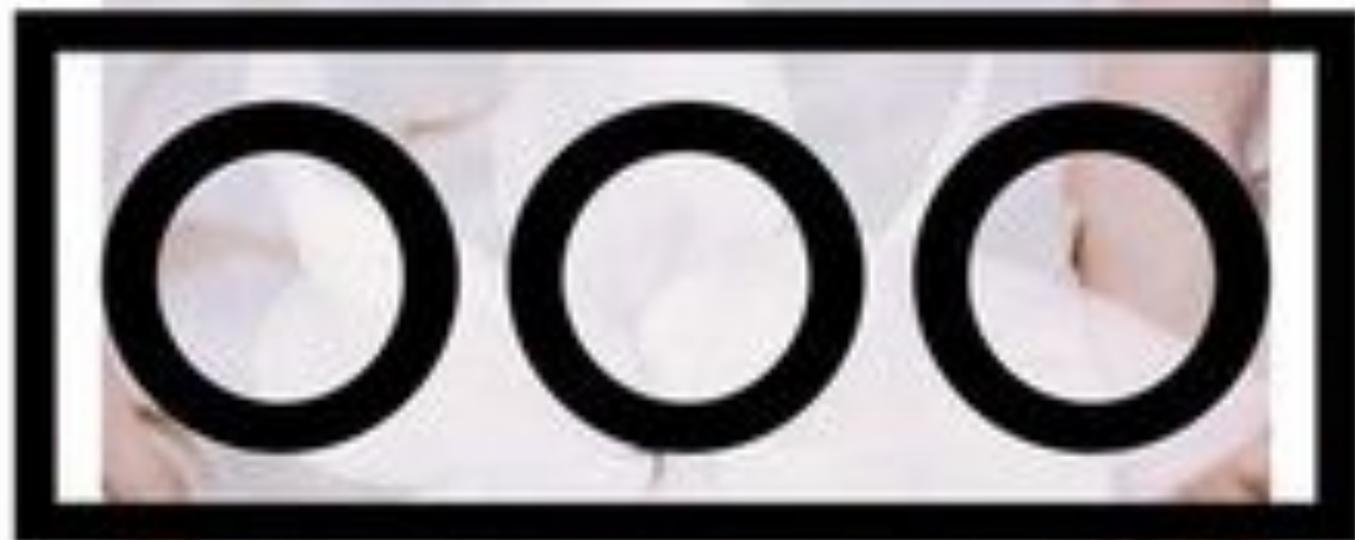


OUT OF ORDER



O1: Innocence

*Exclusive interview
with Woody Allen,
Aaron Young and
Caroline Polachek*

*Yeh Eshita
Bright Future's interview
Plus: Inside the studio
with Barry X Ball*



ship, both working and personal, with the photographer. He recently shot her wedding.

Testino's has an incredible capacity to translate a counter-cultural aesthetic into a popular one, in ways not so different than another star of the people, Madonna. In 1995, the same year as his first campaign for Gucci, the singer requested Testino for her Versace ad campaign. Who better to encapsulate the twinning of celebrity and sex for the Queen of Pop? The playing ground for such messaging was fertile: Madonna's album *Erotica* had been released just a few years earlier, followed by a book simply called *Sex*. As such, the advertisement announced in unabashed, bold, red text: "Versace Presents Madonna Photographed by Testino." Testino's vision of the star was glamorous and sexy, yet casual and natural. Most remarkable, however, was that it was unlike any photograph of her before. Shot against a blank studio backdrop, the singer wears minimal makeup and relatively refined clothes yet appears more powerful and bare than ever before. Over the next several years, Madonna, like Moss and so many other celebrities, continued to request Testino for magazine editorials, album covers, and portraits—testament to the photographer's aptitude to turn the photograph into personal relationships, between the photographer and his subject as well as the subject and her audience.

Testino was one of the first photographers to conceive of celebrities as brands unto themselves, controlling and stabilizing their images. Today, even the Royal Family must contend with contemporary popular culture in order to remain relevant: "The royal families are a brand, so how to represent them in their best? I brand things," said Testino in an interview for the magazine. The early '90s saw the launch of both *E!*, *Entertainment Television* and *Entertainment Magazine* and a number of other media outlets, such as *US Weekly* and *InStyle*, but it was not until the early 2000s that major fashion magazines like *Vogue* began to regularly feature celebrities on their covers. It is perhaps not a coincidence that Anna Wintour began to work regularly with Testino around that very moment and the photographer has shot celebrities for the cover of the American magazine since 2002. As with his photographs of Princess Diana and Madonna, Testino has the uncanny ability to make celebrity and fantasy appear real and accessible. This is partly because, as he says, "I'm not a voyeur—I'm a participant."

Testino is a participant in the industry at every level, from photographing stars to being friends with them to managing brands and creative directing—a few years ago, he founded MARIOTESTINO, which covers art direction, film, print, and social media among other

media outlets for various clients. His whole-hearted embrace of the commercial aspects of fashion has resulted in claims that his work is shallow. Recently commenting on the smiling perfection of portraits of the Royal family, *Guardian* writer Jonathan Jones called the photographer "the world's most horrible flatterer of wealth and status." Of course, elitists often decry signs of commerciality even in inherently commercial industries like fashion and the art world—again, the artist Jeff Koons has similarly been lampooned for his embrace of commerce and commercial aesthetics. To such criticisms, the photographer says, "Beauty can be considered superficial. People never think it has any depth. But in my case, beauty isn't skin-deep, because beauty is very much something to do with persona." For Testino this idea of surface and depth as well as the celebration of beauty and consumerism, is related to the idea of decadence, which is central to Testino's practice: "I like decadence in a sense that it takes it to a level underneath. For many, there's a negative connotation, something that is the beginning of the end. But I don't see it like that. I see it like a beginning of something new." Testino is not alone in his celebration of decadence, and if decadence is decay caused by excessive indulgence in pleasure and luxury, perhaps Testino is right in assuming that such decay might reveal hidden layers underneath or result in a renewal.

The interplay between dualities—surface and depth, posed and unposed, and masculine and feminine—is at the heart of Testino's work and can be seen in his portraits of celebrities like Princess Diana and Madonna as well as his fashion photographs, like those on the following pages. For Testino, this balance of opposites is what he calls a form of androgyny. Celebrated by Decadent fin-de-siècle artists and writers like Oscar Wilde, androgyny has long been seen as a signal of either cultural regeneration or degeneration. In this regard, Testino's practice once again aligns with the work of the American artist Jeff Koons, who since the 1980s has similarly been accused of decadence by breaking down dualities inherent in the art world, such as high and low, elitism and mass appeal, the real and the surreal through his celebration of commercialism and sexuality. Since the early 1990s, the iconoclastic yet popular American scholar Camille Paglia has argued for the importance of androgyny and decadence in contemporary culture. Borrowing from Nietzsche's concept of the Apollonian and the Dionysian, Paglia argues that all great art is a struggle between the masculine and the feminine, and that decadent art is great precisely because it offers a truer vision of "the amorality of the instinctual life." By embracing both androgyny and decadence, Testino's photographs remind us of the power of sex, fashion, and celebrity to not only mold bodies but also to liberate them.



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Trousers: Yapp NYC
Earring: Lady Grey