NEWTON FOUNDATION

6 November 2026

PRESS RELEASE

Helmut Newton's Early Books

Press Tour	Tuesday, 1 December 2026 10 am (German) 11:30 am (English)
Opening	Wednesday, 2 December 2026, 8 pm
Duration	3 December 2026 – 16 May 2027

On 2 December 2026, the Newton Foundation in Berlin opens a new exhibition devoted to three early, iconic books by Helmut Newton. Each one follows its own concept, which Newton himself planned down to the last detail. Together, the more than 200 photographs they contain form a kind of "best of" his work from the 1970s and early 1980s.

Helmut Newton is one of the most influential photographers of the 20th century. Famously, he staged his images to be seductive and provocative, at times pushing past the bounds of prevailing social mores. His strikingly inventive photographs, most of them shot on assignment for the most prestigious magazines of the day, were published regularly from the 1950s onward. In 1975 he also began showing his work in galleries, and a year later came his first book, ***White Women*** (also called ***Femmes Secrètes***), which sold very well and won the Kodak Photo Book Award that same year – though it was controversial from the start. ***Sleepless Nights*** (also called ***Nuits Blanches***) followed in 1978, and ***Big Nudes*** (also called ***47 Nudes***) three years later. The books appeared with different publishers and in three language versions – hence the different titles – so they could be sold in English-, German-, and French-speaking markets; their contents remained virtually unchanged. As celebrated as they are notorious, these books established Newton's international reputation beyond his countless magazine publications and are now true photobook classics.

The **Newton Foundation** marks the 50th anniversary of ***Femmes Secrètes*** with an exhibition that brings together numerous photographs from all three books. The new presentation is based on an exhibition conceived for the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, for which Newton's photographs were produced as modern exhibition prints. During Newton's lifetime, these early images – some of them iconic, poised on the threshold between fashion, portrait, and nude photography – were never shown together. Display cases also present the original book maquettes with alternative cover designs, alongside small-format work prints that probably served as masters for the lithographs at the time, and reviews from magazines of the period.

Coinciding with the exhibition, TASCHEN is publishing a near-facsimile reissue of ***Femmes Secrètes*** – an international edition, trilingual for the first time. This legendary book has been out of print for many years; its return closes a gap in the current bibliography of Newton's work.

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With his first photobook, Newton pulled off a daring coup, paving the way for an eroticization of fashion imagery that culminated in 1980/81 in his famous series *Big Nudes* and *Naked and Dressed* for various editions of *Vogue*. He had been laying the groundwork for this unconventional idea – contemporary fashion in diptychs, the model clothed in one frame and nude in the other – as early as the mid-1970s, and he offered a glimpse of it in ***Femmes Secrètes***: a variant of his iconic fashion image *Yves Saint Laurent, Rue Aubriot*, shot one night in 1975 on the street of the same name for French *Vogue*. A few minutes later, he made a second version, this time with a nude model. In this book, he brought nudity and fashion together for the first time – subtly, in images that read like film stills.

For Newton, *Femmes Secrètes* was "important at this stage in my career, because a book gives a photographer an authority that magazines and newspapers can never offer." It was his wife, June – who was "always a moving force behind my work" – who encouraged him to make it. The book "made a big furor because it was the first of its kind," Helmut Newton later recalled in his autobiography.

He assembled his second book, ***Sleepless Nights*** (1978), with the same finesse as his first: a different selection of recent black-and-white and color images that had previously appeared in numerous magazines. Here again the subject is women – their bodies and their clothes. Many of the images are not only fashion photographs but also portraits or partial nudes. Among them are three small iconic series: images of models in orthopedic braces, made shortly after the publication of J. G. Ballard's legendary novel *Crash*; models with Hermès leather saddles, a series that proved especially controversial; and the so-called "dummies." In the mid-1970s, while on fashion assignments for French *Vogue*, Newton worked with shop mannequins – for instance, having them secured with wire late at night on the Pont Alexandre III bridge over the Seine. Stylists made them up so convincingly that it could take a second or third look to tell whether a figure was a live model or a life-size mannequin. Newton had first brought this unusual, even radical idea to fashion photography in the mid-1960s.

