

Michel Haddi's glossy portraits have made him the king of celebrity snappers. To celebrate a new book of his work, he tells **John Walsh** some of the stories behind his shots of the rich and famous

Fame games



Cameron Diaz, California, 1998 'I was doing a story on up-and-coming young actors, and she arrived wearing that T-shirt. She's a cool girl, very joyful and funny. I've photographed a lot of people on the cusp of fame and I knew she was going to be a star.'

David Bowie, Los Angeles, 1994 'He said, "I'm coming out of a neo-realistic Italian movie from the 1940s." So that was how I shot him. He arrived in the suit and the hat at the Peninsula Hotel and we were done in an hour.'

Debbie Harry, New York, 1990 'I'd had a crush on her since I was a teenager. She was the ultimate rock'n'roll girl – and super sexy. She's got that pout; Kate Moss does the same thing – they are like cats. This shot has my notes to the retoucher; in the 1990s it was all done by hand, now it's computerised.'

A BIT
Wider

A BIT
more distant

Good

even
the face

even
the face

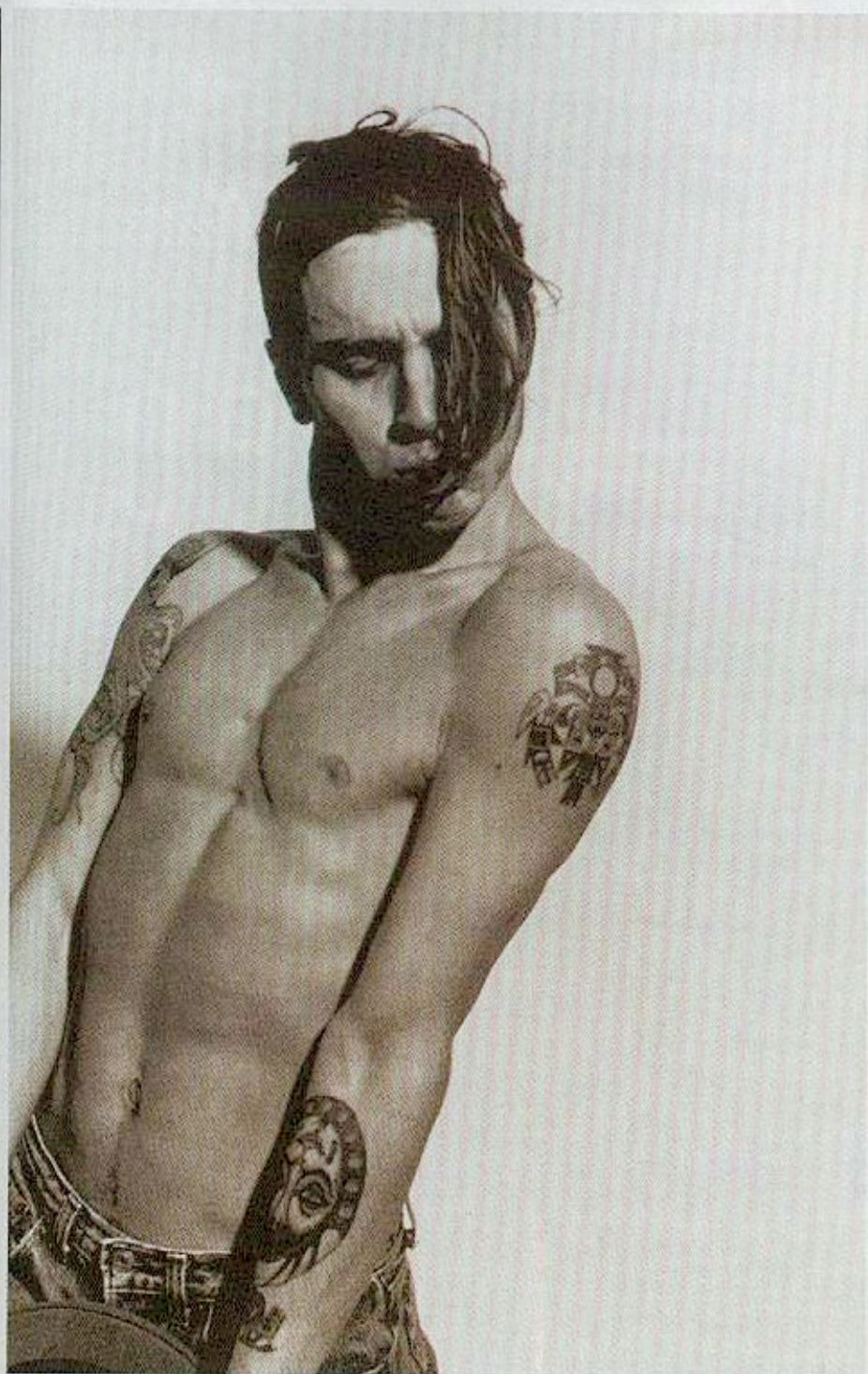
Good

Blue Black

OK



Blue Black Print



Johnny Depp is not looking his usual pretty-boy self. His hair (see page 39) is greasy, his chin unkempt, his skin pitted like a lunar freeway. He looks as if he's been up all night, smoking cheroots like the one in his stained fingers. The Pacific sunlight casts a golden sheen on Depp's frowning face and inscribes dark shadows across his chest. Is it the morning, hurting his hungover eyes with its dazzle? Or is this late-afternoon Californian light heralding an evening of excess and the waste of another day?

Depp was filming *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* in 1998 when Michel Haddi came on a photo shoot for *Premiere*, the American film magazine. In the movie,

Depp impersonated Hunter S Thompson, the great connoisseur of excess, and had to persuade audiences that he'd spent half a lifetime of drugged insanity, with constant ingestions of speed, acid, hashish and cocaine. Nature made Depp too good-looking to be convincing as a monged-out wreck; but Haddi's photograph comes close. No wonder Kate Moss wrote him a fan letter and posed for him at her most poutingly seductive (page 39).

