

# THE ROVING EYE

By Judith Thurman

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Miller in Man Ray's "La Révolution Surréaliste" (1930). © 2008 MAN RAY TRUST/ARTISTS RIGHTS SOCIETY, NY/ADAGP, PARIS

The American model and photographer Lee Miller was born in Poughkeepsie, New York, a century ago, but spent most of her life seeking adventure in Europe and the Middle East. Last September, a retrospective of her work in front of and behind a camera, “The Art of Lee Miller,” curated by Mark Haworth-Booth, opened at the Victoria and Albert Museum, in London. (It travels to the Philadelphia Museum of Art this month.) In his introduction to the show’s companion volume (Yale; \$60), Haworth-Booth describes Miller as an artist of “the first electric century,” and he invokes the metaphor of electricity—its power to attract, repel, shock, and illuminate—in making a case for her significance.

Miller’s power, however, generated an uneven legacy notably indebted to her lover Man Ray, to her mentor Edward Steichen, and to Eugène Atget, Edward Weston, Brassai, and Paul Strand. Her audacious sexual history has colored perceptions of her art, as has her enshrinement by the fashion world. She traded on her exceptional beauty while it lasted, but she also struggled for respect, and for something more elusive: self-respect. The formal tension in her work is a play between veiling and exposure, glamour and brutality. It carries an erotic charge even when the subject isn’t erotic.

On my way to the London preview, I stopped to ponder a startling image of Miller in a show of military and couture camouflage at the Imperial War Museum. The French were the first, in 1915, to experiment with “disruptive patterns” of light, shade, and color hand-painted on uniforms and artillery—a technique indebted to Cubism. In 1940, the rich and eccentric British Surrealist Roland Penrose decided that he could best contribute to his country’s defense by recruiting artists for a camouflage unit, and lecturing on their research to the Home Guard. The unit had been testing an ointment developed to hide skin from a rifle scope, or at least to disguise it, and on a summer day, in a friend’s garden, Penrose asked Miller, his mistress (they married a few years later, to legitimize their only child, Antony), to play the guinea pig.

Miller was in her mid-thirties. She had been covering the blitz for British *Vogue*, and, after the Normandy invasion, she would help to document the liberation of Europe as one of an élite company of women (Margaret Bourke-White, Marguerite Higgins, Mary Welsh, Helen Kirkpatrick, and Martha Gelhorn, among others) accredited as war correspondents. That afternoon, she gamely stripped for the assembled house party, smeared the dull, greenish paste over her body, and stretched out on the lawn under a caul of camouflage netting. In the course of the demonstration, her groin was covered by a clump of sod bristling with matted weeds—a trompe-l’œil pubis—and one of her nipples snagged in the net. As a finishing touch, the severed heads of two blood-red lilies were placed between her breasts like a funerary offering. The couple’s friend (and partner in a ménage à trois) the American photojournalist Dave Scherman captured the scene, and Penrose used the image in slide shows—no doubt to great effect with the guardsmen.

**T**he earliest known nude study of Lee Miller, who was christened Elizabeth, was made by her father, Theodore, an engineer whose hobby was photography. He titled the picture “December Morn,” even though it was taken in April of 1915, two weeks before Elizabeth’s eighth birthday. Poughkeepsie had been blanketed by a spring snowfall, and the shivering little girl is posed outside the family house wearing nothing but bedroom slippers. A year before, as Carolyn Burke observes in a fine biography, “Lee Miller: A Life” (2006), the likeness of a fleshier maiden—“September Morn,” by the French painter Paul Chabas—had provoked a storm of outrage and titillation when it was displayed in the window of a Manhattan gallery. The public rallied to one side or the other, and Theodore, a health faddist, evidently took the liberal view. He had persuaded Lee’s mother, Florence MacDonald, a Canadian nurse from a respectable family, to pose nude for him before they were married, and if he later philandered with impunity she considered divorcing him to marry a lover. They kept up appearances, but something in the household was seriously peculiar. Lee became a promiscuous hellion; her older brother, John, was a cross-dresser;

Florence attempted suicide; Theodore continued taking nude pictures of his daughter, often with a stereoscopic camera, well into her twenties. He also talked her girlfriends out of their clothes and into posing for group portraits, though when other people's naked children were involved Florence chaperoned the sittings.

