

SCREEN SIRENS WHEN LIGHT HIT THE FILM IN GEORGE HURRELL'S CAMERA, HOLLYWOOD'S BEAUTIES WERE SAFE FOREVER FROM THE RAVAGES OF AGE.

By Susan Kelley

Name-dropping comes easily when you talk about George Hurrell.

Joan Crawford. Shirley Temple, Elizabeth Taylor, Marilyn Monroe, Ronald Reagan. Jean Harlow. Carol Lombard. Clark Gable. Sharon Stone. Brooke Shields.

The list goes on. Hurrell photographed these and hundreds of other stars during Hollywood's golden age in the 1930s, until his death from stomach cancer in May.

But Hurrell did more than snap photos. He made gods and goddesses out of ordinary people, creating images that propelled them onto the silver screen.

As if that weren't enough, Hurrell's trademark use of lighting influenced a generation of image-makers, such as Madonna, movie director Warren Beatty, and photographers Irving Penn and Herb Ritts, whose photos cover Vogue and Cosmopolitan magazines.

An exhibit of Hurrell's work, titled "Hurrell's Hollywood," is showing through April 3 at the Helen Day Art Center in Stowe. Stowe art dealer and film maker J. Grier Clarke owns about half the photos in the exhibit, some worth up to \$15,000. Clarke began collecting Hurrell photos in the late 1970s as a fashion photographer in New York.

"(Hurrell) had the ability to glamorize women in a way I always admired,"

Clarke said. "It's not a sexual thing, it's a sensual thing. They leave a lot more to the imagination than cheesecake."

Part of Hurrell's gift was an ability to make his subjects feel glamorous. He bathed them in bright light, played jazz in the background, touched them on the shoulder, Clarke said.

A three-minute video at the exhibit sheds light onto Hurrell's personality. The clip is part of a longer documentary, titled "Legends in Light," that Clarke made before Hurrell died. The film brought Clarke and Hurrell together as friends during the last three years of Hurrell's life.

"Obviously if you do a film of a man's life, you get to know him very well," Clarke said. "He was sort of impish. He had that Irish twinkle in his eye."

Hurrell photographed mostly women, and it was a woman who jump-started his career.

At the age of 19, Hurrell went to paint in 1925 at the artist's haven of Laguna Beach, Fla., but found more work through photography.

Hurrell's shots of actress Norma Shearer there convinced her husband, MGM Studios production head Irving Thalberg, that she had what it took

to play the seductive lead role in the film "The Divorcee."

In 1930, those photographs earned Hurrell the plum job of head of publicity at MGM in Hollywood.

Hurrell fell from movieland grace after World War II, when cinematographic tastes became more realistic. He kept his hand in photography by shooting advertising, social photos for cosmetics queen Helena Rubenstein, and movie stills for



George Hurrell photographed Jean Harlow (above) in 1934, early in an illustrious career that is the subject of a film by J. Grier Clarke of Stowe, who collects Hurrell's work.

"All the President's Men" and "Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid."

He did album covers and publicity shots for Diana Ross, Talking Heads and Aretha Franklin in the 1970s and 1980s.

The Hurrell style came back into vogue in the 1990s, with fashion designer Ralph Lauren's Gatsby-esque look. Most recently, Hurrell shot the cover of Natalie Cole's Grammy-award winning album "Unforgettable."

Stars from the 1930s through the 1990s felt comfortable with Hurrell, Clarke said, because no matter what, their photo would overflow with glamour.

"When they went to George, they knew they'd be taken care of."

"Hurrell's Hollywood," featuring photographs from Clarke's collection, is on exhibit noon- 5 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays through April 3 at the Helen Day Art Center, School Street, Stowe. Information: 253-8358. Correction:

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