Haddi is French by birth, Moroccan by descent and American by inclination. For the last quarter-century he has roved through the celebrity jungle for *Elle*, *Paris Match*, *Stern*, *Vogue* and *Vanity Fair* taking pictures of actors, singers, directors and great beauties, including Kylie Minogue, James Brown, →



Anthony Kiedis, Berlin, 1989 'The Red Hot Chili Peppers' frontman and his band were running around taking their clothes off and being totally outrageous. I took the pictures back to Liz Tilberis, the editor of *Vogue*, who'd commissioned me; she said, "They're fab Michel, but do you have anything a bit more traditional?"

James Brown, Georgia, 1993 'This was the scoop of my life. He was in jail for shooting at his wife and some policemen while high on PCP, but was allowed out in the day for community service. I joined him for lunch for a couple of days. He said, "I won't allow you to take my photograph, but you can steal it." It took me a while to understand what he meant. As he left I shot one roll of film, a sequence, of him going to his car and back to jail. *Interview* magazine ran it over 10 pages.'



Deborah Harry, Cameron Diaz, Peter Greenaway, Jennifer Lopez and Martin Scorsese. He does not flatter his subjects, but prefers to show them in odd, fish-out-of-water surroundings. In the pages of his collected works, *I Love America, Don't You?*, Jennifer Lopez stands outside Rita Hayworth's Malibu house in a headscarf and thrift-store frock, looking grumpily suburban (page 44). David Bowie, in double-breasted pinstripes, hat, shirt and tie, smokes a cigarette against the glary sunlight by the pool of the Peninsula Hotel in Los Angeles, impeccably British, indefinably weird.

In Haddi's pictures, there's always more going on than meets the eye. Keanu Reeves (page 41) creeps fawningly across a lawn in white cotton pyjamas; it takes a second to glimpse the flying boot he is trying to avoid (but whose?). Haddi's portrait of Debbie Harry is so stark and featureless, it's almost abstract, the face a white expanse reversed out of black and grey. The

photographer has marked up the print as if trying to improve it – but all the viewer wants is to lose the dark glasses that hide her peerless eyes.