None of those "art studies," or none that survive, cross the line into obscenity, and the family seems to have been unperturbed by them. They did, however, bury a painful secret that Antony Penrose revealed in "The Lives of Lee Miller" (1985), an illustrated biography of his mother. At the age of seven, Elizabeth had been raped, ostensibly by a family friend (all attempts to verify his identity, Penrose told me, "have drawn a blank"), and infected with gonorrhea. Venereal diseases were still incurable, so she was treated at a hospital and by her mother with disinfectant "irrigations." The Millers also consulted a psychiatrist, Penrose said, who counselled them to tell Elizabeth that sex was merely a mechanical act, and not the same thing as love, so the damage wasn't permanent. But the damage to a violated child, even one as resilient as Miller, is permanent in incalculable ways.

Given the timing, the kindest interpretation of "December Morn" is that it represents a form of shock therapy—physical immodesty as a cure for shame. Whatever it was, Miller's story suggests that beauty can also be a form of camouflage, one that successfully deceives the beholder without offering much protection to the wearer. Her art was always improvised on the run, escaping from or to a man or a place, and she described her life as "a water soaked jig-saw puzzle, drunken bits that don't match in shape or design." The memory of a trauma is often fractured in the same fashion by that most devious of camouflagers the unconscious. Few artists achieve lasting renown without a body of work that is cumulative in its power, and Miller wasn't capable of sustained ambition. But her finest pictures—the semi-abstract desert landscapes; the poetic rubble of wartime London; the graphs of desolation from the battlefield; the sculptural female torsos, which were considered shockingly "phallic"—tantalize you, as they tantalized those who

championed her career, with the promise of what she might have achieved.

**A**lthough Miller was expelled from nearly every school she attended, she was capable of focus when a subject or a teacher, more often the latter, excited her. She and her best friend collaborated on screenplays, inspired by Anita Loos. At eighteen, having badgered her parents for a trip to Paris, she dumped her chaperone and enrolled in a course on stage design taught by the Hungarian artist Ladislas Medgyès, who introduced her to experimental theatre, and to her destiny as a bohemian. Back in Poughkeepsie eight months later and pining for the Left Bank, she continued her training in stagecraft at Vassar, did some acting with a local company, and studied dance, which led to a part in the chorus line of a risqué Broadway revue. Success in the performing arts came easily to a quicksilver girl who was usually the most striking hopeful at a casting call. (A few years later, Jean Cocteau, looking for an actress with the features and aplomb of a Greek statue, chose Miller, who had no experience onscreen, for the lead role in his didactically outré first film, “The Blood of a Poet.”)

None of these promising forays, however, held Miller’s fugitive attention. By the autumn of 1926, she had moved to Manhattan to take classes at the Art Students League, and was earning her pocket money as a lingerie model. If one is to believe the story, Condé Nast noticed her crossing the street just in time to pull her from the path of an oncoming vehicle, and this fortuitous collision led to an interview with Edna Chase, *Vogue’s* editor-in-chief. With a boyish haircut and a new moniker, Lee (a contraction of Li-Li, her family nickname, but also, perhaps, a little bow to that most enterprising flapper Lorelei Lee), Miller made her début in *Vogue*—on the March, 1927, cover, in a drawing by the French fashion illustrator Georges Lepape—and at the famous parties that Condé Nast hosted in his penthouse. She was soon posing for Steichen, Arnold Genthe, and Nickolas Muray, the leading photographers of the day. But the fact that she modelled for them is more interesting in retrospect than the decorous pictures they took of her. None capture her subversive modernity the way Lepape did: confronting the

beholder from under a purple cloche with swollen lips and a sullen gaze that manages to project both wantonness and reserve.

In 1929, with several lovers fighting for the honor of seeing her off, and café society sad to lose its star playgirl, Miller sailed for Europe with the ambition “to enter photography by the back end.” It was Steichen, she said, who “put the idea into my head.” She planned to do some modelling for George Hoyningen-Huene at Paris *Vogue* while she apprenticed with Man Ray, a leader of the avant-garde and a master of many genres—painting, photography, sculpture, and graphic art. After co-founding the Dada movement in New York, with Marcel Duchamp, Man Ray had immigrated to France, where society portraiture and fashion photography helped to support his experiments. To be “done” by this edgy dynamo was as chic in the Jazz Age as to be done by Warhol was forty years later. Despite a bantam physique and a receding chin, Man Ray attracted singular women. Miller succeeded an adorably lewd and fleshy cabaret singer who was a legend of the Latin Quarter: Kiki de Montparnasse.

