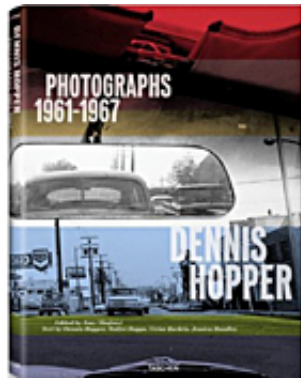


Léon Bing, *Swans and Pistols: Modeling, Motherhood, and Making It in the Me Generation*, Bloomsbury



Dennis Hopper, *Dennis Hopper: Photographs, 1961-1967*, Taschen

BOOK REPORT

by Hunter Drohojowska-Philp

"I'm either a dumb person at the core of a smart one or an intelligent woman who can make some really stupid choices." So writes Léon Bing in the epilogue to her new memoir, *Swans and Pistols: Modeling, Motherhood, and Making It in the Me Generation*.

One of a host of players that makes the Southern California art scene of the '50s and '60s into a glowing bohemia, Bing has an enviable combination of *chutzpah* and good fortune. After an unexceptional childhood in Northern California with a strong-willed mother with five marriages, Bing finds herself a beautiful ingénue in the glittering Los Angeles of the 1950s. Her success as a department store model propels her to New York, where she models for the top fashion magazines and dates myriad fabulous men.

A marriage to television director Mack Bing and the birth of their daughter Lisa follows, before she winds up back in Los Angeles in the 1960s. After the marriage falls apart, Bing goes back to work, becoming the top model for Rudi Gernreich. (His other model, Peggy Moffitt, has moved to London with photographer husband William Claxton.)

With Gernreich she is posing on the steps of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art for a photograph of artists and designers when she spies Ed Ruscha, also there for the photo-session. She insists Gernreich introduce them and after that, as she says, "It was on." Ruscha, not long married to his wife Danna and a new father, is smitten by the long-legged cover girl and begins a torrid affair that continues for four years. She brings Ruscha to the home of her good friend Mama Cass and has sex with him in her swimming pool.

It must have been true love, for she also agreed to star in Ruscha's legendary *Premium*, a book of photographs and later a movie. In both she is the date of a nattily dressed Larry Bell, the sculptor, riding in a Pierce Arrow driven by Tommy Smothers. Bell escorts her to a hotel room where she undresses and gets into a bed covered in lettuce. Bell then douses her with salad dressing and leaves to get. . . crackers. Premium brand saltines, of course. Her affair with Ruscha ultimately comes to an end but he gives her a large word painting, *Listen, I'd Like to Help Out, But --*.

Still more colorful men enter her life. She befriends gangster Mickey Cohen, producer David Merrick and for three years lives with Nick Barbosa, whom she describes as a "successful, mid-range cocaine dealer." It is the early '80s when such a calling had significant social cachet in free-wheeling L.A. When it concludes, Bing is left to fend for herself.

Where most such memoirs might grind to a sad halt, Bing reinvents herself again, this time as

an author of articles and books on what might seem the least probable topic: gang wars. (Though she does seem to have a rather tender outlook on mobsters.)

Her first book, *Do and Die*, about the Crips and Bloods in L.A., came out in 1991 and was praised by critics, who could hardly help but be amazed by the beauty of its author. The current memoir is her fourth book, a summation of a most unusual life, and at the conclusion, one can hardly help but recall the wisdom of Mae West: good girls go to heaven but bad girls, and lucky girls, get to go everywhere.

Dennis Hopper took most of the glamorous photographs that appear in Bing's memoir. Hopper's photos are featured as well in a substantial new book that not only makes a case for Hopper as a photographer but also chronicles his work as actor, director and all-around rogue. Those familiar with his photographs of the 1960s L.A. art scene will find few surprises here, but the images retain a certain timeless appeal. From Jasper Johns to Jane Fonda, the crowd is lovely, funny and fashionable, and we are lucky today that Hopper was around to take their pictures.

Informal and inventive, Hopper definitely had his own esthetic, whether he was capturing images from his home life with actor Brooke Hayward, or friends like Paul Newman, the sets of various films, the civil rights marches in the Montgomery, rodeo riders, rock bands and, of course, naked girls.

An added boon is the essay written about Hopper and L.A. in the '60s by the late, great Walter Hopps. The legendary curator chronicles Hopper's drug-addled obsession with guns when he lived in Taos, years that the book frankly and accurately labels as "Into Oblivion." Another essay by art dealer Tony Shafrazi, who edited the book and now shows Hopper's photos and paintings, chronicles his long friendship with the 72-year-old actor and artist.

Marvelous in many ways, the publication also gives concrete meaning to the notion of a book as "a valuable addition to your library." The signed limited edition of 100, which includes a Hopper print, is \$1,800, while copies from the signed edition of 1,500 are priced at \$700.

Léon Bing, *Swans and Pistols: Modeling, Motherhood, and Making It in the Me Generation*, Bloomsbury, \$25.

Dennis Hopper, *Dennis Hopper: Photographs, 1961-1967*, Taschen, \$1,800 and \$700.

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