Few photographers take such creative liberties with monochrome, to express a celebrity shadow-life. The late Tupac Shakur is shot in crepuscular grey light, his closed eyes and still demeanour redolent of death or martyrdom (page 44). The musician Bobby Brown and the singer Adeva were photographed for *British Vogue*, their black skin given a tarry, ebonic sheen, set off by silver jewellery and the whites of their eyes.

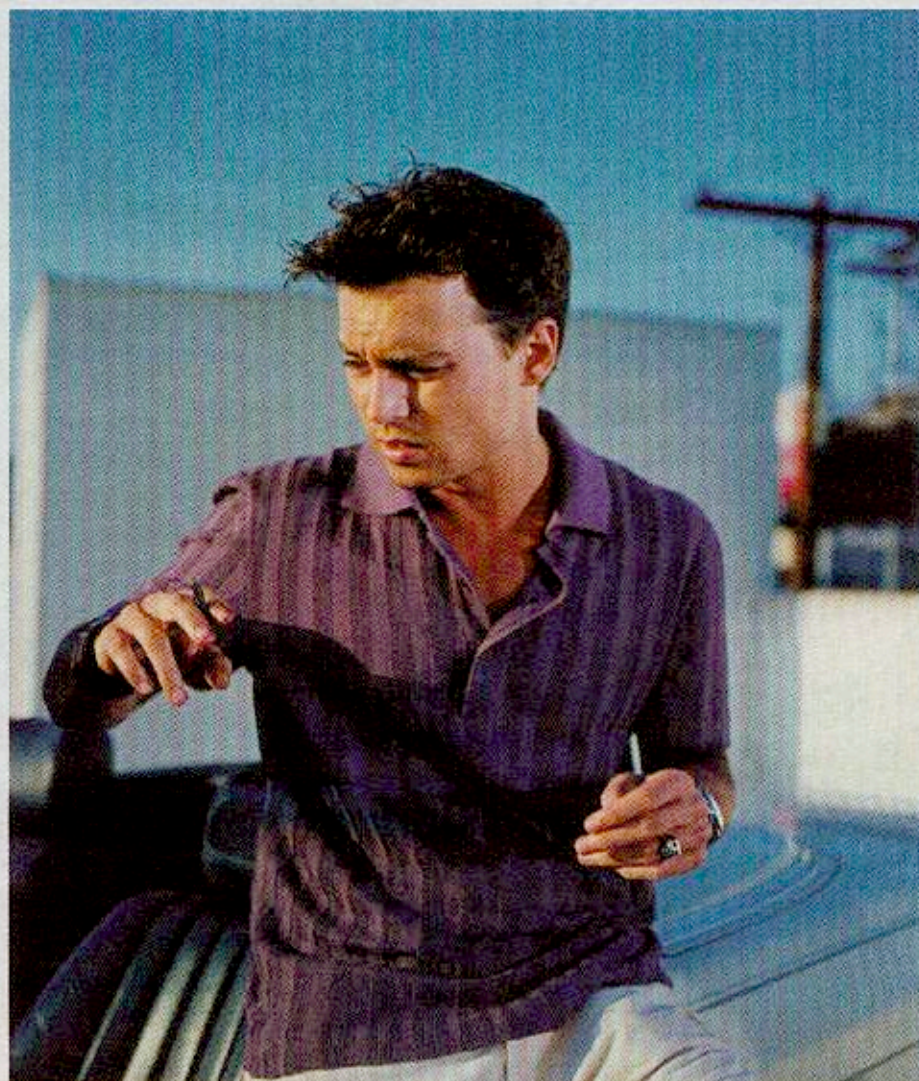
Visiting Winona Ryder for *Interview* in 1993 (above), he photographed her in a black sweater and dark lipstick, her elfin face frozen in a mini-diva strop; he also filmed just her shadow on a wall, to emphasise her insubstantiality.

Gwyneth Paltrow appears in five frames of delicate milky white, until her hands, legs, clothes and shoes disappear, leaving something close to an etching →



Winona Ryder, New York, 1993 'I wanted her to look like Marilyn Monroe with black hair. I did it for *Interview* and they loved it. She was a sweet girl, a doll.'

