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Rare Unseen Photos of Marilyn Monroe

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In November 1945 Andre de Dienes, a fashion photographer with a penchant for nude photography, moved to Beverly Hills, looking for a fresh face. There he met a tenacious 19-year-old orphan named Norma Jeane Dougherty.

An exhibition of rare unseen photographs of Marilyn Monroe is on show at the Steven Kasher Gallery in New York until the end of July. 'Andre de Dienes: Marilyn and California Girls' is a collection of 50 photographs depicting a young, 'coy' Norma Jeane Dougherty, shot for the first time by professional photographer Andre de Dienes, who would later become her lover.

The chance meeting in 1945 was the beginning of the photographer's lifelong fascination with Norma Jeane. In his memoir, de Dienes says: "It was as if a miracle had happened to me. From the instant I looked at her and we began to talk, her voice, her smile and her beautiful blue eyes... Norma Jeane seemed to be like an angel... an earthly, sexy-looking angel sent expressly for me!"

De Dienes became obsessed with photographing her every day, from secluded beaches in Malibu to the desert out west, to California, Nevada, Arizona and Oregon. At the time she was married to James Dougherty, a merchant marine away at war.

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The two became lovers and de Dienes vowed that he would marry her as soon as she divorced from her husband. But when his photographs landed Norma Jeane her first magazine covers, she broke off their engagement as she wanted to become an actress. According to the photographer's memoirs, she said: "Andre, please don't come, I can't marry you! I want to become an actress!" Soon, shy Norma Jeane was replaced with budding sex-pot Marilyn Monroe.

De Dienes moved to Hollywood, and he and Marilyn remained friends. On a shoot for Blonde Heat, the now world-renowned Marilyn sent her team of handlers away and de Dienes spent the day photographing her privately in her Bel Air Hotel bungalow. She posed for him coyly wrapped in a towel, reading scripts in bed, exercising and taking a bubble bath.

A large quantity of photos, letters, negatives and magazine articles stored in De Dienes' photo laboratory were severely damaged in a storm and he buried the damaged boxes in his yard. While putting together a pitch for Life magazine of his early Marilyn photographs, de Dienes dug up the buried boxes.

After Monroe's untimely death, de Dienes created his final shots of her. Employing his experimental collage technique, he superimposed his loveliest, simplest images of Marilyn onto sunsets, seascapes, nightscapes, and beds of flowers. De Dienes then hid these prints in boxes in his garage where they would not be found for 20 years.

On his deathbed, de Dienes penned his memoirs, recalling his early experiences photographing Norma Jeane and his lifelong adoration. His widow Shirley recently found the lost and forgotten prints.

These rare lifetime prints will be on view in the exhibition Andre de Dienes: Marilyn and California Girls, at Steven Kasher Gallery 9 June to 29 July 2016.