

Lee Miller | *Performance of a Lifetime*

23 January – 25 February 2026



Lee Miller, Irmgard Seefried Opera singer, singing an aria from 'Madame Butterfly', 1945.
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Lee Miller, Model [Elizabeth Cowell] wearing Digby Morton Suit, 1941.
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Lyndsey Ingram announces *Lee Miller: Performance of a Lifetime*, an exhibition of 34 photographs by the American artist, coinciding with her major retrospective at Tate Britain.

On view from January 23–February 25, 2026 at 20 Bourdon Street, the show is curated by Clara Zevi and organised in collaboration with the Lee Miller Archives. Zevi is the founder of Artists Support, an initiative working with artists, estates and archives to raise money and awareness for charitable causes of their choosing. A portion of sale proceeds from this show will directly support the conservation of Lee Miller's photographs and the founding of a charity to preserve Farleys, Lee Miller and Roland Penrose's home.

The exhibition examines the pivotal role of theatre, staging and performance in Miller's practice - from her arrival in Paris in 1929, through to the end of the Second World War.

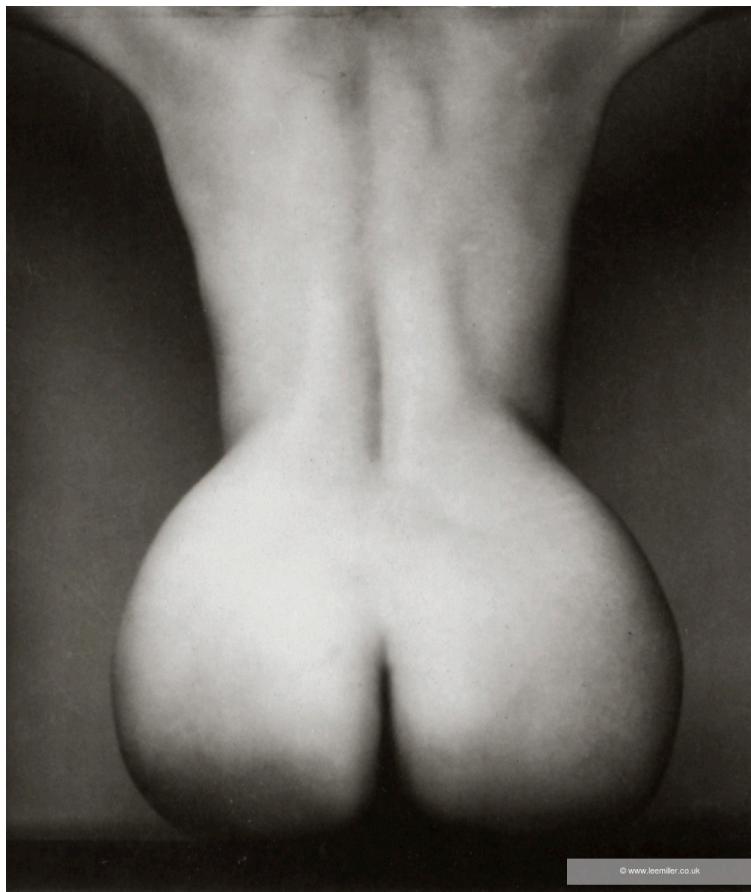
In 1925, eighteen-year-old Miller was sent by her parents from New York to Paris to pursue an education in European arts and culture. On arrival, Miller declared that she wanted to be an artist and studied stage design at *L'Ecole Medgyes pour la Technique du Théâtre*, a technical theatre school run by the French-Hungarian artist, Ladislas Medgyes. Erno Goldfinger, the architect responsible for Trellick Tower and many other modernist London buildings, was a teacher at the time. The following year, back in the United States, Miller enrolled at Vassar College to continue her studies. In a diary entry from March 1927, Miller describes resolving a lighting problem on the set of a school play. Impressed, Professor Hallie Flanagan - a key figure in early twentieth-century performance - asked Miller, still a student, to lecture on the technical aspects of contemporary European theatre.

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Lee Miller, *Untitled Nude back (thought to be Noma Rathner)*, Paris, 1930.

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The fifteen years that followed saw the height of Surrealism, the Blitz and the Second World War, all of which Miller captured. It is this era that is closely examined in *Performance of a Lifetime*. Miller collaborated with Man Ray, shot commercial fashion shoots for *Vogue*, and photographed the war and liberation of the Dachau and Buchenwald concentration camps. Her photographs from this period are marked by staging and theatricality: dramatic spot lighting, illusions, distortions, and everyday objects that function like props.

For *Performance of a Lifetime*, photographs are presented in pairs, each coupling two seemingly unrelated images unified by theatrical tension and formal ties. A line of ATS (Auxiliary Territorial Service) women silhouetted by a searchlight is paired with an early commercial photograph of mirrored perfume bottles; a crisp 1932 profile self-portrait is placed next to Miller's harrowing 1945 image of Regina Liss, the daughter of Leipzig's deputy mayor, photographed shortly after her suicide as Allied forces advanced. In the *Vogue* text accompanying the image, Miller remarked on the teenager's "extraordinarily pretty teeth", a chilling detail that underscores the artist's ability to fuse observation with narrative.

