



HELMUT
NEWTON
SUMO

100 Years of Helmut Newton:
The Making of SUMO
and the Birth of BABY SUMO

40

TASCHEN

SINCE 1980

HELMUT NEWTON
The BABY SUMO Edition

Philippe Starck
photographed
by Helmut Newton



The Making of
Helmut Newton's
SUMMO

Helmut Newton checks a
printing sheet during
Frankfurt Book Fair, 1999.

à No. Fax 00 49 221 2580163

La Figuière

3 PAGES

*** NN 9.5.1999

①

My dear Benedikt,
 It was important that I talked to
 you on the phone today. Es hat
 mich sehr erleichtert. I feel
 lately that the SUMO book has
 become my slavemaster, a
 stone around my neck and it
 should be a joy. I me & I have
 worked on many books, though
 never a project as ambitious as
 this one. I have always enjoyed
 my work and loved it, this is
 the first time that I am suf-
 fering a depression and I must
 do something about it. These are
 the worries I must talk to
 you about and clear the air.
 1.) The foremost is the signing!



Helmut Newton signing the pages which were subsequently bound into SUMO. Monte Carlo, 1999. Photo by Alice Springs.

Over a period of two years, Helmut Newton and Benedikt Taschen exchanged letters, faxes, and phone calls to define details of the SUMO production. At some point, not amused by the prospect of having to sign the entire print run of 10,000 copies, Newton tried to wrestle out of the agreement, suggesting to "maybe sign a few dozen" printing sheets.

29/05/99 18:22 Pg: 2

La Figueire (2)

*** NN

You smoeely have not yet annou-
ced it officially. After all, the
first presentation will be in Be-
sel. So let's not mention this
in any way. Nr. 2 is the sudden
realization that either June or
myself will have to stand next
to the machines to check the fi-
nal printing. This came as a
great shock to us both. We
haven't done this for 20 years
and in these 20 years we have
published a great number of
books + catalogues, in most
cases excellently executed.
Supervising the final print-
ing is terribly tiring and
should not be necessary any-

ROUTE DE TAHIII - 83300 RAMAIDELLE - TELEPHONE : 04 94 97 18 21 - FAX : 04 94 97 68 48

0077141

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La Figueire (3)

*** NN

more. From my past exhibitions I
can show you many posters, same
size as the Sumo, and they are
perfectly printed without my
supervision. But so was your in-
vitation. It looks great. Let's
find a way to get over this
hurdle! Nr. 3: I am really good
at press conferences and interviews,
But as I said to you the other day,
it's a very tiring business and
I will not overdo it. Conse-
quently I will do this sparing-
ly and also avoid long plane
travel. There it is, once I am
relieved of these worries I can
have fun with the Sumo, as
we all want to. - I will be here
until the morning of June 2nd.
Warmest regards, Helmut

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Benedikt Taschen with
the handmade dummy
of SUMO when first
presenting his idea of
producing a gigantic
book to stunned Helmut
and June Newton in his

suite at the Sunset
Marquis Hotel,
Hollywood, 1997. Photo
by Helmut Newton.

Helmut Newton,
Benedikt Taschen and
auctioneer Simon de
Pury after the auction of
SUMO copy number
one, signed by over 100
celebrities portrayed in

the book. At 620,000
deuschmarks it made
the world record price
for a book published in
the 20th century, Berlin,
2000. Photo by Alice
Springs.



© The Helmut Newton Estate / Macconochie Photography. © Alice Springs / Macconochie Photography

Helmut la Figueire

Taschen, Benedikt

An: Taschen, Benedikt

cher maitre,
dear helmut,

NEWTON MR HELMUT NEWTON

sorry for not coming back to yr recent fax earlier. i wanted to type it instead of handwriting
because i thought you could read it easier.

proofs
====

33 FAX 4/94 9768 48
PL 4/94 9718 21

i was really relieved and very happy after my short visit to monte carlo. our production department now knows what we
have to do and i do know as well. so every new proof will go through my hands (and eyes) and needs my ok. to make
sure you are happy as well with the next set of proofs i suggest you have to ok them again. either me or horst could
come to see you with the new proofs may be some day next week. when you feel confident with the next delivery you
should decide whether you want to continue checking the rest of the proofs,
or wheter you want to see just some more critical & complicated prints or maybe nothing more.

printing
=====

we will make test-printing for several sheets (that means not the whole printrun) next week.
this is made for you and us to see how it looks in general and particularly with the varnish.
as well, if you like/love it you don't have to come to the printer in person. if you don't like
it we try again. if you like it there after your personal appearance at the printing plant is
not necessary as well.

press conference in basel
=====

we do like you said: we will book up to maximum 4 personal interviews upon request with you. the rest is for the press-
conference on thursday at noon. i think this is done in 1 hour.
ca va bien avec vous?