Man Ray was thirty-nine and Miller was twenty-two when they met. He marginalized their relationship in his autobiography, “Self Portrait” (1963), perhaps in revenge for her infidelities, but she described their chance (or contrived) encounter at an artists’ hangout, Le Bateau Ivre, as the “turning point” of her youth. With few preliminaries—she introduced herself as his new student, he told her that he didn’t accept students, they left the next morning on a road trip—the affair began. After a summer in the South of France, Miller rented lodgings near Man Ray’s studio on the Rue Campagne-Première, and paid tuition for a priceless education in art and worldliness by working as his dogsbody. One of her early tests was to help him photograph the Count and Countess Pecci-Blunt’s White Ball of 1930, and, typically, she abandoned her post to dance with other men.

Under Man Ray’s tutelage, Miller mastered the use of a Graflex camera, with glass plates, and then a Rolleiflex; studio-lighting setups; cropping and

retouching; improvisation with a viewfinder; and his techniques for developing. A darkroom accident (Miller turned the lights on before she realized that a batch of negatives was in the tank) led, by her account, to the discovery of “solarization,” a process in which the background of a portrait is overexposed to outline the head with a black penumbra. Many years later, claiming partial credit for one of Man Ray’s most famous solarized images, Miller pretended that it didn’t really matter which of them had made it, because “we were almost the same person when we were working.”

Man Ray was a generous mentor, but his generosity didn’t extend to sharing his protégée with rivals in the arts. He was furious with Miller for lending herself to Cocteau, and resentful of the time that she spent working in London as the still photographer on a feature. “You are so young and beautiful and free,” he wrote to her, “and I hate myself for trying to cramp that in you which I admire most.” The definitive image of his obsession is a 1930 nude study of Miller, her gaze enigmatic, her head caged by a wire fencing guard. He titled it “La Révolution Surréaliste,” and it expresses an attitude rife in the movement, but also in Miller’s life: a contradictory impulse to worship and defile the female body. But Miller’s submissiveness in games of bondage was, if not illusory, paradoxical. She claimed the privilege of a man’s sexual freedom (while depending, like most women of her class, on subsidies from her men), and Man Ray’s jealousy—indeed, any man’s jealousy—made her claustrophobic. Man Ray may not initially have known that Julian Levy, his New York art dealer, who included Miller in an important, early group show of European photography, was among her paramours, but in 1931 the couple’s fragile illusion of oneness was tested by the arrival in Paris of Theodore Miller, toting his cameras. He photographed his daughter and her roommate, Tanja Ramm, an American model, cavorting in bed, and Lee obliged him, Burke writes, by striking “contorted poses . . . pubic region exposed.” She insists that Lee’s composure in the pictures is evidence of her implicit trust in the photographer, though “one wonders,” she adds, “what went through Man’s head as he watched” them.

Perhaps it was trust, or perhaps, as Miller's own work suggests, it was dissociation. She had the gift of finding beauty in a wasteland, and her eye tends to petrify what it looks at. Organic forms and living creatures become abstract in her pictures, but movingly so—the way a nymph fleeing an aggressor is transformed into a star. Where human figures appear in a frame, they are often faceless or disembodied. Her best photographs from the war are of corpses, landscapes, statuary, or distant violence. Once she was proficient with a camera, Man Ray promoted her for commissions that he couldn't fulfill or didn't want, one of which was to document operations at the Sorbonne medical school. Having watched a mastectomy, she asked the surgeon if she could keep the amputated breast. She arrived for a fashion shoot at the studio of French *Vogue* in a buoyant mood, carrying this grisly trophy on a dinner plate, then photographed it at a place setting, next to a knife and fork. She tends to isolate the mechanical act of taking a picture from the visceral connection with a subject, as she was taught to compartmentalize sex and love. Most of her portraits, including her self-portraits, seem wary or disdainful of any true engagement with a sitter except, perhaps, where she was engaged by the drama of seduction. That was the case with two great satyrs who yielded both to her and to her camera: Chaplin, whom she knew from her modelling days in New York, and Picasso.

