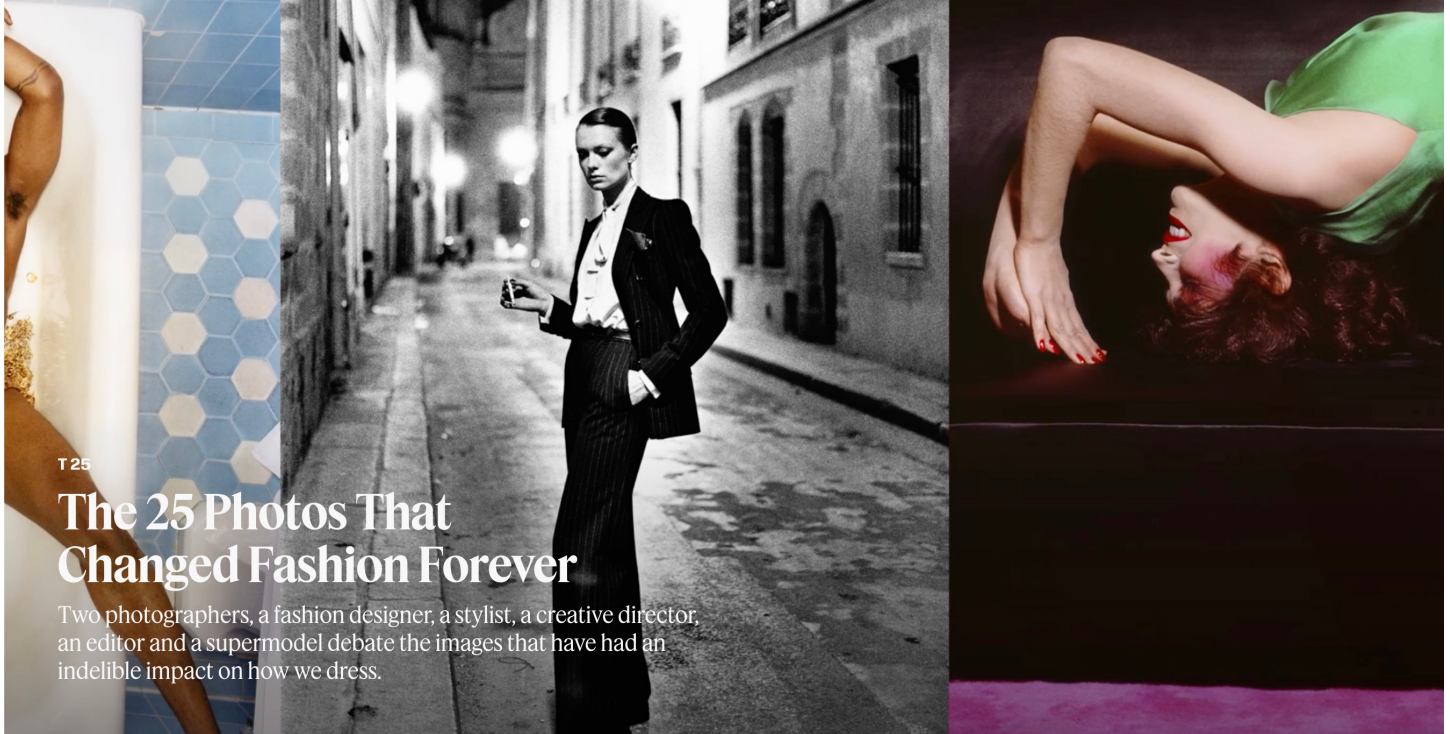


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The 25 Photos That Changed Fashion Forever

Two photographers, a fashion designer, a stylist, a creative director, an editor and a supermodel debate the images that have had an indelible impact on how we dress.

By Nick Haramis, Elly Fishman, Kate Guadagnino, Eviana Hartman, Jameson Montgomery, and Kin Woo
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In many art circles, fashion photography doesn't always get the respect it deserves. Plastered across billboards and printed in magazines, these images — of moisturized and windswept models, cradling \$5,000 handbags on the beach, by the pool or atop a tenement building — are plainly commercial. Although they exist to sell you something, they can be insidious (and inescapable) reminders that a certain level of wealth or perfection will always be out of reach. "Fashion," the American photographer Richard Avedon once said, "is about who you want to be, not who you are." But despite their limitations, print editorials and brand campaigns are, for many, a portal into a new world, proposing fresh ideas about identity and beauty. They can also provoke: In 1992, a United Colors of Benetton ad featured a photo, originally published in a 1990 issue of *Life* magazine, of the AIDS activist David Kirby on his deathbed; in 2010, after *Italian Vogue* printed an oil-spill-themed fashion story shot by Steven Meisel, *The Guardian* would ask if the spread was "slick or crude."

