication of the Master,

but rather, to explore and to expand on the subject of 'La Femme', in the Now.

The 'Sublime Feminine' and its poetic manifestation, both visual and conceptual, has been at the centre of my photographic odyssey since I first began my adventures in this art form. As to Vogue's December 1974 issue featuring Newton's take on Rampling, followed by a further shoot, more personal in nature and less editorially prescribed, led to her divination as the "sexiest woman of the seventies". I balked at the idea of stepping on such hallowed ground, but given the opportunity, I could not resist; perhaps I was even subliminally attracted by both the challenge and the fear.

It must be said that Le Nord-Pinus's photographic accolades do not begin nor do they end with Newton. Peter Lindbergh often stayed at the hotel. Peter Beard and Marella Oppenheim traced Vincent Van Gogh's footsteps in 1984, the very year Lucien Clergue set up the *Rencontres d'Arles*, soon to become one of the world's leading exposes of the art of photography – if not the best. Beard was so moved by space and place that he left his personal mark with a beautiful hand-written fresco worked into the cornice of the hotel's lobby.

Perhaps the last word on the mythical cultural importance of Le Nord-Pinus should be left to fashion designer Christian Lacroix who wrote: '*Le Nord-Pinus belongs to the memory of every Arlesian... To me, back as a child, it was the temple of the quintessential summer holiday, of high society, and of course, of bullfighting. Starting from the Place du Forum but never leaving it, it was like a voyage of discovery and adventure towards Paris, Spain, the world. Images of Lucia Bose and of Dominguin in white and gold suits spring to mind, or of Cocteau and Picasso in black capes...*'

Well, you can imagine the challenges I faced under such rarefied circumstance? I'm hoping (fingers crossed) the results bear up to the commands of exaltation in my pursuit of trying to define the various angles of the Sublime Feminine, always strong and powerful, but also sensual.

Maryam Eisler
Arles, August 2022

'When the Good Lord begins to
doubt the world,
He remembers that
He created Provence.'

Frédéric Mistral

IS HISTORY EVER BLACK & WHITE?

Helen Ho

If *Only These Walls Could Talk* marks a return to black and white photography for Maryam Eisler. Where dazzling, kaleidoscopic colours in her *Once Upon a Turquoise Past* series serve to perfectly reflect the exotic glamour of pre-revolutionary Iran (Maryam's birthplace), this new series captures the mythical beauty and historical richness of Le Nord-Pinus in Arles through a magical dance between light and shade.

Hotel as muse

It would be impossible to overstate the social, cultural, and artistic importance of Le Nord-Pinus, having played host to countless artists and luminaries since it first opened its doors. Overlooking another of Arles' iconic landmarks (Van Gogh's Le Café de La Nuit), the Hotel represents a place of fantasy and dreams – a mecca for historians and artists alike.

Frédéric Mistral, winner of the 1904 Nobel Prize in Literature, acclaimed poet and Provençal philologist (whose statue stands proudly outside Le Nord-Pinus) wrote, "*Le soleil semble se coucher dans un verre de Tavel aux tons rubis irisés de topaze. Mais c'est pour mieux se lever dans les coeurs.*"

It is this iridescent light that has captured the heart (and soul) of Maryam, and inspired her since childhood, having spent many wonderful, carefree summers in Arles with her grandparents and parents while growing up in Paris. In many ways, these happy, colourful memories are the fundamental inspiration for this new series.

The aesthetics of these works are very much centred around French culture in the 70's. It was a time of true intellectual freedom and creativity thrives on freedom, as evidenced in the music, film, and fashion of that era. Sensual beauty was simply appreciated on its own terms. The two dancer-models featured in Maryam's photographs were specifically chosen for their classical attributes, in the style of Catherine Deneuve and Brigitte Bardot, who continue to be the very definition of French beauty, elegance, and feminine strength.

Suite 10

If only these walls could talk...

One of the most recognised and celebrated photographs by Helmut Newton is that of Charlotte Rampling in front of the Hotel's ornate console mirror; as Newton himself recounted, "[It was] taken in the best room of the hotel on the night of 19th of October 1973".

Now known fondly by the French as "La Légende", English actress Charlotte Rampling has been a muse to designers and filmmakers for over sixty years. A model of the Swinging Sixties, she soon became synonymous with the classic French style after appearing in a "Le Smoking" velvet tuxedo designed by Yves Saint Laurent in 1974.

