

## DUFFY THE MAN WHO SHOT THE SIXTIES

WRITTEN BY HELEN TROMPETELER

London, 1960: this iconic decade began with a new optimism which would come to revolutionize all forms of creativity including fashion, film, music and photography. The preceding decade had seen London still recovering from the effects of World War II austerity, with rationing not abolished until 1954. Before considering Brian Duffy's remarkable career, let us pause to consider the cultural and political background against which he established his reputation.

During the early 1960s, England's traditional class-based establishment was being challenged by such factors as the rise of popular satire, e.g. the stage revue *Beyond the Fringe* (1960), the foundation of the magazine *Private Eye* (1961) and the BBC television series *That Was the Week That Was* (1962-3), youth culture, and a less deferential approach to the past and people in authority. The aftermath of the adulterous affair of John Profumo, Secretary of State for War (1960-3), directly contributed in October 1963 to the fall of Harold Macmillan's Conservative government. The decade would become defined by 'a new aristocracy of talent' of pop stars, models, and photographers.<sup>1</sup> Photographers including David Bailey, Brian Duffy and Terence Donovan changed the visual landscape of the decade. Becoming legends in their own lifetime, they later inspired David Hemming's character in Michelangelo Antonioni's *Blow Up* (1966).

Born in North London in 1933 to Irish parents, Duffy enrolled at St Martin's School of Art in 1950 to study painting. He soon changed specialism to dress design and on leaving St Martin's in 1953, Duffy worked as an assistant designer at Susan Small Dresses before joining couturier Victor Steibel. A job offer with Balenciaga in Paris followed in 1954, but he declined the position to concentrate on his family. Duffy worked as a freelance fashion illustrator for *Harper's Bazaar*, and it was here that he first became interested in a career in photography.

Duffy applied unsuccessfully to work as an assistant to John French, before finding employment with Carlton Studios and Cosmopolitan Artists. He became an assistant to Adrian Flowers in 1955, and in this year received his first commission from *The Sunday Times Magazine*. Art Director Michael Rand recalled of Duffy: "He had tremendous style. His work was immediate, direct and lively."<sup>2</sup> Duffy's career was also established by new magazines *Queen* and *Man About Town*. Jocelyn Steven's *Queen* and Michael Hesletine's *Man About Town* (later *Town*) under Editor Tom Wolsey were highly influential arenas for emerging photographers to showcase their work.<sup>3</sup> Duffy's photographs exhibited in this year's Ballarat International Foto Biennale include his double-exposure study of Grace Coddington for *Town*

(1960) and his joyful portrait of a jumping Veruschka for *Queen* (1965).

From 1957-1963, Duffy worked for British *Vogue* under Art Director John Parsons, working closely with models Jennifer Hocking, Jean Shrimpton and Paulene Stone. He was one of a number of young staff photographers who brought a new sense of reality to the previously class-conscious magazine.<sup>4</sup> Duffy's education at St Martin's and experience with *Harper's Bazaar* arguably gave him a unique insight into his new career in fashion photography. His early photographs for *Vogue* include those of the E-type jaguar (1960) and fashion studies taken at Westminster Bridge, London (1961) and in Florence (1964).

These early commissions show Duffy finding his own unique style. His fashion story for *Vogue* at Westminster Bridge is modern in its documentary approach while clearly acknowledging the tradition and style of his predecessors, notably Norman Parkinson.

Taken four years later, Duffy's image for *Queen* [shown opposite] reveals a free and experimental approach to fashion photography. His confident and bold graphic style uses only a third of the frame to create this remarkably striking image. Subversive in its almost misuse of framing and the denial of direct engagement between viewer and model, such early photographs paved the way for Duffy's later classic fashion photography for *Elle*.

In 1962, Duffy's reputation was secured when he was named alongside Bailey and Donovan as 'the Terrible Trio' by the *Sunday Times* and 'the Black Trinity' by Norman Parkinson. He established his own London studio in 1963, and from 1963-6 regularly contributed to French *Elle* under Art Director Peter Knapp. In 1965, Duffy also shot his first calendar for Pirelli in Morocco. By the end of the decade, he was at the height of his profession, but keen to explore new challenges. In 1967, he formed film company Deighton Duffy with novelist Len Deighton and together they produced *Only When I Laugh* (1968) and *Oh! What a Lovely War* (1969).

Duffy was commissioned to create a second calendar for Pirelli in 1973, in collaboration with pop artist Allen Jones and airbrush artist Philip Castle. Creative tensions between Duffy and Jones led Duffy to search again for new creative platforms. He formed Duffy Design Concepts with young graphic designer Celia Philo and together they created one of the most iconic images of the 1970s. Their legendary cover for David Bowie's *Aladdin Sane* (1973) was revolutionary in its inversion of the simple tradition of the passport photograph to create a non-likeness of the human face. The striking contrast between the vivid colours of the subject's face and the mono-chromatic lower third of the image

also contributed to the image's potency. It is with Duffy's characteristic irreverence that the iconic zig-zag motif was partly inspired by the trademark for home appliances brand National Panasonic.<sup>5</sup> *Aladdin Sane* became Bowie's first number one album in the UK Charts and Duffy later created images for *The Lodger* (1979) and *Scary Monsters* (1980).

