

PHOTOGRAPHY FOR WOMEN

War-time Is Boom-time

FROM the studio, dim now that the arc-lights were extinguished, I climbed the staircase and, thanks to my hostess's timely warning ("Careful of your head!") ducked three steps from the top and emerged unscathed into the upper room. After the professional bareness of the studio the eye rested gratefully on homely details such as the three tea mugs and the jar of jonquils, and more gratefully still upon the plate of sandwiches and the immersion heater sizzling in the aluminium jug. And after a quarter of an hour of sitting up nicely and being shot at from all angles it's good to lounge just anyhow in an easy chair in front of a radiator and watch people bringing down the tea caddy with intent.

Not that the quarter of an hour had really been an ordeal—in fact after the first few minutes I'd found myself enjoying it. The photographer herself had much more reason to be exhausted.

"Isn't it hard work?" I asked her.

"Yes, Sylvia (that's my assistant) and I often remark at the beginning of the week that we're in for another six days' hard labour. The mere shifting of lights from place to place, moving furniture and setting-up and taking-down of tripods is quite hard work."

Is It Art?

"Why did you take up photography?" I asked. "Did it all begin when somebody gave you a Box Brownie for your birthday?"

"No, not quite that," she laughed. "I really wanted to become an artist, but to do that you've got to have money, because you've got to keep yourself all the time you're learning. So I decided to take up photography instead. To be a good photographer you have to have some of the qualities that make you a good artist, and it's a job which can be, artistically, very satisfying."

"But it's a mistake to suppose that the 'artistic' side is more important than the practical. It's comparatively recently that photography has come to be recognised as an art form as well as a technique, and since then a number of artistically-inclined people have taken up photography as a means of expressing themselves. They have lots of fun 'composing' their studies, and juggling round with arc-lights to get new and unusual effects. This is, of course, very laudable (though in these days of film-shortage you can't afford to experiment), but if you are concerned with photography purely from the artistic side you're liable to have little patience with technical details of developing and printing. And photography, after all, is as much a technique as an art."

Why Women Succeed

We discussed the fact that so many women had been successful as photographers. "I think that photography as a profession seems particularly suited to women", said my hostess. "For one thing a lot of mothers seem to think

that women take better photos of children, because the children feel more at ease in their presence."

"Is there any special technique for putting sitters at their ease?" I asked.

"No, I don't think so. One usually talks, of course. But the best way is to take as many exposures as you possibly can, because you usually find that by about the tenth the sitter's shyness has worn off and he's beginning to enjoy himself. Of course nowadays you haven't got ten extra plates to spare. However, if I get anybody of the 'I-hate-having-my-photo-taken-it's-as-bad-as-the-dentist' type I usually pretend to take several shots before I start in earnest."

Going back to the question of women in photography my hostess mentioned that women had from the beginning won a place for themselves as photographers. Perhaps the most famous in photographic history was Margaret Cameron, who took up photography in 1864 at the age of 50, and in the eight years of her career became famous as one of the most remarkable photographic artists of



the whole century. Her portraits of well-known people—Tennyson, Browning, Carlyle, Longfellow, Darwin—are often reproduced, and are remarkable for the fact that for the first time in photographic history attention was concentrated on the head. Among present day women photographers two of the most famous are Lucia Moholy, born in Czechoslovakia and now living in England—she's the author of *A Hundred Years of Photography*—and Dorothy Wilding.

Dorothy Wilding's Career

"Dorothy Wilding is a good example among photographers of the will-to-win", said my hostess. "She wasn't even given a Box Brownie for her birthday, but she was so determined to be a photographer that she went out weeding people's gardens and thus earned enough money to buy a camera for herself. Then, at the beginning of the last war, she set up in Baker Street. (At that time Baker Street housed, as well as Sherlock Holmes, most of the photographers who took themselves seriously; but now Bond Street is considered a more desirable location.) She was fortunate, for war-time is usually boom-time for photographers, and she got in on the crest of the wave. From then on she became one of the most sought-after of London photographers, and deservedly, for she is unsurpassed in the soft-focused style in portrait work and most English people prefer it to the harsher outlines and sharply contrasted lights and shades of the continental school."

To Suit Your Subject

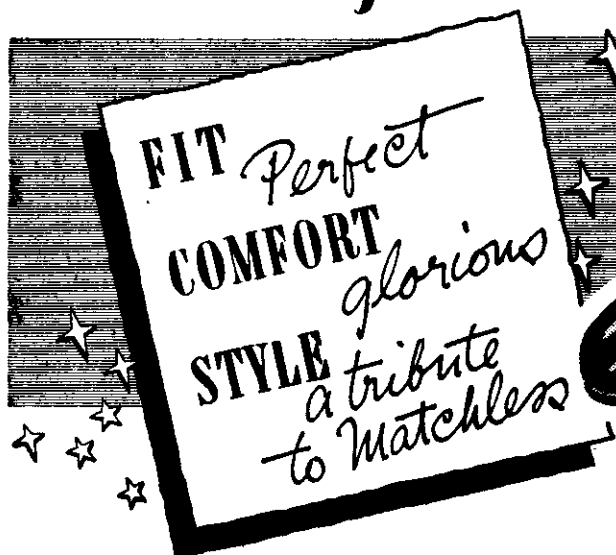
"What style of photography do you prefer?"

"I prefer the soft-focused style too, but it really depends on the sitter. You have to vary your style to bring out your sitter's best points. I usually try to take a natural photo, and though I tell my women sitters to use plenty of lipstick I don't either make them up beforehand or touch them up afterwards. Of course some sitters are disappointed if you don't turn them out looking like Hedy Lamarr, but the majority prefer a likeness, provided it's taken at their best angle."

"And is this war providing opportunities for photographers?"

(Continued on next page)

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