Originally intended for *Vogue's* December 1974 issue, Newton's photograph of Rampling was shown at his first solo exhibition in Paris in the spring of 1975. Instantly recognisable for its grainy, almost film-like quality, Newton always portrayed women as beautiful yet strong, stylish, confident, and completely in control. Indeed, these images represent a celebration of the Sublime Feminine.

In sharp contrast to the seductive power of Newton's photographs, the walls of Suite 10 also witnessed a very different, masculine display of strength – that of bullfighters such as the celebrated Luis Miguel Dominguín as they waved to a cheering crowd from the suite's balcony.

Following the footsteps of such illustrious company was a challenging experience; but for Maryam, it was about absorbing the creative energy of the space and imparting her own vision of Suite 10.

Body architecture

The French word *les courbes* refers to curving lines in architecture and interiors; it is also often used to describe the graceful curves of the female form. Exemplifying this aesthetic are two works in particular – "Avec le Temps" and "Quand les Cheveux s'étaient", where the dynamic tension between figure and setting is palpable.

A distinctive feature that has prevailed throughout Maryam's *oeuvre* is her pursuit of the essence of form

and the dichotomous tensions within a visual field. Black and white photography lends itself perfectly to her skill in manipulating light and shade, allowing her to distil figures into abstract but emotive shapes, or what she calls "body architecture".

Hardly surprising then, to see this characteristic played out in full force against the stunning backdrop of intricate wrought ironwork, twinkling chandelier lights, Mediterranean tiles, and ornate furniture.

Yin & Yang

As one marvels at the colourful history emanating from the walls of Le Nord-Pinus, it is impossible to avoid being confronted by the region's other legacy – its deep-seated love of bullfighting. Vintage *corrida* posters along corridors lead the way into the Hotel's bar where photographs of Picasso at the arena highlight the modern master's own lifelong passion for bullfighting.

Ernest Hemingway famously wrote, "*Bullfighting is the only art in which the artist is in danger of death and in which the degree of brilliance in the performance is left to the fighter's honour.*"

A photography series in Arles would hardly be complete without featuring a sport that has captivated so many generations of artists, poets, and writers, not to mention its indelible link to the region's identity.

Of all the works in this series, only nine are in colour and three of them are set in the arena. As the dominant colour, red is symbolic on many levels – life & death, yin & yang. Red is the colour of passion and danger. In the

aply titled "Seule Dans L'Arène du Monde", a female figure stands alone in the centre of the vast arena. This placement of a lone female model against a hostile background can be traced back to Maryam's *Searching for Eve in the American West* series. Despite her solitude and apparent vulnerability, the viewer is never really concerned for her safety. Instead, it is her fortitude that shines through most clearly.

La Reine d'Arles

Any study of Arles' cultural identity would be remiss without mentioning *La Reine d'Arles*. The first Queen was crowned on 30th March 1930 to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the birth of Frédéric Mistral. Every three years, a new Queen is elected with the coronation ceremony taking place at Le Nord-Pinus.

As an ambassadress for the region and guardian of Provençal culture, costume, and language, the Queen is selected based on her knowledge of the region, her demeanour and inner strength – all qualities of the Sublime Feminine. In a special tribute to her iconic status, the reigning Queen of Arles, Camille Hoteman (elected in 2021), is featured in Maryam's version of "Les Trois Grâces" – a reference to the three goddesses in Greek mythology (Euphrosyne, Aglaia, and Thalia), and the personification of Faith, Hope and Charity.

If Only These Walls Could Talk is as much an homage to all the great artists and personalities who've passed through the hallowed grounds of Le Nord-Pinus as a continuation of Maryam's own artistic journey, exploring the theme of the Sublime Feminine.

Helen Ho
Exhibition curator
London, June 2022



Tu es en somme
Devant les hommes
Comme un soupir
Sur leur désir

'Emmanuelle' - Pierre Bachelet









*The woman is always
more important
than the clothes.*

Peter Lindbergh





*'The last thing left in nature
is the beauty of women'*

Peter Beard



Tu es comme le vent qui fait
chanter les violons
Et emporte au loin le parfum des roses

'Paroles Paroles' — Alain Delon & Dalida





*It's that I don't like white paper backgrounds.
A woman does not live in front
of white paper.
She lives on the street,
in a motorcar,
in a hotel room.*

Helmut Newton



Tu n'est qu'un fumeur de gitanes
et la dernière je veux
La voir briller au fond de mes yeux

'Dieu Fumeur de Havanes' - Serge Gainsbourg





Then Helmut said,

"Could I come to this fantastic room,
where the matadors dressed.
Could I take an hour of your life?"