Liza Minnelli, New York, 1991 'She spent four hours in make-up but it was worth it – for once, the photographs didn't need any retouching. She was a perfectionist: I remember her saying, "The light has to be right in front of my face". The result has a 1970s feel even though it was taken in the 1990s.'



Dear Michel. ★
 ★ Your pictures
 of Johnny Depp
 are beautiful. ☺
 Maybe you could
 take a picture with
 me sometime.
 Lots of Love,
 Kate (1988).

Kate Moss, New York, 1991 'This was a shot for British GQ that we did in New York when Kate was 17 or 18. She's a great girl. I love pale English girls; I like that style. The note she sent me [left] was from the heart; it was written during her big, long love affair with Johnny Depp.'

Johnny Depp, Hollywood, 1998 'I was supposed to have four hours to do the pictures, but he was working on his bike and came three hours late. He looked at all the clothes, chose one T-shirt, and wore that for all the pictures; he couldn't care less. He's very natural. I did 20 rolls of film in 15 minutes, and that was it.'

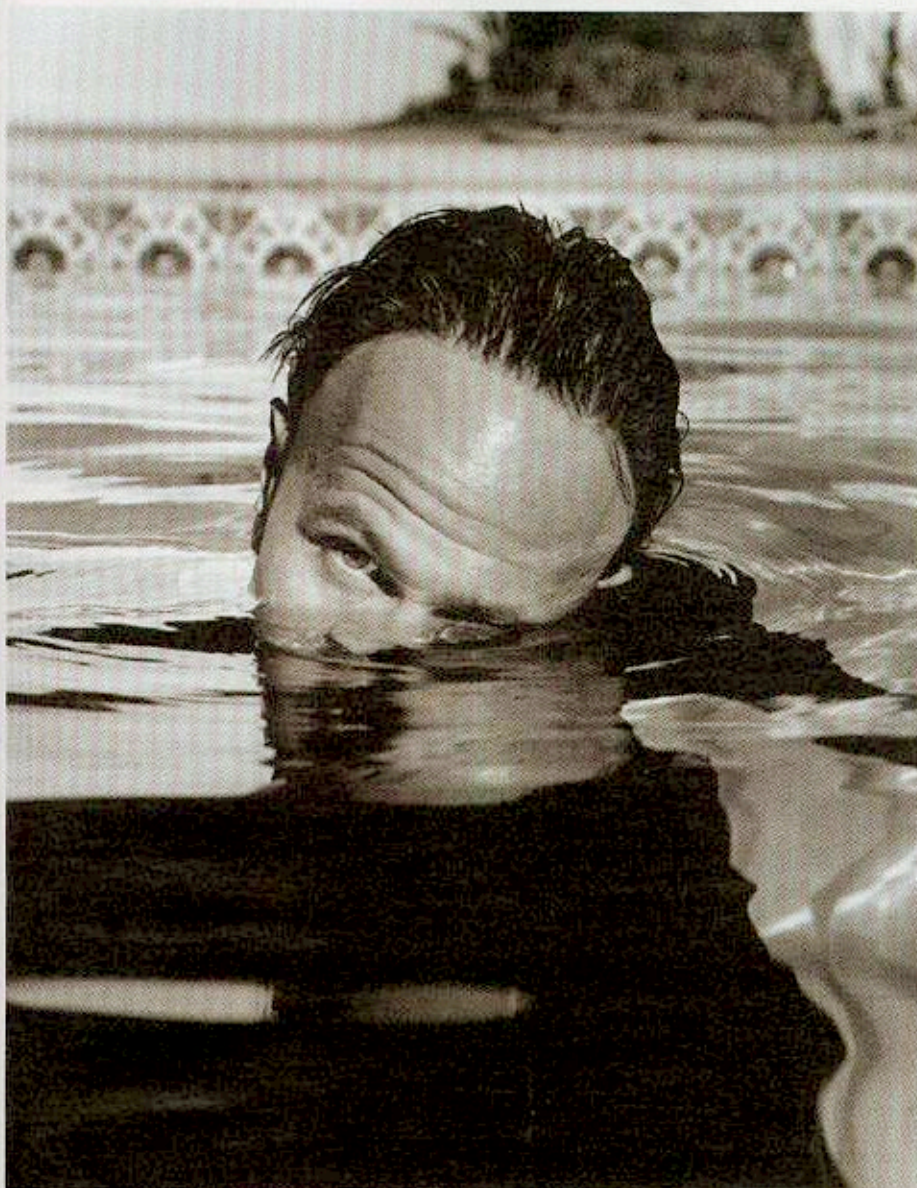
of her delicate features and fair hair. Never was wholesomeness celebrated so ambiguously. He pulled off the same white-on-white trick with Isabella Rossellini (page 43) in 1993, turning her into a novice nun with kohl-drenched eyes – gamine, but game as well.