signing
=====

we choose paper this week and make suggestions next week for you. you will have up to
9 (nine) months to finish the signing. that means 270 days or less than 40 per day. or
you sign i.e. 400 on one day (takes 45 minutes) and take 9 days holidays after. or we are
happy to make you whatever kind of arrangements for einen anregenden sign-kurzurlaub
in a place whereever you and june would feel comfortable. please, please believe me:
it sounds a terrble (may be) but it will be done very smooth. beside this i am happy to assist
you as suggested in cologne. i really NEED to have them signed because it makes just a significant difference to the
customers all over the world. just remeber that already in a quiet
corner of a not specila restaurant in cologne two people came to ask you for an autograph.

dear helmut, the layout as finished from june is looking terrific. it's will be the coolest fotobook
ever published. and it want be a burden/mühlstein for you anymore - stattdessen ein QUELL
ständiger FREUDE, einem FÜLLHORN gleich. but it will be a mühlstein for generations of photographers who have to
live with this. so i feel sorry for them.

please give a kiss to june from me, i appreciate so much what she did for the RUHM of the
SUMO already (beside this, as i told you, i think we have something june will like for her
immense and intense work on this book).

have a nice evening and please say hello to ralph whom we missed in paris

as always ihr benedikt

Benedikt

1



“That book was an *outrageous* idea—totally crazy!”
Helmut Newton

At 620,000 Deutschmarks SUMO made the world record price for a book published in the 20th century

Exhibition view from *Helmut Newton SUMO* at the Helmut Newton Foundation, Berlin, 2009. Photo by Gerhard Kassner.

SUMO: A Landmark Revisited

by Philippe Garner

HELMUT ALWAYS DEMONSTRATED a healthy disdain for easy or predictable solutions. SUMO—a bold and, certainly within the traditions of photography, an unprecedented publishing venture—was an irresistible project. The idea of a spectacular compendium of images, reproduced to exceptional page size and to state-of-the-art origination and printing standards, emerged from an open, exploratory dialogue between photographer and publisher. Helmut liked to probe possibilities, ever eager to rethink the ways in which he could develop and extend the all-important interface between his work and his audience. The magazine page had been the constant on which he had built his career; from the mid-1970s, books and exhibitions offered further opportunities, allowing him to exploit more extended picture sequences and significant changes of print scale. Here, with the physically commanding SUMO, weighing in—boxed and shrink-wrapped—at 35.4 kilos, Helmut created, at the close of the 20th century, a landmark book that would stand head and shoulders above anything that had been attempted conceptually or technically before. SUMO, complete with its bespoke lectern, set an ambitious new standard—a book with the dimension of a private exhibition.

SUMO might also be interpreted as a triumph of another order, with a very particular political and cultural significance that made it a singularly emotive and gratifying achievement. For here was a forceful statement, implicit rather than baldly stated—and all the stronger for that—confirming the authority of an unusually gifted individual's perspective and emphatically marking his determination to engage an audience on his terms—in short, a statement about freedom of expression.

Helmut ranks among the foremost figurative artists of his era. A social commentator of exceptional insight, his was a distinct and surprising sensibility—perverse, with a sharp and insistent curiosity, perfectly leavened by wry humour. Helmut's talent was uniquely personal and he had the ability to turn into a valuable creative resource everything that he experienced, including the turmoil of those formative years in which brutal and traumatic political realities disrupted all that had been agreeable and stable in his life. An at-first reluctant exile, he adapted imaginatively to his itinerant destiny. Helmut developed a finely calibrated sensitivity to the atmosphere of place and to everything he observed—notably to the subtleties of social codes and rituals and to the visual language of seduction and of style. He took inspiration from his nostalgic fondness for the evocative symbols of old Europe, the Europe of his youth; and he embraced with fascination the vulgar New Babylons of the U.S., particularly Los Angeles. As he matured, he learned to use that matchless eye and twisted perception to create a body of work that is to its age as significant a document as are, for instance, the satirical caricatures of William Hogarth to the excesses of 18th-century Britain, the drawings of Honoré Daumier to the social nuances of French life in the mid-19th century or the savage visual dissections of George Grosz to the decadence of that very Berlin into which Helmut was born.



*Karl Lagerfeld,
Paris 1992.*

*Rue Aubriot,
Yves Saint Laurent,
French Vogue,
Paris 1975.*





Villa d'Este,
Lake Como,
Italy 1975.



