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IMAN

"Iman limped to our sitting (it was our second) on a broken foot on a sweltering day in New York, an inconvenience she hardly acknowledged. The carved, totemic goddess of a thousand photo shoots is, in life, a whirl of kinetic energy and ricocheting laughter. A deity still, but earthbound."

IMAN ILLUSTRATION: COPYRIGHT DAVID DOWNTON. DOWNTON AND IMAN: TIM PETERSEN.

Lasting

Written by HEATHER JOHN FOGARTY



British artist DAVID DOWNTON has captured some of the most beautiful women in the world, anthologized in a new L.A. EXHIBITION

IMPRESSIONS



> “I’m trying to capture the essence, the sense of a memory, as if they’ve just floated onto the surface of the paper,” says portraitist David Downton from his suite at Claridge’s in London. “I want it to look as if something just happened, something was left unsaid.” With his elegant brushstrokes, the British artist has created portraits of some of the world’s most recognizable and beautiful women, including Cate Blanchett, Catherine Deneuve, Diane von Furstenberg and Dita Von Teese. Downton has just arrived in Los Angeles to launch his latest venture: a one-year exhibition of his “Icon Series” at Mary Ta’s Minotti Los Angeles and Mass Beverly showrooms, featuring large-scale portraits on paper of celebrated women, small drawings, medium-format works and a limited number of exclusive portrait commissions that start at \$15,000.

When Downton sits to sketch his subjects, often he has only an hour or two with each. “I get to know the person as much as I can in the sitting. What I look for above everything is a sense of self,” he says. “A classic beauty isn’t of much interest to



DOWNTON: JACOBUS SNYMAN; DITA VON TEESE AND THANDIE NEWTON ILLUSTRATIONS: COPYRIGHT DAVID DOWNTON.

THANDIE NEWTON

“I ran into Thandie at the Schiaparelli show in Paris in January and arranged a sitting in London (she wore the same Schiaparelli couture). With her ongoing role in *Westworld* and the guest lead in the U.K. crime drama *Line of Duty*, she is at the top of her game—beauty and intensity personified.”

Opposite: DITA VON TEESE

“I have drawn Dita often. She is, as I’m fond of saying, a genuine fake. Or perhaps a real illusion would be more polite: the blonde from Michigan who dreamed big (and in color) and made the world see things her way. ‘Glamour every minute, every day’ is her mantra, and she is as good as her word.”





CATE BLANCHETT

"This was for the cover of *Vogue Australia* in 2009. It was a banner day for me. Not only did I get to work with the brilliant and beautiful Cate Blanchett (everyone's idea of a gold standard), but the issue also became the fastest selling in the history of the magazine—a small victory for artists and illustrators in our photo-saturated world."

CATE BLANCHETT AND SOFIA COPPOLA ILLUSTRATIONS: COPYRIGHT DAVID DOWNTON.

draw. I love that great charm, individuality and intelligence; all of this comes together. I translate and respond." He sketches page after page while talking to subjects, collecting what he calls "the raw material," but it's back at the studio that he does the heavy lifting with the lightest of brushstrokes—elegantly overlapping and measured—that crystallize the unique spirit of each subject.

"David's talent is that he really enjoys people, and he actually listens and looks

at you walking across the room," says Ta. "These days we are so busy we don't stop. He stops. He listens. He perceives. His portraits are almost like reflections."

Downton began as a fashion illustrator more than 20 years ago, sketching for houses like Chanel and Valentino, and his work has been featured everywhere from *Vogue* to *Vanity Fair*. Since 2011, he has been artist in residence at Claridge's, rendering some of the hotel's most well-reputed guests, from Sarah Jessica Parker to

Christian Louboutin. Bringing his art to Los Angeles comes as part of a broader initiative by his U.S. agent Lauren Gurvich to introduce British artists to the American market, with a concentration on California in particular. For Downton, it marks the next step in a storied career. "Engaging with a new audience, there's a reminder that there is always further to go," he says. "It feels like a new beginning, like I've begun a new dance." minotti-la.com; massbeverly.com; daviddownton.com •



SOFIA COPPOLA

"I drew Sofia in the Duke of Windsor suite at the Ritz in Paris days before it closed for a four-year renovation. (I wish I'd stolen an ashtray.) Chic, cool and appraising, she was both elusive and easy to capture. A memorable sitting."