

ANDREW WEISS GALLERY



HURRELL

Born: 1904

Died: 1992

Nationality: American

“What is glamour?”

- Matthew Rolston

“I dunno, kid. I think it’s some kinda suffering look.”

- George Hurrell

George Hurrell was a photographer who made a significant contribution to the image of glamour presented by Hollywood during the 1930s and 1940s. Born in Covington, Kentucky, Hurrell originally studied as a painter with no particular interest in photography. He first began to use photography only as a medium for recording his paintings. After moving to Laguna Beach, California from Chicago, Illinois in 1925 he found that photography was a more reliable source of income than painting. His photography was encouraged by his friend aviatrix Pancho Barnes, who often posed for him. He eventually opened a photographic studio in Los Angeles.

In the late 1920s, Hurrell was introduced to the actor Ramon Novarro, by Pancho Barnes, and agreed to take a series of photographs of him. Novarro was impressed with the results and showed them to the actress Norma Shearer, who was attempting to mold her wholesome image into something more glamorous and sophisticated in an attempt to land the title role in the movie *The Divorcee*. She asked Hurrell to photograph her in poses more provocative than her fans had seen before. After she showed these photographs to her husband, MGM production chief Irving Thalberg, Thalberg was so impressed that he signed Hurrell to a contract with MGM Studios, making him head of the portrait photography department. Over the next decade, Hurrell photographed every star

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contracted to MGM, and his striking black-and-white images were used extensively in the marketing of these stars. Among the performers regularly photographed by him during these years were silent screen star Dorothy Jordan, as well as Myrna Loy, Robert Montgomery, Jean Harlow, Joan Crawford, Clark Gable, Carole Lombard and Norma Shearer, who was said to have refused to allow herself to be photographed by anyone else. In the early 1940s Hurrell moved to Warner Brothers Studios photographing Bette Davis, Ann Sheridan, Errol Flynn, Maxine Fife, Humphrey Bogart and James Cagney, among others. Later in the decade he moved to Columbia Pictures where his photographs were used to help the studio build the career of Rita Hayworth. In 1984 when Joan Collins was asked to pose for Playboy at the age of 50 she insisted that the only photographer she would accept was Hurrell, he photographed Collins in a nude 12 page layout and the issue became a bestseller. Among his last works were production stills featuring Warren Beatty and Annette Bening for the film Bugsy and the cover artwork for the Natalie Cole album Unforgettable... with Love.

Hurrell died on May 17, 1992 shortly after completing a documentary about his career from complications from his long standing problem with bladder cancer. When his doctors delivered the message to him that he had perhaps only a day left to live, he replied, "Well, the party is over. Time to go home." Since his death, his works have appreciated in value and are highly sought after as fine art by collectors.