

To die in beauty. The staging of death in fashion photography
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The "dead woman" is a recurrent motive in fashion photography. This is all the more amazing because it seems to undermine the very purpose of fashion photography that is supposed to make clothes appeal to the consumer so that they may be bought. How can such images promote fashion, when the taboo of death is put on display? But although there is this seeming conflict, it is also true that the photographs of Izima Kaoru, Helmut Newton or Guy Bourdin are strange and fascinating. In the mode of self-reference the images force the observer to notice that fashion always plays on its own death.

In the 19th and 20th century, cultural philosophers like Georg Simmel, Giacomo Leopardi and Walter Benjamin wrote about the cyclic nature of fashion where only the 'death' of a vogue generates a new style. These authors constructed a connection of death, fashion and woman and created the topos of the "enticing corpse". Reflections of these ideas can still be found in the works of fashion photographers like Guy Bourdin or Izima Kaoru, who in their work are interested in the very end of life. In the middle of the 20th century, Bourdin was one of the first fashion photographers to artistically expose the cruelty of fashion beauty, referring to the Surrealists. Guy Luchford and Kaoru followed his lead but intensified the images by even staging the fashion-deaths.