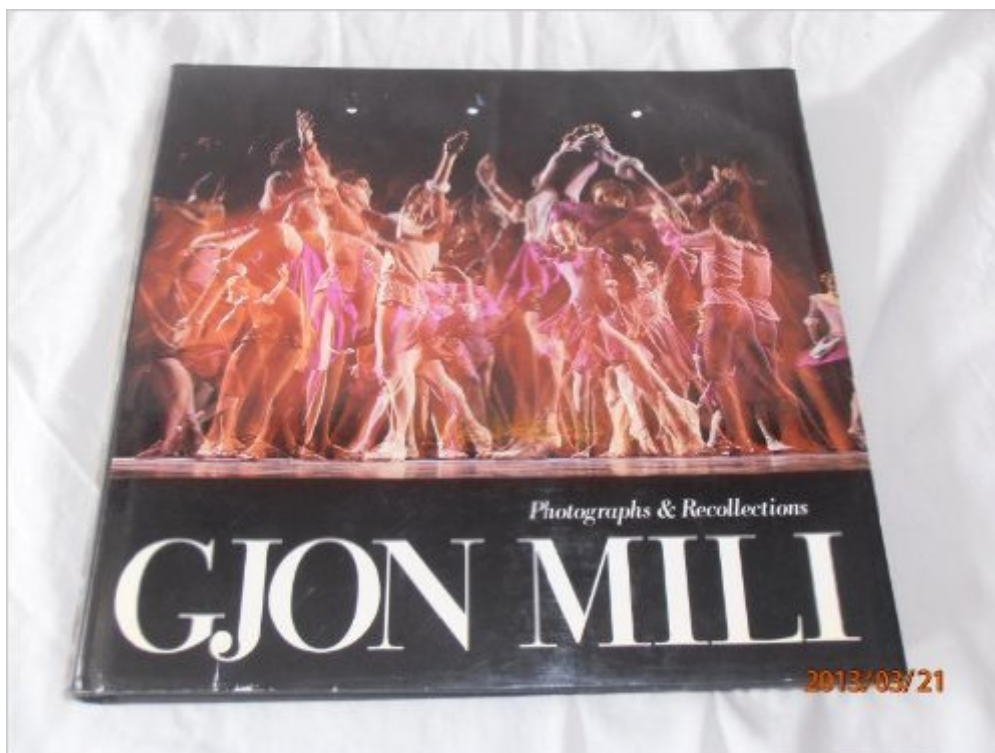


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Gjon Mili: Photographs And Recollections



Synopsis

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Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Gjon Mili was an MIT educated Engineer who spent most of his life working as a "Life" magazine photographer. In 1937 he and Dr. Harold Edgerton were speakers on lighting in photography at MIT. Mili was lecturing, "about artificial light sources then available, and Professor Edgerton discussed his newly developed electronic flash with the remarkably short duration of 1/100,000 second." Up to that time, Edgerton had only been able to use his electronic flash to capture very small subjects such as a drop of milk falling, a bullet in flight and humming birds. After they talked, Mili told Edgerton if he could supply ten times the amount of light he would quit his Engineering job at Westinghouse and photograph everything. That's exactly what he did. His knowledge of using the multiple "motion freezing" exposures of Edgerton's techniques led him immediately to "Life" magazine where he used the technique to explore a previously unseen and un-photographed visual world. While few people recognize Mili's name today, most of them have seen some of his pictures such as "Pas de Bourree, Nora Kaye of the American Ballet Theater, 1947" or "Traceries with lights attached to Foils, 1947" or "A centaur drawn with Light--Pablo Picasso at the Madoura Pottery in Vallaruis, France 1949" or "Nude descending staircase, 1942." One of the multiple exposures that I'd never seen was a 1946 portrait of photographer Edward Weston walking and being so delighted with all the multiple strobes firing that his expression goes from somber at the beginning of his walk to smiling, skipping and clapping his hands together at the end of the walk. All this happens in a

single multiple exposure photograph.

Just have a quick flip through this book and you'll realize why Mili worked for Life magazine for over three decades. Pages after page of remarkable photos including several of his trademark shots using a strobe light. Though this technique was initially devised for industrial use Mili saw the potential and his photos in Life captured the public imagination. It's slightly unfortunate there is only one photo from the 1949 assignment of Picasso painting in air with a light pen (other shots can be found on the net and they are truly quite stunning). Mili was probably best known for his strobe work but as these pages reveal he was an extraordinary photojournalist. I think his second strength was his ability to capture the humanity of creative folk. There are photos here of Sean O'Casey, Raoul Dufy, George Braque, Henri Matisse, Giorgio de Chirico, Igor Stravinsky, Ben Shahn, Alexander Calder and Isaac Stern that must count as some of the greatest portraits ever taken of these people. They are not the usual studio portraits but photos bursting with life and the aura of these great artists. There is a 1949 photo essay devoted to Pablo Casals that has some amazing images of one of world's greatest cellists. As well as strobe photos and great artists Mili could turn his lens towards anything: landscapes; popular entertainers; historic ruins and sculpture (Greece, Rome, Chartres); landscapes (Carrara, Italy); politics (Watergate); current affairs (Adolf Eichmann) and more. So why three stars? Because the book's reproduction and paper are inadequate for these fascinating photos. Though the book was published in 1980 I was surprised to discover that the screen used was only 133. Supermarket flyers that come through your letterbox use this.

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