

# L'ŒIL DE LA PHOTOGRAPHIE

## What's new, Sylvie Blum? Interview by Nadine Dinter

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January 15,  
2020



Giant Albino Python, 2017 © Sylvie Blum



Daily Walk II, 2008 © Sylvie Blum



Angela Hollywood, 2009 © Sylvie Blum



Angela rides the Lion, 2008 © Sylvie Blum



Beautiful Creatures, 2019 © Sylvie Blum



Big Cat, 2008 © Sylvie Blum



Birdwoman One, 2017 © Sylvie Blum



Daily Walk II, 2008 © Sylvie Blum



Fat Angel, 2017 © Sylvie Blum



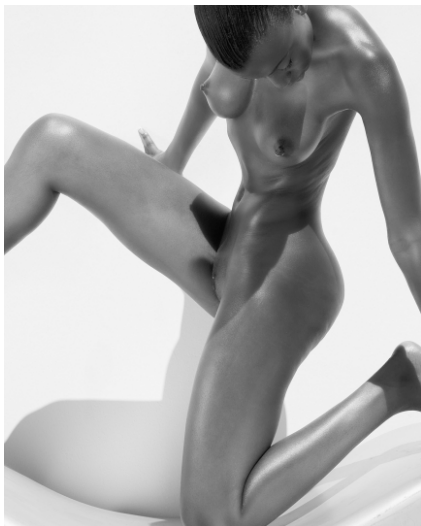
Giants, 2018 © Sylvie Blum



Girl with Alligator, 2017 © Sylvie Blum



Glitter Face, 2017 © Sylvie Blum



Leg Position, 2010 © Sylvie Blum



Leila in the Cloud, 2016 © Sylvie Blum



Nirmala and the Giant Python, 2017 © Sylvie Blum



Portrait with Giant Python, 2017 © Sylvie Blum



Stephanie with Flamingo, 2019 © Sylvie Blum



The Flamingo, 2019 © Sylvie Blum





The Naked Butt, 2009 © Sylvie Blum



The Pigeon, 2017 © Sylvie Blum



Sylvie with Leica 2019 © Sylvie Blum



Giant Albino Python, 2017 © Sylvie Blum



Daily Walk II, 2008 © Sylvie Blum

**Sylvie Blum** is one of a small number of female photographers who venture to work in the field of nude photography. After working as a model for the likes of Helmut Newton and Jeanloup Sieff, she decided to switch roles and become a photographer herself.

and Jean-Paul Gaultier, she decided to switch roles and become a photographer herself. Informed by this exciting resume she has developed a unique trademark: the female body photographed from a female view point of view, staged with a view, staged with a perfection that transcends gender stereotypes.

Blum's series *Big Cats* drew international attention when it was auctioned off at Christies in 2014. Her works from the series "Naked Beauty" were shown alongside those by Herb Ritts at Fahey Klein in Los Angeles, and now she is ready to kick off her first solo show in Asia at the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) in Bangkok, opening on January 25, 2020.

In between preparations for the show, she took time out to share her insights with us. Enjoy the read!

**Nadine Dinter: A woman photographing nude women – do you feel like you are breaking with tradition?**

**Sylvie Blum:** I am the kind of person that always loves to break a boring rule – it makes life so much more exciting!

**ND: What triggered your switch from being a model to becoming a photographer?**

**SB:** Becoming a photographer after being a model for 16 years was a very natural transition for me. Besides that, I always knew I wanted to become an artist. And I have been fascinated by photography as long as I can remember. After I met legendary photographer and artist Gunter Blum in the 1990s, I became his model, muse, and wife. Gunter was a genius, obsessive artist and my mentor. He taught me a lot about photography. When he died, I picked up an old Sx70 Polaroid camera and started taking pictures of myself. That is something very common today, but at the time it was very exotic and bold to go public with my work, which showed me as a model and photographer at the same time. These "selfies" were sold in 2014 at Christie's NYC and also graced the cover of the auction catalog.

**ND: Was it hard to get a foothold in a genre dominated by men, and how have your experiences been so far? Are people open or taken aback?**

**SB:** The art and photography world is generally quite competitive, so I am used to pushing my way into the genre I want to be in. I love good competition because I am a fighter and it comes in handy if you are persistent, a hard worker, a perfectionist, and master your craft. I know my voice as an image maker is strong and unique and I am bold enough to ignore the gender-related negativity. It surprises me that it still exists, but on the other side I couldn't care less. A good picture is still a good picture and it speaks for itself.