Miller and Man Ray spent three stormy years together, then, almost as suddenly as she had decamped for Paris, she returned to New York. On the strength of her growing reputation, but also of her errant glamour, she found rich backers for a studio in Manhattan. Theodore had the nerve to sue *Time* for describing his daughter “as the possessor of the most beautiful navel in Paris,” and she spent part of the libel settlement to hire a staff, including a young maid who cooked homey lunches for the artist and her clients. The press was fascinated by Miller's new incarnation—paparazzi had been waiting on the pier when her ship docked—and *Vogue*, *Harper's Bazaar*, and *Vanity Fair* welcomed her to their pages. When she chose to model for one

of the pictures *Vogue* had commissioned—a story on headbands—her younger brother, Erik, operated the camera, and their feature is, in its way, a perfect artifact of high fashion in the Depression. Miller sits at an angle in a plush wing chair, against a black backdrop. The light in this hermetic frame glosses the fine planes of her face and neck, the frill of her hair, and the ruching of a velvet gown. Her beauty and expression are as inanimate as those of the figures that were, at the same moment, being carved into the granite of Mt. Rushmore. The bell jar that she had sometimes used as a prop in her Surrealist art photographs is here invisible, yet implied. She embodies elegance as refusal—the refusal to inhabit a flawed world of human inferiors.

While the Lee Miller Studio was ultimately an abortive venture (Man Ray was outraged to learn that his ex-apprentice was touting his name and his signature techniques to promote it), for two years, from 1932-34, it made her one of the most sought-after commercial photographers in New York. In addition to her advertising and fashion work, she specialized in celebrity portraits. Julian Levy gave “The Blood of a Poet” its début at the New York Film Society, enhancing Miller’s prestige as a muse to genius. He also gave her art photography a well-received solo exhibition at his gallery. (“We don’t think her photos are very good,” Levy’s wife, Joella, admitted in private, “but they make a surprisingly good show.”) Erik Miller, who ran the darkroom, admired Lee’s perfectionism as a printer, but noted that his sister could also be “intolerably lazy.” She never scheduled more than one sitting a day, and, after work, Penrose writes, “she would resume her social life: the demonic games of poker . . . or wild parties” with friends from the theatre world.

In 1933, the director John Houseman engaged Miller to photograph the all-Negro cast of Virgil Thomson’s opera “Four Saints in Three Acts,” with a libretto by Gertrude Stein. Those portraits, taken in Harlem, have a dignity and a depth of tenderness otherwise missing from her airless portfolio of movie stars, perfume bottles, socialites, and couture. That May, Miller was named by *Vanity Fair* as one of the seven “most distinguished living photographers.” Rather than capitalize on her growing renown, she abruptly

closed her studio and holed up at a “fat farm” in the Poconos, to lose fifteen pounds. The motive for her apparent self-sabotage was revealed two months later, when she stunned her family and friends by announcing her marriage to a man they had scarcely met, Aziz Eloui Bey, an Egyptian railroad magnate in his forties. Their romance, a well-kept secret, had begun in Saint Moritz, in 1931, when Miller was vacationing with Chaplin. Among the pictures she took for *Vogue* that year is one of Eloui’s wife, Nimet—“La Belle Circassienne”—in a turban and pearls, and perhaps there was a thrill to stealing the husband of such a formidable rival.

Leaving her brother, a newlywed, unemployed, and her angels incensed, “Lee embarked on marriage as if it were a holiday,” Burke writes. Eloui owned a beach house in Alexandria and a mansion in Cairo. He added a European ladies’ maid to their staff of fifteen, and endowed his bride with a stock portfolio. She had nothing more strenuous to do than enjoy the high life. Eloui believed that this “serene” existence would, as he assured the Millers, cure their daughter’s ennui, and a series of exotic pastimes—snake-charming, camel racing, desert safaris—did briefly distract her. She also recovered from an ephemeral “loathing” for photography, or for the discipline a career required, to do some of her purest work as a modernist. (Her 1937 “Portrait of Space,” a barren landscape seen through the gash in a patched window screen, was included in the definitive retrospective of Dada and Surrealism at the Arts Council of Britain, forty years later.) But life in Egypt was also much like her childhood: charmed on the surface, roiling beneath it, with a dotting male footing the bills for her mischief, and a provincial society that was fun to shock. “If I need to pee, I pee in the road; if I have a letch for someone, I hop into bed with him,” she boasted to a friend.

One loses sight of how young Miller still was. In June of 1937, just thirty, escaping her husband and the heat, she returned to Paris. There she met Roland Penrose, who was married to a lesbian poet and was, or had been, homosexual himself but in any event wasn’t the next morning. Later that summer, they vacationed in Mougins with a party of friends who, like

Penrose, worshipped Picasso. The acolytes paid tribute to their idol by offering their women to him (although they also shared them fraternally with one another). Miller posed for Picasso, who posed for her, and they recognized in each other a vulnerable quality—the expectation of being looked at without being seen—that others had missed. Those arty revels, staged, in part, for posterity, also produced her homage to Manet’s “Le Déjeuner sur l’Herbe.” In a dappled grove, three eminent Surrealists (Penrose, Paul Éluard, and Man Ray) and their bare-breasted muses share an amorous picnic. The size of the picture—a one-and-a-half-by-two-inch Rolleiflex contact print that Miller never bothered to enlarge—enhances its peepshow coyness.