Uma Thurman, snapped for British Vogue in 1990, puts a long white hand over her face to shut out the viewer – but her half-smile and the film-noir shadows and lines of her dress and hair suggest a self-conscious theatricality. Elsewhere, Haddi movingly catches the bond between two famous writers in 1995, by illuminating their faces in the New York night – Bret Easton Ellis, then 30, and James Ellroy from an earlier generation, a benign mentor surveying his young friend over the limo door (page 44).

Haddi can be breathtakingly chauvinistic. His "Self Portrait with Friend (Tijuana 1999)", features him in an

open-mouth snog with a young lady, his chin-stubble and chest-wig contrasting with her black hair and caramel flesh, but the pose is aggressively I'm-in-charge-baby. A sequence with the actors Patsy Kensit and Djimon Hounsou shows the white Englishwoman clamping her mouth on the black African star's head as though trying to eat him, a throwback to the cotton-plantation, slave-and-mistress fantasies (*Mandingo*, *Drum*) of the Sixties.

His attitudes are fascinatingly unreconstructed. In his Introduction, he describes a car journey he once took to Las Vegas accompanied by Christina, a model. "I'd always wanted to fuck a Communist, so I did in this car going west," he tells us chattily, while telling Christina: "You Russian slut, sometimes I don't get you. You wanted to come to America, you begged me to take you out of your dump back in Siberia. So why →



the bloody tears? Now I just want to hear you scream these orgasmic words, 'Yes! Yes! Yes! I love America!'"

He's not kidding. In the book he explains how he was raised in a Paris orphanage as a child, and one day had a glimpse of Paradise. It was 23 December 1962, and a group of US Army soldiers had arrived to dish out croissants, cakes and toys to the hapless children. Haddi fell instantly in love with all things American and vowed to live there.

"I lived my life in Venice Beach, LA, and New York City," he writes. "I had beautiful affairs with beautiful American girls. Once, one said the coolest thing, she said, 'Hey Michel, don't ever change your accent, I love your seductive voice ...' So many girls, so little time."

Mr Haddi may himself be a little hard to love, but his pictures are a record of an obsession: American beauty, American light, American energy, American celebrity and — something he discovered as an orphan — the generosity with which Americans will lift their faces to his. *
'I Love America, Don't You?' by Michel Haddi, published by One Eyed Jacks, £38, is available in all good book shops