The earliest work in the show, a c.1930 nude shot while Miller was Man Ray's collaborator and romantic partner, reveals her early command of lighting with the curves of the body rendered as delicately as graphite. Miller's proficiency in technical lighting is clear here, even at this early stage in her career. Several photographs originally published in *British Vogue* are also presented, including *High Fashion*, 1939, in which a model wearing a fur trimmed suit looks down on a globe as though appraising a world in the midst of realignment.

To mark the exhibition, the Lee Miller Archives will debut and release a newly printed platinum edition photograph of opera singer Irmgard Seefried, captured performing amid the bombed ruins of Vienna's State Opera House, a poignant encapsulation of Miller's lifelong fascination with performance, even under the most extreme conditions.

About Lee Miller: Lee Miller, born in 1907 in Poughkeepsie, New York, entered the world of photography as a high fashion model in 1920's New York, working with some of the greatest fashion photographers of the day, including Edward Steichen, George Hoyningen-Huene and Arnold Genthe. Deciding she would '*rather take a picture than be one*', in 1929 she moved to Paris to work with Man Ray.

In Paris, Miller established her own photographic studio, working as a commercial portrait and fashion photographer. During this period she re-discovered the Sabattier Effect, a photographic technique later popularised as 'Solarisation', with Man Ray. Miller returned to New York in 1932, and there she established another successful photographic studio. She married Egyptian businessman Aziz Eloui Bey, and moved with him to Cairo, where she photographed precarious, long-range desert travel.

During a visit to Paris in 1937 Miller met Roland Penrose- the surrealist artist who would later co-found the ICA in London and become her second husband- and travelled with him to Greece and Romania. In 1939, she definitively left Egypt for London, moved in with Roland and, defying orders from the US Embassy to return to America, took a job as a freelance photographer for *Vogue*.

In 1944, Miller became a correspondent accredited to the US Army, and often teamed up with her friend, the *LIFE Magazine* photographer David E. Scherman. She followed the US troops overseas after D Day, becoming one of only a few women combat photojournalists to cover the front-line war in Europe. Miller documented the siege of St Malo, the Liberation of Paris, the fighting in Luxembourg and Alsace, the Russian/American link up at Torgau, and the liberation of Buchenwald and Dachau Concentration Camps.

Witnessing many of the major events of the Second World War, Miller was billeted in both Hitler and Eva Braun's houses in Munich, and photographed Hitler's house, Wachenfeld at Berchtesgaden, in flames on the eve of Germany's surrender. Penetrating deep into Eastern Europe, she covered harrowing scenes of children dying in Vienna, peasant life in devastated post-war Hungary and finally the execution of Prime Minister Lazlo Bardossy.

Post-war, Miller continued to contribute to *Vogue*, covering fashion and celebrity culture, including portraits of renowned artists such as Pablo Picasso and Joan Miró. Following the birth of their son, Antony Penrose, Miller and Roland relocated to Farleys, a farm in the East Sussex countryside. In the last two decades of her life, Miller became a celebrated, award-winning cook, known for her dishes inspired by Surrealism. Miller died at Farleys in 1977.

Her works are held in the permanent collections of The National Portrait Gallery, London; Tate, London; Victoria and Albert Museum, London; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Art Institute of Chicago; J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles; New Orleans Museum of Art, New Orleans; Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia; Museum Ludwig, Cologne; Collection Centre Pompidou, Paris; National Galleries of Scotland and more. Solo exhibitions have been held at Fitzrovia Chapel, London, UK; Palazzo Reale, Milan, Italy; Fundacio Joan Miro, Barcelona, Spain; Martin Gropius Bau, Berlin, Germany; Museo de Arte Moderno 'MAM', Mexico; Albertina Kunst Museum Palais, Vienna, Austria; Scottish National Portrait Gallery, Edinburgh, UK; Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, USA; SF MOMA, San Francisco, USA; Jeu de Paume, Paris, France; National Portrait Gallery, London, UK; Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, UK; Stedelijk, Amsterdam, The Netherlands; Museum Ludwig, Cologne, Germany; Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minneapolis, USA; Museum of Modern Art, Oxford, UK; Tate Britain, London.

About Farleys: Farleys is the Sussex farmhouse where Lee Miller lived with her husband, art historian and ICA co-founder Roland Penrose, from 1949 until her death. It is also where the Lee Miller Archives are held and conserved. The house, gardens and gallery are open to the public for tours from April to October.

About Clara Zevi: Clara Zevi is an art historian working on impactful fundraising projects. She is the founder and director of Artists Support, an initiative founded in 2020 that helps artists, estates and archives raise money and awareness for the causes and charities most important to them.

Lee Miller: Performance of a Lifetime is open to the public at Lyndsey Ingram, 20 Bourdon Street, London W1K 3PL every Monday to Friday between the 23 January – 25 February 2026 from 10am until 6pm.

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