When Miller went back to Eloui, she and Penrose exchanged fervid letters, hers astute about her own character. Her betrayal of a man whom she had married for love in the sincere belief that their union was forever “makes me cynically suspicious of any attachment I might make,” she told Penrose—“my ‘always’ don’t seem to mean much, do they.” But on September 1, 1939, the day that Hitler invaded Poland, the two adulterers, reunited in France after fugues and dramas, caught the last boat for England from Saint-Malo. The stoical Eloui forgave her, and facilitated a last-minute divorce, in 1947, shortly before her child was born, so that she and Penrose could marry. When she returned to Egypt, in the sixties—by which time Eloui had lost his fortune and married the ladies’ maid—he was grateful for the visit.

**I**dleness only ever aggravated Miller’s demons: she needed purpose to still them. With Britain girding for the siege, she volunteered at an unlikely venue for patriotic service, but the only one likely to accept her: British *Vogue*. Her cavalier defection from the fashion business had devalued her credit as a professional, and Condé Nast was skeptical of his prodigal’s return, so she was hired, on a trial basis, at eight pounds a week, to celebrate handbags and famous faces. But, when the *Vogue* pattern house was destroyed by a bomb, Miller was eager to photograph the ruins. The magazine, impressed with the laconic eloquence of her reportage (perhaps

one could also describe it as stagecraft—she created, literally, a theatre of war, a puppet theatre, for the most part, in which objects dramatize human suffering), began to feature it prominently. With an eye for the macabre visual ironies scattered by the bombs like promotional flyers for Surrealism, she photographed a ruined chapel, bricks cascading from its portico like worshippers after the service; a smashed typewriter (“Remington Silent”) lying in the gutter; an egg-shaped barrage balloon nesting in a London park behind a pair of geese that are strutting as if they had just laid it; and two air-raid wardens—nubile vestals—masked totemically by their eye-shields.

Early in 1942, when American troops and journalists arrived in London, including Dave Scherman, who worked for *Life*, Miller was accredited as a war correspondent with the U.S. forces, a promotion that gave her access to restricted zones. In 1944, six weeks after D Day, she sailed for Normandy to cover the work of nurses in a field hospital. She also began filing text to accompany her pictures, and, for the next eighteen months, her writing and photojournalism changed the perception of *Vogue*, even among its staff, as an atoll of frivolity in a vast ocean of heroic conflict. “Something had unfettered Lee’s talent,” her son writes. The model in the ruched gown lived in fatigues and channelled her “insatiable desire for excitement” into a noble endeavor. On her next trip to France, in a tank-landing ship, her convoy ran aground on Omaha Beach, where she was carried ashore by a sailor. Hitching a ride into Saint-Malo, she discovered that, contrary to reports, the siege of the town was still under way, and the Allies were using napalm for the first time in Europe to dislodge a German unit holding out in the fortress. “Tall chimneys standing alone gave off smoke from the burning remnants of their buildings at their feet,” she wrote. “Stricken lonely cats prowled. A swollen horse had not provided adequate shelter for the dead American behind it. . . . I sheltered in a kraut dugout, squatting under the ramparts. My heel ground into a dead detached hand.” She picked up the hand, and, in a spasm of fury at the enemy, “hurled it across the street, and ran back the way I’d come bruising my feet and crashing in the unsteady piles of stone and slipping in

blood.” Like one of those feline survivors, Miller was probably too unnerved to have been conscious of how much of herself—of her previous life and imagery—that passage, an inventory of disintegration, contains.

Miller was rewarded for her virtuosity under fire with a working vacation in Paris, and the chance to celebrate its liberation among old friends. She photographed Colette, another feline survivor, at the Palais Royal, and covered the first postwar couture collections. They were enlivened, she wrote, apparently without irony, by “folderols, a splurge of red and a desire for oversized muffs.” Scherman turned up at her hotel, the Scribe, and together with him or singly, travelling with infantry divisions, she covered the Allied push to the Rhine on icy roads clogged with refugees, and the reconquest of Alsace, Luxembourg, and Cologne. “It is worth remembering,” Penrose writes, “that Lee’s Rolleiflex did not have a telephoto lens,” and that the only way she could get her pictures “was to go and find the action.”

