

# SOMERSET HOUSE PRESS RELEASE



## FROM VERA TO VERUSCHKA: THE UNSEEN PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOHNNY MONCADA 2 April - 1 June 2014 Courtyard Rooms, Somerset House, London Admission free

In the 1960s the most captivating, exotic face in fashion was supermodel Veruschka, who went by only one name. But before she hit the big time, she was known as Vera and it wasn't until fashion photographer Johnny Moncada put her in front of a camera that she was to transform into the model destined to become an icon. *From Vera to Veruschka: The Unseen Photographs by Johnny Moncada* is an exhibition of the forgotten and unpublished photographic archive of Johnny Moncada, whose extraordinary images feature the young budding model in Rome, by the sea in Capri and Sardinia, and in other locales of *la dolce vita*. Taken over the course of 1963 and 1964, the shots serve as an invaluable source of inspiration to aficionados of 1960s style and the glamour of Italian fashion.

Vera Gräfin von Lehndorff-Steinort was born in a German province of East Prussia, the daughter of a Count who became a key member of the German Resistance. When Vera was five years old, her father was executed for his involvement in Operation Valkyrie, the famous assassination attempt on Adolf Hitler. Vera and her sisters were consequently separated from their mother and sent to camps until the end of World War II. As a teenager, she wanted to become an artist and at the age of 20, she moved to Florence to pursue her

dream. In the Tuscan capital she was discovered by photographer Ugo Mulas and encouraged to take up modeling. She moved to New York, but standing at a statuesque six feet tall with tawny, golden skin, Vera didn't fit to the feminine form of the time and struggled to get a single booking. Disappointed and disheartened, she returned to Italy, met Johnny Moncada who told her she was 'marvellous' and gave it another go. She said: "Our encounters meant a lot to me, and they transformed my point of view on being a model. The time I worked with Johnny was wonderful and liberating – like a dream ... Everything began in Italy, and it was there that Johnny took my first pictures."

Not long after, she went back to New York but this time with a new, exotic name behind her – Veruschka – deciding a Russian-sounding moniker was more suited to her; her once-German hometown had become part of the Soviet Union in any case and in the Sixties she felt there was still a stigma attached to German heritage in the US and Europe. It was to be the start of a very successful career. Considered the world's first supermodel, she went on to revolutionise fashion's feminine ideal and became one of the highest paid models earning as much as \$10,000 a day. Yet she never forgot her meetings with Moncada, saying: "Perhaps you can see the beginnings of this transformation in Johnny's photographs. Even though I had evolved into Veruschka, in Johnny's photos I always remained Vera."

After Moncada's death in 2011, his daughter discovered three thousand of the unpublished photographs in a trunk that had been sealed for over forty years. The images show Vera in both beautifully staged and informal poses, dressed in the best of Italian fashion including Valentino, Irene Galitzine, Sorelle Fontana, Antonelli, Trico, Biki, Forquet, and Lancetti. Never previously exhibited, they capture a moment in fashion history and present a rare glimpse of the soon-to-be legendary model, transforming in front of Moncada's camera into the icon of Amazonian perfection that we came to know simply as Veruschka.

Curated by Moncada's daughter Valentina Moncada and creative director Antonio Monfreda, *From Vera to Veruschka: The Unseen Photographs by Johnny Moncada* will feature over 20 works, both in black and white and colour, and a video installation which takes the viewer on a behind the scenes journey through the dark room to the *dolce vita* locations.

The exhibition coincides with the release of the book by the same name, published by Rizzoli. *From Vera to Veruschka, The Unseen Photographs by Johnny Moncada*, edited and art directed by Antonio Monfreda, is priced at £47.50 and available on site from Somerset House's Rizzoli bookshop.

## **LISTINGS INFORMATION**

**Dates:** 2 April – 1 June 2014

**Opening Hours:** 10am – 6pm Daily.

**Address:** Courtyard Rooms, Somerset House, Strand, London, WC2R 1LA

**Admission:** Free

**Transport:** Temple, Embankment, Charing Cross, Waterloo

**Website:** [www.somersehouse.org.uk](http://www.somersehouse.org.uk)

**Somerset House Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/SomersetHouse](http://www.facebook.com/SomersetHouse)

**Somerset House Twitter:** @SomersetHouse (<https://twitter.com/SomersetHouse>)

**For press and image enquiries, please contact the Somerset House press office on [press@somersehouse.org.uk](mailto:press@somersehouse.org.uk) or 020 7845 4638**

**For enquiries about the book, please contact Sophie Liardet [Sophie@sophieliardet.com](mailto:Sophie@sophieliardet.com)**

### **About Somerset House**

Somerset House is a spectacular neo-classical building in the heart of London, sitting between the Strand and the River Thames. Since opening to the public in 2000, Somerset House has produced a distinctive public programme that annually draws over 2.5 million visitors to the site, providing a stimulating environment for exploration and relaxation. The varied, year-round programme includes an open air film and concert season and ice rink, as well as temporary exhibitions focusing on contemporary fashion, design, art and architecture, family workshops and free guided tours. In September 2009, Somerset House has become the home of London Fashion Week.