It was the publication ***Big Nudes*** that finally made Newton, by then in his early 60s, world-famous. Like his earlier books, it remained in print for decades after 1981, ran to hundreds of thousands of copies, and appeared with several publishers and in several languages. Karl Lagerfeld later contributed a foreword. In his autobiography, Newton traced the origin of the *Big Nudes* to the oversized wanted posters for Red Army Faction (RAF) members issued by the German police: they gave him the idea of shooting full-body nudes with a medium-format camera in the studio, then printing them life-size. He first showed them at that unusual scale in 1981 at Galerie Daniel Templon in Paris, alongside the first edition of the book – not yet called *Big Nudes* but simply titled *Helmut Newton*, published by Éditions du Regard, Paris. The first five *Big Nudes* of 1980, numbered in Roman numerals, have been on display in the Newton Foundation's upper lobby since it opened in summer 2004, together with the diptych *Sie kommen* (*They're Coming*), also printed life-size, from the *Naked and Dressed* series. Both are among his best-known bodies of work. The book – and this exhibition – also includes other black-and-white nudes, taken between 1979 and 1981 in Paris, Monaco, Los Angeles, Saint-Tropez, and Brescia.

"We are now exhibiting Newton's early publications once again, through a selection of the images they contain – and opening them up to discussion. The three-part exhibition – *White Women, Sleepless Nights, Big Nudes*, named at the time after the book titles – premiered in 2011 at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, came to Berlin in 2012 and Los Angeles in 2013, and then toured Italy, with museum stops in Venice, Genoa, and Naples in 2016/17. We have now made the exhibition title shorter and more matter-of-fact, and in doing so shifted the focus. Since the exhibition was first shown, a new critical awareness

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has emerged – bringing greater care and attentiveness, and in some cases a reassessment, not only of image content but also of the language we use in public discourse. We want to respond to that, including through an accompanying program of events at the Newton Foundation." – Matthias Harder, Director, Newton Foundation

On the occasion of the exhibition, TASCHEN is publishing a near-facsimile reissue of ***Helmut Newton. Femmes Secrètes*** in November 2026 – an international edition, trilingual for the first time, with an expanded text by Philippe Garner. Hardcover, 23 x 30.5 cm, 132 pages, €50, ISBN: 978-3-7544-0785-1.

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Villa d'Este, Lake Como, 1975
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02 Helmut Newton
Rose Murder, Croisette, Cannes, 1975
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03 Helmut Newton
Saddle II, Hermès, Vogue Hommes, Paris, 1976
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Karl Lagerfeld, Paris, 1976
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05 Helmut Newton
Paloma Picasso and her dog Martha, 1978
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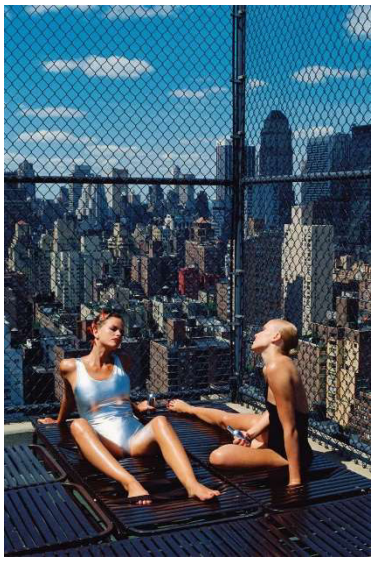
06 Helmut Newton
Elsa Peretti as a Bunny, New York, 1975
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Store Dummies I, Paris, 1976
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Security New York II, New York City, 1977
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Nude in Seaweed, Saint-Tropez, 1981
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Big Nude III, Henrietta, Paris, 1980
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