Miller’s instinct for detachment was probably the most useful tool in her survival kit, but nothing could steel anyone for the camps. She arrived at Buchenwald, in the wake of General Patton, at the end of April, and dared her editors to publish the photographs that she took there. “Believe it,” she cabled them, and that was the headline that *Vogue* ran, in June, 1945, opposite an image that was enlarged to fill a full page of the magazine. It was of a human rubbish heap, although the dead—young people with limbs like broken tinder—aren’t quite yet corpses. Their eyes still have light in them.

Dachau was liberated on April 29, 1945. The next morning, Miller and Scherman were among the first journalists to document a scene of depravity that sickened combat veterans. Numbly, she did her work. Later that afternoon, they reached Munich, and “wangled a billet,” Penrose writes, in Hitler’s private apartment, on the Prinzregentenplatz—the command post for the 45th Infantry Division. Scherman took a picture of his lover and comrade nude in the Führer’s bathtub. For Scherman, it was a great journalistic coup, and it brought him fame. It brought the model fame, too,

though not of the kind that her war journalism deserved. That sensational moment of callous clowning after an ordeal is the image of Lee Miller that is, perhaps, best remembered.

Last April, Miller would have celebrated her hundredth birthday. Her father had died only a month short of his, but she was done in, at seventy, by lung cancer. Hard smoking and alcoholism had, by then, ravaged her beauty. “The post-war period was an anti-climax,” Haworth-Booth writes, with considerable understatement. Miller had once asked her parents if, should she conceive a child, she could park it with them in Poughkeepsie—for five years or so. Antony, her accidental child, conceived at thirty-nine, was parked with a nanny who displaced her in his affections. Mother and son came to hate each other, Penrose admits, and he left home bitterly estranged. But, after he married, Miller took a liking to her daughter-in-law, Suzanna, who was sunny and maternal, and helped to finesse a *détente*.

Miller became Lady Penrose (mocking the honor, a dubious one for an orthodox bohemian, she called herself Lady Penrose of Poughkeepsie) when her husband was knighted, in 1966. He had founded the Institute for Contemporary Arts, in London, with the writer Herbert Read, and written an authoritative biography of Picasso. The couple had been living for decades on a farm in Sussex with a large and unstable entourage that was held in thrall by her drinking binges and self-pity, which often gave way to frenzies of spite. She put on weight and, despite the odd flare of vanity, gave up on her appearance. Sex lost its savor as she lost her charisma, and when she complained to a doctor friend about her panic and depression, he replied, “There is nothing wrong with you, and we cannot keep the world permanently at war just to provide you with excitement.”

In the early sixties, however, Miller found a creative outlet in gastronomy. She earned a Cordon Bleu and amassed a library of cookbooks that she mined for her fantastical recipes: Persian Carpet, a dessert of oranges and candied violets; a plum pudding with a blue sauce; marshmallow-cola ice

cream; and the Penrose, an open-faced sandwich of mushrooms and foie gras that won first prize in a Norwegian competition for *smørbrød*. As she approached sixty, she had a face-lift, which, oddly, heightened the mannishness that her sexual pliancy had dissembled. She bossed around the friends and lovers (hers past, Roland's current, including a trapeze artist whom he wanted desperately to marry) when they came, in droves, for the weekend, though she nourished them with memorable food. But her son had no idea, until his wife found Miller's archives in the attic of the farmhouse, of the lives she had lived or of the work that she had accomplished. When pressed about her career by a journalist or a curator, Miller was wont to tell an implausible lie with a grain of truth at its core: that the war had destroyed everything.

Among the Picassos in the Penroses' collection of modern art, one of the greatest in private hands, was "Portrait of Lee Miller as L'Arlésienne" (1937). The painting will not travel to Philadelphia, but Haworth-Booth chose to end the London show with it. It vibrated on the wall of the last gallery, leaving a potent impression of Picasso's genius for the irreducible. What the artist saw was a golden face with green hair and a pert profile; an inverted eyeball leaking a tear and caged by red lids; a blue earlobe with a corkscrew earring; a clenched fist; teeth bared in a smile or a grimace; bulging shoulders—white globes with a brown crust, each bigger than the head—which might be the breasts, displaced, or a bursting heart. But the black cavity of her body has the jagged shape of the torn screen from her "Portrait of Space," with a void beyond it. ♦

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