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## Exhibitions: Andre de Dienes and Marilyn, the Private Moments

By David Schonauer

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She walked into his dreams.

“When Norma Jean [sic] arrive to my bungalow later in the afternoon, it was if a miracle had happened,” wrote Andre de Dienes in his memoir, describing his first meeting with the 19-year-old model who would become Marilyn Monroe.

It was 1945, and de Dienes — a Romanian-born photographer then shooting fashion in New York — had moved temporarily to Hollywood. He wanted to work on a series of experimental nudes, and he needed a model. He called agent Emmeline Snively, who said she had a very pretty girl in her office waiting for her first job. She sent Norma Jeane Baker to see him.

“I could hardly believe it for a few moments,” de Dienes wrote later. In front of him stood what he called “an earthly, sexy-looking angel.”

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De Dienes became the first professional photographer to take pictures of Norma Jeane Baker and one of her first lovers; over the next eight years he continued to photograph her in private sessions. From June 9 to July 30, New York City's Steven Kasher Gallery features the pictures they made together in the exhibition "Andre de Dienes: Marilyn and California Girls." It's the first solo show of de Dienes's image in New York in over ten years.

"His iconic photographs capture her transformation from sensitive and ambitious ingénue into Marilyn Monroe, troubled star," notes the gallery.

De Dienes, who died in 1985, photographed Norma Jeane in 1945, 1946, 1949 and 1953. He may have been the first photographer to fall in love with her; he wouldn't be the last. The attraction, he wrote, was instant and primal.

"[T]he sex drive is an enormously powerful force in all of us! Simply because Norma Jean's breasts were protruding in her sweater, I went completely erratic in my desire to have her," he noted at one point in his memoir. At another, he wrote, "It was fantastic, an almost supernatural feeling when I fell asleep with Norma Jean ..... Norma Jean was hugging me; I was kissing her tears; she said she had never had an orgasm before in her life.



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Though there was apparently a marriage proposal, nothing came of it and after his 1945 trip to Los Angeles, de Dienes returned to New York. But several months later he was back in Hollywood, and, as the Kasher Gallery notes, he “found that the young and innocent model he knew as Norma Jeane had been made over into the coy budding actress Marilyn Monroe.”

On that trip, he shot Marilyn on a beach in Malibu as she acted displayed her acting skills, alternating between happiness, introspection and sadness.



In the summer of 1949, Marilyn was on the verge of movie fame; on a trip to New York she contacted de Dienes, who photographed her at Tobay Beach on Long Island. “Once on the beach she let go of her new sex-pot persona and returned to the innocent girl de Dienes first met, laughing and playing in front of the camera,” notes the Kasher Gallery.

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Their last shoot together, in 1953, took place in what Kasher calls “a dark valley in Beverly Hills.”

“Without a flash or professional lighting, he lit Marilyn’s face with the headlight of his car,” states the gallery. “She posed sad and lonely. This was the first time that de Dienes came face to face with the dark side of Marilyn. De Dienes stayed in touch with Marilyn until her death in 1962, but never photographed her again.

“I was shaving, when I heard on the radio that Marilyn died during the night,” de Dienes wrote. “Of course I was estounded [sic], shocked, during the first few minutes, but after a while, while looking at her photos all laid out on my long worktable, I took it quite calmly. I was prepared to the event! I looked at the first photo, Norma Jean smiling, loughing [sic], than (sic), in the next photos, she looked more and more serious, and at the end of the serie [sic] of photos, there she was ....dead.”

