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My Weeks With Marilyn

by Alexandra Cheney



"First Dip, Marilyn Monroe, Something's Got To Give," (1962)

Lawrence Schiller/Steven Kasher Gallery

Film director, author and photojournalist Lawrence Schiller is simultaneously releasing two editions of the same book, one for \$20 and one for \$1,000. "Marilyn & Me: A Photographer's Memories" and "Marilyn & Me: A Memoir in Words and Photographs," respectively, tell the story of Schiller's short time with Marilyn Monroe in both words and pictures.

Coinciding with the 50th anniversary of her death, Schiller is also celebrating his first solo exhibition in the United States at the Steven Kasher Gallery in New York. His photographic prints

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range from \$3,500 to \$15,000, and his original proof sheets with Marilyn's rejection markings and scrawled notes will also be on display.

Speakeasy caught up with Schiller via phone while he was in London promoting his books, which come out today.

The Wall Street Journal: Were you concerned with "Smash" and "My Week with Marilyn" that that Marilyn was thrust too deeply into popular culture before you were able to get your books out?

Lawrence Schiller: I do not pay attention to or am aware of normally what is going on in the entertainment industry. I have, for the last five years of my life, been devoting myself to building the Norman Mailer Center and Writers Colony in Provincetown, Mass. He was my friend and collaborator for 35 years. This is a very big endeavor. At the same time, four years ago I decided to write my autobiography. I had hired someone to interview me, twice a week, four hours a day for a year and a half to preserve the facts as best as I remembered them. I started writing my autobiography a year ago. Obviously Marilyn Monroe was a chapter in that autobiography. Last summer in June I saw the ads and the Michelle Williams story in Vanity Fair on "My Week With Marilyn." There's no question that that triggered, in my mind, the fact that one year later was going to be the 50th anniversary of her death. I did not go see the movie; I did not read any of the articles because I experienced the real person myself. Going to see a movie about the real person doesn't do anything for me.

Ok, but you were aware of Marilyn being in the mainstream culture again. Did that concern you since you were still in the process of putting your thoughts together?

No. Being a film director myself, I didn't want to absorb anything by osmosis. So in July, I started to polish this chapter. In November, I had just come back from a long trip and I sent the polished manuscript of about 28,000 words to Gay Talese and Colum McCann. They came back to me and said I had something really special. I've written five books, but I've never written a book that way. I've never written with my own voice, looked at the warts on my own face. In writing the autobiography, I was going to look at myself warts and all.

And what did you see?

I saw a book. I went to Benedikt Taschen, I wanted my book to have a foundation of text, not a foundation of pictures. I showed him a preliminary selection, I didn't want it to be illustrations but an emotional journey, a photographic essay. We had a layout by early January but I told Benedikt that I wanted to publish it as just a small memoir. He said, "I'm not in the return book

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business. I can't print out 30,000 books and sell them on consignment like the big book publishers." He said "I sell my books direct," he has a different business model.

So you sent to book to Nan Talese?

Without telling Gay Talese I submitted the book to Nan, his wife, and she got back to me within two days. The book was already set in type for Taschen. So I gave her edited manuscript. She stepped up to the line. She published the book knowing there was going to be another book. We decided that there might be two markets here, the market for the \$20 book and the market for the \$1,000 book.

Do you think there is a \$20 market and a \$1,000 market?

Yes. The Cannes Film Festival has Marilyn on the poster. It's the 65th anniversary of Cannes and it's the 50th anniversary of her death. There's interest.

Why did you choose to hold on to your story and images only to release them now?

It's very simple. As a businessman, less is more. If you keep something off of the marketing you are building a form of exclusivity. If there's less of a product, there's more.

And you were not concerned that public would be flooded with stories of Marilyn?

No. I wasn't for one reason. I was giving you a view of Marilyn that had never been given before. I wasn't giving you my opinions, I was giving something people had never experienced before. And as much as you can be Marilyn-ed out or The Beatles-out or Elvis Presley-out, there's always room for something fresh. I think it has to do with, is the story interesting. I use my creativity as a form of public discourse.

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"Marilyn and Paula Strasberg," May 1962
Lawrence Schiller/Steven Kasher Gallery