Choosing the 25 most influential fashion photographs of the past century is an impossible task. Partly, that's because influence is hard to trace. Without knowing firsthand, one can't really say whether Marc Jacobs's 1993 grunge collection (the one that got him fired from Perry Ellis) was inspired by the work of Joseph Szabo, whose photographs in the 1970s captured the angst and glory of suburban adolescence; or whether today's street-style photographers admire or even know about the midcentury American photographer Saul Leiter. There's also the fact that some fine-art photographers have had a great deal

of influence on fashion, even though they aren't considered fashion photographers and wouldn't refer to themselves as such. In general, fashion photography was defined broadly enough here to include the work of fine artists, street-style photographers, backstage and nightlife photographers and paparazzi. And it didn't matter if an image was *meant* as a fashion photograph, so long as the picture later inspired a designer, collection or trend, or it changed how we might think about style.



The panel, from left: Linda Evangelista, Vinoodh Matadin, Cate Holstein, Inez van Lamsweerde, Patrick Li, Nick Haramis (the conversation's moderator) and Ian Bradley, photographed at The New York Times on July 14, 2026. Credit: Davey Adésida

One morning this past July, a group of experts convened at the Times building in Midtown Manhattan to debate and make the list below. Huddled in a conference room for nearly three hours, six image makers — the New York-based stylist and T contributor Ian Bradley; the Canadian model Linda Evangelista, one of the original “supers” in the late 1980s and '90s; the American fashion designer and Khaite founder, Cate Holstein; the Dutch American photography duo Inez van Lamsweerde and Vinoodh Matadin; and T's creative director, Patrick Li — considered the merits of about 60 pictures they'd nominated, spanning roughly 100 years. (Ahead of time, each panelist was asked to submit 10 nominations, and they weren't allowed to choose ones they'd worked on.)

As one might expect, there were many arguments. Evangelista petitioned not to include “Priscilla,” Szabo's 1969 portrait of a girl smoking alone at New York's Jones Beach, since the subject, she reasoned, looks too young to have consented. Matadin unwittingly eliminated a famous album cover with a casual observation — “It was clearly based on a work of ours” — and Li talked about how graphic design can make an image more indelible. Although diversity was a consideration, most of the photographs they included orbit

global fashion capitals (New York, London, Milan, Paris and Tokyo), with an emphasis on New York, where several of the panelists live.

In the end, the following list, which isn't ranked — it's presented roughly in the order in which the entries were discussed — can be only so definitive. The selections are bound by the preferences and personal experiences of the judges, or even by their moods that day. But there's one thing they could all agree on: Whether you think it's art or frivolity, fashion photography is about so much more than clothes. — *Nick Haramis*



Deana Lawson's "Binky & Tony Forever" (2009). © Deana Lawson. Courtesy of the artist

11. Deana Lawson, "Binky & Tony Forever," 2009

Tony sits on the edge of a bed decorated with a gold satin bedspread. Binky stands between his legs, her arms coiled around his. An oval mirror reflects a sliver of the scene from another angle, suggesting a world beyond the frame. The moment appears spontaneous, but like all of Deana Lawson's work, it was carefully composed and meticulously directed. Lawson, 47, who was born and raised in Rochester, New York, made "Binky

& Tony Forever" in 2009, when she was in her 20s and living in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn. She'd met Binky, a makeup artist, on a shoot and invited her, along with her friend Anthony, to pose in the photographer's own bedroom; she wanted the image, which was later used as the album cover for Blood Orange's "Freetown Sound" (2016), to capture young Black love. The photograph is part of her broader project to build an expansive portrait of the Black diaspora, uncovering moments of beauty and grace within the everyday spaces of working-class life. As the novelist Zadie Smith wrote in *The New Yorker* in 2018, "Outside a Lawson portrait you might be working three jobs, just keeping your head above water, struggling. But inside her frame you are beautiful, imperious, unbroken, unfallen." — *Elly Fishman*

Van Lamsweerde: Oh, this picture's so good.

Bradley: Deana's a fine artist, but I think fashion photography in the last five years has become a lot like this.

Li: It's on every mood board.

Bradley: And these homey interiors — I love this set.

Li: I don't think these *are* sets.