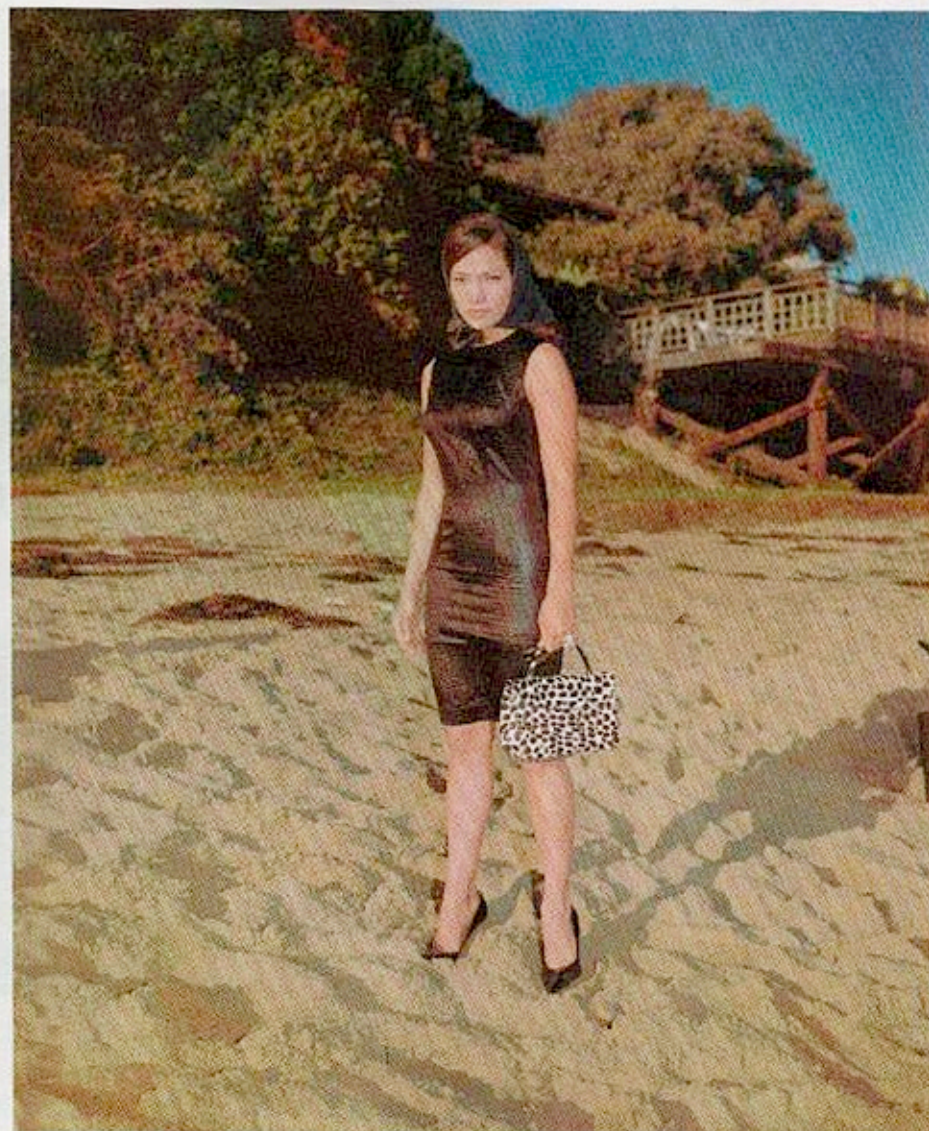
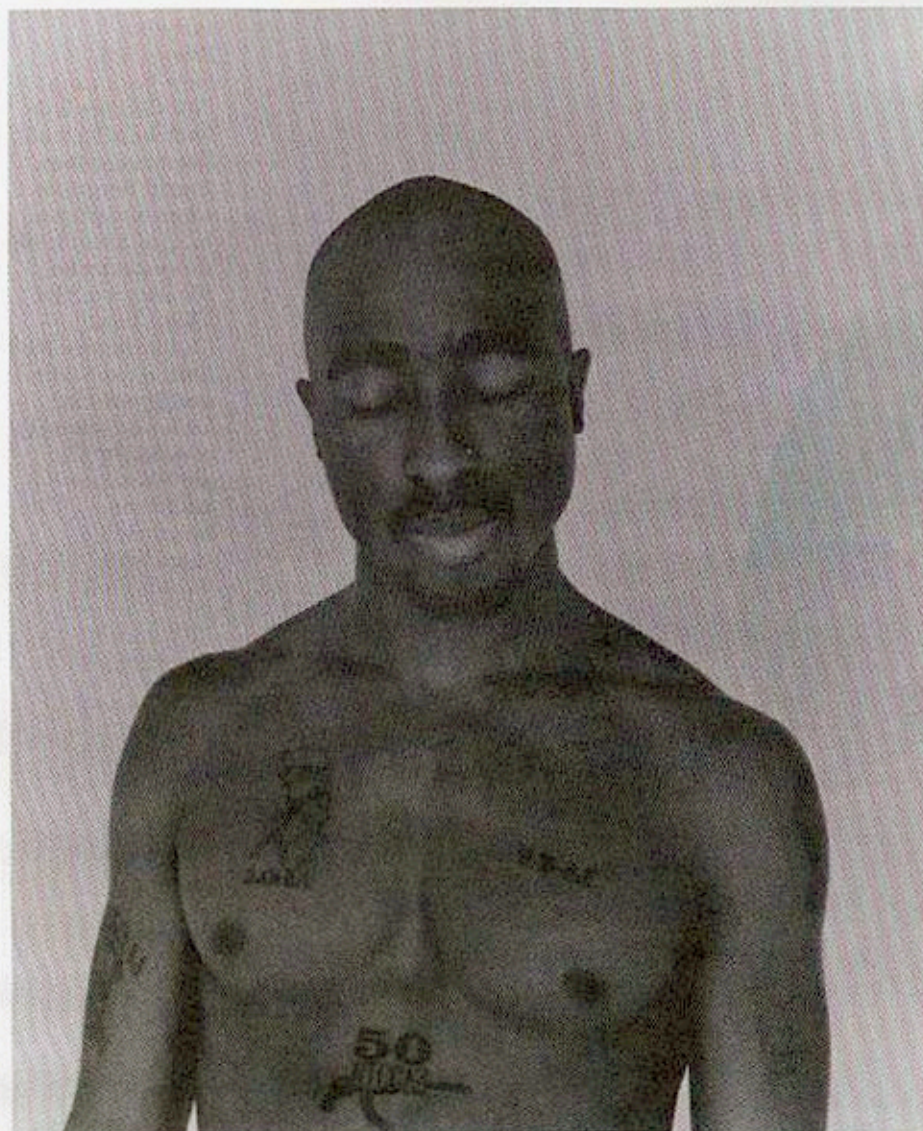
Gary Oldman, Hollywood, 1996 "He was doing *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, which is why his hairline is so high; it had been shaved back for the movie. I wanted to photograph him like that because that is how Martin Sheen comes out of the water in *Apocalypse Now*, so it made a link to Francis Coppola, who directed both movies. I didn't have my swimsuit so I was in the water, bare butt."