To the question:
*“What people do you
 like to photograph?”*
 my answer is: *“Those
 I love, those I admire
 and those I hate.”*

Helmut Newton

Helmut truly found his form once he settled in Paris. There, he defined for himself a creative role within a chic high Bohemia, the milieu of interlinked friends and professional associates in the worlds of fashion, the media and the arts that was the stimulating crucible for his work. In his rue Aubriot studio in the 1970s, he stored his Kodachrome transparencies in small cabinets labelled “Fashion”, “Erotic subjects” and “Portraits mondains”; but of course his genius was to wilfully blur these distinctions, building a multilayered social portrait in which subtle allusions and telling undercurrents lent every picture intrigue and reverberation.

Helmut travelled widely, but always carried with him the precious and poignant memories of his native Germany; and these feelings drew him back with increasing regularity to the country and culture that had shaped him. There was an irresistible logic in the fact that the four issues of *Helmut Newton’s Illustrated* that he produced between 1985 and 1995 should take their inspiration from then-new photo-illustrated journals that had inspired him in the 1930s. Germany could boast a long and significant tradition in the story of publishing, since the flowering of printing in the pioneering era of Johannes Gutenberg; and Helmut had, at first hand, witnessed its tragic corollary with the repression and the book burning of the Nazis. This observation calls to mind Helmut’s cool-headed response some years ago to the report that a lecture he had been invited to deliver to a university audience would be disrupted by a group of students planning to throw raw meat at this speaker, whose work they were only prepared to perceive through the prism of their own rigid prejudices. Helmut’s judicious opening remarks situated him immediately as one who was lucky to have escaped the increasingly vicious purges of the late 1930s and who had surely earned the right to freedom of artistic expression—and the right, as a working photographer, to challenge and to provoke. The student anger was defused and by the end of his talk all were ready to offer up their resounding applause for an artist with the courage and tenacity to pursue his creative instinct to the full and who, through his witty, sophisticated and confrontational images, was determined to throw down the gauntlet against the mediocre, the safe and the superficial.

SUMO, appropriately published in Germany, has made its memorable statement as a piece of photo-book history.



Elizabeth Taylor,
Vanity Fair,
 Los Angeles 1989.

Debra Winger,
 Los Angeles 1983.

Reach for the Essential



How did you meet Benedikt? How did your collaboration with TASCHEN start?

I can't remember how or when I met Benedikt Taschen, because the meeting seems anecdotal and meaningless compared to the person. Before everything, that person was an extraordinary voice, a voice that raised the dead, a voice from beyond the grave, a voice that made women from all continents fall. The dream voice. A voice so deep that sometimes we couldn't hear, as there was only bass and infrabass.

I didn't want to make books. Actually, it's been 12 years since our last book—it's my fault I am unable to finish the one in progress, which shows my degree of urgency. I used to find coffee table books—these big, heavy, expensive art books—quite anti-democratic. For me, they were social representations that no one really browsed through, only displayed to show we have wealth, culture, and a sturdy coffee table (well designed by a famous creator) that can support them.

When I discovered by chance TASCHEN Editions, I also discovered that their prices were exactly in line with my work on democratic design. I thought that with these prices, TASCHEN books were actually like TV at that time: going everywhere, reaching everyone, with no social discrimination. That is the reason why, on the day we met, I signed with him. He still is the only one I have signed with.

It must be said that Benedikt is an incredibly special person and an incredibly loyal friend. When you're friends with Benedikt, it's for life. What I like about Benedikt is that he is a man of very few words. He listens. Each "non-answer" is a deep acquiescence: not out of courtesy or disinterest, he simply agrees. And we always agree.

What was the inspiration / impulse for the SUMO bookstand?

I don't precisely remember the inspiration that reigned over the creation of the SUMO bookstand. But when I see it now, I understand that I wanted to create a useful object that would show an extremely intelligent foldable structure. That, I didn't design; I am not that clever. It is a structure that already existed among ancient Egyptians. It is without doubt the most intelligent foldable structure ever made. I was not interested in creating a beautiful object, but in showing this intelligence.

What was the design process?

The design process is always the same: reach for the essential with the minimum of energy, the minimum of matter, and try to prove more than the simple function of the object.

How did you approach the BABY SUMO edition?

I can only like the new BABY SUMO because it connects with my obsession with democratic design, democratic production: being smaller, I suppose, it will cost less. All that is beautiful and less expensive is a mark of respect to people who don't want to or can't spend their money on an object that is great yet secondary to survival.

Besides your very own book and the design of the bookstand, you created the architecture for the first TASCHEN stores (Paris 2000, Miami, Beverly Hills, New York, London...). The first store, in Paris, took a radical new approach to presenting books; what was your idea?

My idea was extremely simple: TASCHEN books are not expensive but accessible to all, from all social classes. Thus, paradoxically, I wanted the time of purchase to feel like a privileged, exceptional moment. I wanted the boutiques to be artistic, even luxurious. I couldn't stand the idea of selling these wonderful books on plywood panels. I wanted to subconsciously give an added value to the purchase of these books, especially since they are almost always gifts.