**ND: How do you find your models and do you work alone or with a team?**

**SB:** Most of the models contact me because of social media. It is fantastic: it brings people together with the same interests and you can work with models around the

world because you are already connected via social media. I love to discover new talent and exciting people...and I think everyone is beautiful and fascinating anyway. Most of the time I am very much connected to my models and muses. With some of them I have established a long relationship. Depending on the project I am working on, I either have a big or a small team. Some productions just need a lot of preparation and then your team grows.

**ND: In the series "Big Cats" you cooperated with a group of tamed animals, such as lions etc. What's the story of the famous "Angela riding the lion"?**

**SB:** Working with animals is very fascinating and can be difficult sometimes. In contrast to the models, they are not used to posing over a long time. They are just natural and will let you know if they are not in the mood for more. You can really read them when they get frisky or lazy and they start playing games with you. I love animals and love working with them and having them around me. The “Big Cat” series was one of my biggest productions. I started prepping the shoot back in 2004 when I first traveled to South Africa and Namibia to study wildlife in its natural surroundings. Seeing those animals just blew my mind. Their beauty, strength, and grace was overwhelming. In 2008 I finally jumped into my big cat production. Since that I have worked with all sorts of animals, elephants, flamingos, birds, snakes, alligators, kangaroos, pigs, cats, and many more.

"Angela Rides the Lion" still remains one of my most iconic images. We were not supposed to do that, because it was too outrageous. But I took the chance when I saw it – to lift her up onto the lion's back for just a few seconds. If you look closely you can see Angela has tears in her eyes while posing on the beast. It was all very exciting and we have remained friends ever since that shoot.

**ND: Your next show is opening in Asia. How did you deal with the generally limited openness towards nudity in such cultures? Did this affect your selection of works?**

**SB:** I am glad to be working with a highly professional team at MOCA Bangkok. They are very modern and open-minded in terms of nudity. I mean aren't Facebook, Instagram and the Zuckerberg censorship rules turning back the clock? In the US, the term "you got Zuckered" is common...and guess what it means in terms of nudity!

The prudery surrounding what you are allowed to show and what not is everywhere these days. I find the censorship of nipples, backsides, and other body parts horrid and ridiculous.

My upcoming show at MOCA Bangkok is the first and the biggest exhibition of its kind in Thailand, showing nearly 300 of my works – and they are mostly nudes.

**ND: At the start of your career you took many self-portraits, some classic and some more wild. Is that an on-going series or is that phase over for you?**

**SB:** MOCA Bangkok will be showing my Polaroids in an installation called “20 Years of Polaroids”. These are mostly self-portraits and diary-like shoots of my travels, friends, work, and surroundings...and yes I still take crazy wild Polaroids. It is a game to me; I enjoy working with instant analog and I get excited about every scratch and flaw that comes out of that camera. I have my SX70 with me everywhere I go.

**ND: Apart from your artistic work, are you doing any commercial work these days?**

**SB:** Right now, I am very much involved with my artistic projects. 2020 is already planned out with my next shoots. I have some wild ideas and I can't wait to get working on them.

**ND: What's planned for 2020, apart from your museum show?**

**SB:** We are preparing my next book project right now and are discussing further exhibitions. I will be giving an exclusive workshop right after the opening at MOCA in January in Thailand. Then I plan to go back into production, because for the past year I was busy preparing for the museum exhibitions and there was not much time for anything else.

**ND: For the new generation of aspiring women photographers who want to enter your genre, what is your advice?**

**SB:** It is always hard to give advice, but I am always happy to see my fellow female photographers popping up on social media. There is so much talent out there. I think if you just stick with your vision and do what you really love to do, you can't go wrong. It takes time to find your voice and perfect your craft...just do it!

### **Exhibition:**

*Sylvie Blum: Naked Beauty* at the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) Bangkok

25 January to 25 March 2020

MOCA Museum of Contemporary Art, 499 Kamphaengphet 6 Road, Ladyao, Chatuchak, Bangkok, 10900 Thailand

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Nadine Dinter

January 15, 2020