From 1973-78, Duffy regularly contributed to *The Sunday Times Magazine*, *Harpers* and *Queen*, *Telegraph Magazine* and *The Observer*. Beginning in 1974, he also enjoyed a second period working for French *Elle*. In 1975, he dared to juxtapose the diagonal composition of a model and her sculptural white coat, against the vertical lines of a wooden litter bin in a fashion study for *Elle*. The acceptable but irreverent inclusion of such an object can be considered typical of Duffy's final style and personal character. His definitive *Prêt-à-Porter* study in red (1979) is a highly effective visualization of high fashion, which recalls the surrealist painting of Magritte, while subversively eliminating the models' faces. This image shows Duffy at the peak of his experimental approach to fashion photography. Indeed he was documented as considering his fashion photography for French *Elle* to be his best work.<sup>6</sup>

In 1977, Duffy was commissioned by agency Collett Dickinson Pearce to create a new advertising campaign for Benson & Hedges. His ground-breaking campaign depicted their gold cigarette packet in a variety of surreal contexts, including in a birdcage, emerging from hatched eggs, and as a mouse-trap. The visual assurance and impact of these images set a new standard for advertising photography and gave the brand a previously unimagined very high profile, so effectively working against an environment of government imposed restrictions on tobacco advertising. Duffy's award-winning stills campaigns also included one for Smirnoff in 1978. However, by 1979 he was frustrated by the advertising industry and in a now infamous incident, burnt the majority of his negatives. Turning his back on photography for the next three decades, Duffy established a second career restoring antique furniture.

Duffy's destructive act of creative self-vandalism resulted in his contribution to the history of British photography being less documented and celebrated than his contemporaries for many years. We can be very grateful that within his lifetime, Duffy's individual reputation was reinstated. Although frequently associated with Bailey and Donovan, Duffy's own path was truly unique. In a 2009 interview, he explained:

*I took a route that was about decoding culture. Society has always intrigued me, I have a sort of anarchic streak and corrupted values, which I've had since I was a child.<sup>7</sup>*

From August 2007 until his death in May 2010, Duffy worked with his eldest son Chris to gradually restore his archive. Negatives and contact sheets were retrieved from UK and international magazines and from his remaining personal collection. Duffy's first solo display at the Chris Beetles Gallery in London (2009) and the BBC documentary 'The Man Who Shot the 60s' (2010) helped bring his work to a new wider audience. Chris continues to act as guardian of his father's archive, and the first monograph of Duffy's work was published in June 2011. Throughout his long career, Duffy rarely gave interviews and he resisted his work being defined. In 'The Man Who Shot the 60s' (2010), one of Duffy's last rebuttals to camera was simply 'the work is the statement'. This is perhaps indicative of a man who forged his career during the 1960s and therefore wanted to be judged by the merit of his work alone. The images exhibited in this year's Ballarat International Foto Biennale show a pioneering photographer of the sixties and seventies at the peak of his powers. His work acknowledges the sophistication and classicism of his predecessors, but perhaps like Duffy himself, shows a constant restless creative push to move mainstream photography forwards. Duffy's willingness to experiment and push boundaries led to remarkable accomplishments across the genres of fashion, portraiture and advertising. We remain indebted to his great contribution to the development of modern photography.

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1. Nicholas Drake (ed.), *The Sixties: A Decade in Vogue*, Pyramid, London, 1988, p. 7.
2. Michael Rand quoted in 'Shoot From the Hip', *The Sunday Times Magazine* (August 17 2003) pp.18-26 (p.20).
3. Anne Braybon, Commissions Manager for the National Portrait Gallery, London, has conducted significant research on Town magazine and British photography 1952-1972.
4. Robin Muir interviewed in the BBC4 documentary *'The Man Who Shot the 60s'* (Director: Linda Brusasco, 2010)
5. Brian Duffy quoted in 'Duffy', *Professional Photographer* (December 2009) pp. 62-66 (p.64).
6. Brian Duffy interviewed in the BBC4 documentary *'The Man Who Shot the 60s'* (Director: Linda Brusasco, 2010)
7. Brian Duffy quoted in 'Duffy', *Professional Photographer* (December 2009) pp. 62-66 (p.64).



DUFFY, FASHION FOR QUEEN MAGAZINE



DUFFY, FASHION FOR VOGUE, WESTMINSTER BRIDGE



DUFFY, PRÊT-A-PORTER FOR FRENCH ELLE