So I threw all my whats
to the wind.

Charlotte Rampling on Helmut Newton

Sur la plage abandonnée
Coquillages et crustacés
Qui l'eût cru! Déplorent la perte de l'été
Qui depuis s'en est allé
On a rangé les vacances
Dans des valises en carton
Et c'est triste quand on pense à la saison
Du soleil et des chansons

La Madrague - Brigitte Bardot







*Bullfighting is the only art in which
the artist is in danger of death and
in which the degree of brilliance
in the performance is left
to the fighter's honour.*

Ernest Hemingway



*'Every act of creation
is first of all
an act of destruction'*

Pablo Picasso









*Elle a dû faire toutes les guerres
Pour être si forte aujourd'hui
Elle a dû faire toutes les guerres
De la vie, et l'amour aussi*

'Je l'aime à mourir' – Francis Cabrel



*Viens, je t'emmène
Derrière le miroir de l'autre côté
Viens, je t'emmène
Au pays du vent, au pays des fées
J'ai tellement fermé les yeux
J'ai tellement rêvé
Que j'y suis arrivée*

'Viens je t'emmène' - France Gall





*Elles sont toutes
Belles belles belles
comme le jour*

'Belles belles belles' – Claude François

*Tu es la vague,
moi l'île nue*

'Je t'aime moi non plus' – Serge Gainsbourg & Jane Birkin







Et même si nos raisons nous séparent
Même si l'on vit cet amour comme un art
Même si parfois on fait semblant d'y croire
Autant le vivre même un peu

'Je ne veux qu'elle' - Marc Lavoine



*À faire flamber des enfers dans tes yeux
À faire jurer tous les tonnerres de Dieu
À faire dresser tes seins et tous les Saints
À faire prier et supplier
nos mains, je vais t'aimer*

'Je vais t'aimer' - Michel Sardou





Quand tes cheveux s'étalent
Comme un soleil d'été
Et que ton oreiller
Ressemble aux champs de blé
Quand l'ombre et la lumière
Dessinent sur ton corps
Des montagnes, des forêts
Et des îles aux trésors

'Que j't'aime' - Johnny Hallyday





Caramels, bonbons et chocolats
Par moments, je ne te comprends pas
Merci, pas pour moi mais tu peux bien
les offrir à une autre
Qui aime le vent et la parfum des roses
Moi les mots tendres enrobés de douceur
Se posent sur ma bouche,
mais jamais sur mon cœur

'Paroles, Paroles' - Alain Delon & Dalida

Suis-je la fleur de lune
Ou bien l'eau qui dort ?
Je suis née dans une brume
Là où le vent vient du nord
Suis-je l'herbe sauvage
Ou le ciel de pluie ?
Viens te prendre à mon mirage
Te noyer dans mes yeux gris

'Fleur de Lune' - Françoise Hardy





Avec ta robe longue tu ressemblais
À une aquarelle de Marie Laurencin
Et je me souviens, je me souviens très bien
De ce que je t'ai dit ce matin-là
Il y a un an, y a un siècle, y a une éternité

'L'Été indien' - Joe Dassin

Avec le temps

*Avec le temps, va, tout s'en va
L'autre qu'on adorait,*

*qu'on cherchait sous la pluie
L'autre qu'on devinait au détour d'un regard
Entre les mots, entre les lignes et sous le fard
D'un serment maquillé
qui s'en va faire sa nuit
Avec le temps tout s'évanouit*

'Avec le temps' - Léo Ferré





'Poble d'Arles, veici ta Reino'