How do you describe the collaboration with Benedikt?

My collaboration with B is that of old friends. Even if we don't see each other often, we have always shared the same thought form: the best for everyone with a touch of folly, excess, poetry, fantasy and above all an enormous and permanent laughter. When B laughs, which happens rarely but deeply, window glass splinters and foundations tremble.

Your book with TASCHEN was a huge success. What did it mean to you? Did the book reveal / illustrate anything new about your work?

I didn't know my book with TASCHEN was an important success. I am very happy about it because I spend 10 hours per day creating Christmas gifts for everyone, and I am pleased when gifts are appreciated.

My books are not meant to show how handsome I am (that would be a failure); to show how talented I am (that would also be a failure); to show how genius I am (that, I am definitely not). They are meant to show that the sky isn't the limit; that imagination is the greatest power; that we have the duty to invent always with the highest vision, rigor, and honesty; that everyone can do it, as creativity isn't genetic or of divine order but it is a will, a choice of life: to dedicate one's life, to only exist to the benefit of the dream.

What does TASCHEN mean to you? What does TASCHEN stand for?

TASCHEN is a fantastic educational tool. Almost everyone can have access to almost every existing form of culture. With such editorial quality, TASCHEN should be reimbursed by the Social Security.

What's your favorite TASCHEN book?

All of them, as each complements the others. Each book gives a facet of humanity, so they're all interesting to me.

Philippe Starck working on the design of the stainless steel SUMO table in his studio, Paris, 1998.

BABY SUMO, the ultimate collectible: Published in a limited edition of 10,000 numbered copies, it is exactly half the size of the famous 1999 original. Created on the occasion of Helmut Newton's 100th birthday and TASCHEN's 40th anniversary.

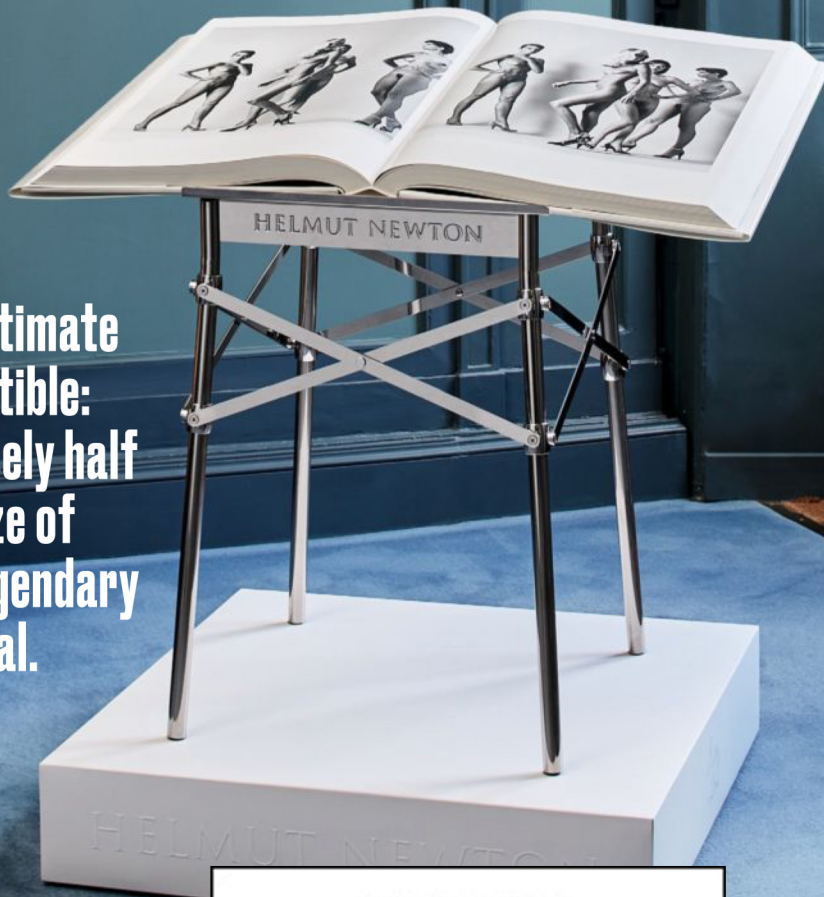


HELMUT NEWTON.
BABY SUMO
Edited and revised by June Newton
Edition of 10,000 numbered copies
29.2 in. (height of book on stand)
464 pages \$1,500

BABY SUMO comes with a bookstand designed by Philippe Starck, including a pedestal and a booklet documenting the making of this legendary publication.

**BABY SUMO,
welcome to
the world!**

**The Ultimate
Collectible:
precisely half
the size of
the legendary
original.**



BUY NOW