Keanu Reeves, California, 1994 "I did this for *French Vogue* around the time that *Little Buddha* was released — so he looks like a Buddha. He was just messing around, throwing a shoe in the air. I used to train at Gold's Gym in Venice Beach and I'd see him in there sometimes."

Heath Ledger, Africa, 2000 "They were shooting *The Four Feathers* in the Sahara Desert. I saw this guy — filthy, long hair, beard — and he said, 'No photographs'. A couple of hours later I see a young guy and I say, 'You're fucking handsome,' and I ask if I can take his photograph. The PR told me it was the same guy, without his down-and-out make-up; maybe the compliment did it."



**Isabella
Rossellini,
New York 1993**
'We tied her hair
back here to look
like her mother,
Ingrid Bergman,
when she played
Joan of Arc. I took
three portraits:
the idea was the
Three Wise
Monkeys: See No
Evil, Hear No Evil
and Speak No
Evil. She was very
puzzled by the
pictures, but
asked me
for copies
years later.' →



Tupac Shakur, Los Angeles, 1995 'He came to the studio smoking a joint like you have no idea; he got stoned, obviously. I had a vision when I saw him; I dressed him in a suit and tie, dapper. But he took it off, showed me his tattoos and that was it. Every time I look at this photograph I get the shivers because he looks like a dead man [Shakur was murdered the following year].'

Jennifer Lopez, outside Rita Hayworth's house, Malibu, 1994 'This was in the early days. She'd just got the lead role in *Selena* and her agent called me and said, "We believe in her." She's beautiful, and she reminds me of those 1950s Mexican actresses, like Maria Felix. I thought it would be interesting to have her wearing high heels in the sand.'

James Ellroy and Bret Easton Ellis, New York, 1995 'This was for *German Vogue*: I took it in the meat-market area in New York. I love *American Psycho*; Bret Easton Ellis has a sick mind. These guys were extremely nice, very friendly, but both quite shy so they didn't say much. They live in their own world.'