Mayor of Arles, 2021





Fin



*Enchantée de Faire Votre
Connaissance*



Il Etait Une Fois, Le Nord-Pinus



Elle Danse



A La Une



Les Confitures



La Courbe de Tes Yeux



Entre-Aperçue



La Magicienne



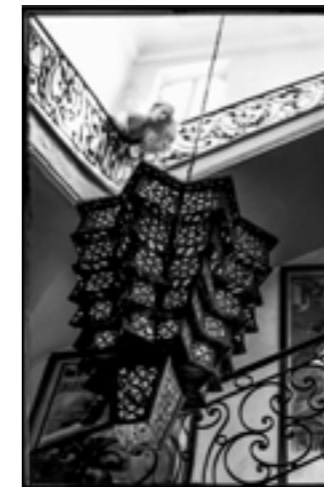
Une Belle Histoire



Rêveries



Les Secrets



Elle et Le Chandelier



Knock Knock



*J'ai Fumé Des Blondes,
Des Brunnes*



Face à Toi



Sur Une Plage Abandonnée



Que C'est Bon



Huitres, Coquillages et Crustacés



La Révélation



Perdu Dans Ses Pensées



Seule Dans L'Arène Du Monde



Autant En Emporte Le Vent



Tango Dans L'Arène



Elles et Lui



Un Instant



La Lionne



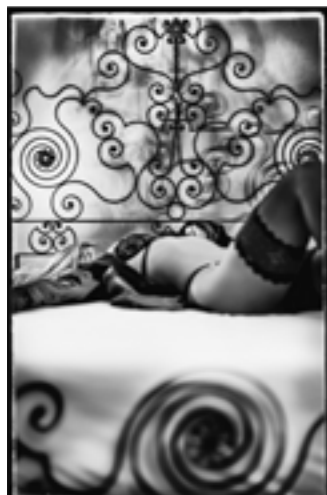
La Danseuse



Dos à Dos



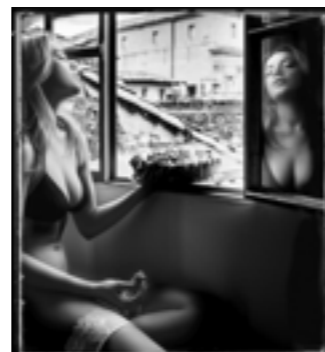
*Belles, Belles, Belles
Comme Le Jour*



Quand Les Cheveux s'Etalent



La Fumeuse de Gitanes



Caramels, Bonbons et Chocolats



De Derrière Le Rideau



Le Téléphone Sonne I



Le Téléphone Sonne II



Le Téléphone Sonne III



Elle s'Abandonne



Ta Robe Longue



Avec Le Temps



La Reine



Les Trois Grâces



Voyage, Voyage Eternellement

ABOUT THE ARTIST



Maryam Eisler is a London – based photographer and author. The crux of Maryam’s photographic work is centred around the Sublime Feminine.

Maryam has shown with Alon Zakaim Fine Art, Tristan Hoare, Linley, De Pury at Asprey, Catherine Prevost, Bermondsey Project Space, Bicester Village and Old Spitalfields Market in London, Harper’s Gallery and Richard Taittinger Gallery in New York, Space Gallery St Barth, FluxZone Gallery in Mexico City, Photo London and Eye of the Collector in London, Dallas Art Fair, Unseen Amsterdam, and Art Marbella.

Maryam is the Chief Contributing Editor to *LUX* magazine (Condé Nast); she has additionally contributed

photographically and editorially to *Vanity Fair*, *Harpers Bazaar Art*, *Harpers Bazaar Interiors* and *Vogue Arabia*.

Maryam’s book, *Voices: East London* for which she is both author and photographer was published in 2018. She has edited several other Thames and Hudson titles to include *Sanctuary: Britain’s Artists and their Studios*, *Art Studio America: Contemporary Artist Spaces* and *London Burning: Portraits from a Creative City* among many more.

Maryam sits on the advisory board of Photo London, is a judge of the Louis Roederer Photography Prize for Sustainability and is a nominator for the Prix Pictet.

Maryam is a graduate of Wellesley College and Columbia University.

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Les Maisons d’Arles

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All the staff at Le Nord-Pinus

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I would additionally like to thank Maja Hoffmann, Simon de Pury, Vassilis Oikonomopoulos, Les Arenes d’Arles, Marie Claude Robles and La Reine d’Arles, Camille Hoteman for their kind support of the project. Also a big thank you to our friends at Du Bar à l’Huitre for their hospitality.

Limited edition

/ 600



Spotify music compilation
If Only These Walls Could Talk



Video
If Only These Walls Could Talk

Published on the occasion of the exhibition *If Only These Walls Could Talk*,
at Alon Zakaim Fine Art, Cork Street, London. November, 2022

First published in an edition of
600 copies in the United Kingdom
by Maryam Eisler
www.maryameisler.com

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A CIP catalogue record of this book is available from the British Library.
ISBN: 978-1-8384374-1-1

www.maryameisler.com



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