

# The Prolific Willy Rizzo



Willy Rizzo, at an exhibition in 2009, was known for, among many things, his poignant portraits of Marilyn Monroe. Marc Mehran/Maxppp/European Pressphoto Agency

By **Eric Wilson**

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**FASHION WAS A CHALLENGING SUBJECT** for a photojournalist like Willy Rizzo. He was already well established and living in Paris in the 1950s, his subjects having included politicians, playboys and a pontiff, when Alexander Liberman, then the art director of Vogue, asked him to shoot for the magazine.

Discussing how to approach the subject of couture, the two men talked about the importance of the model, the expression of her eyes and her movements. Like a writer facing a blank page, a photographer had to tell a story.



A portrait of Marilyn Monroe by Mr. Rizzo.  
Willy Rizzo

While Mr. Rizzo, who died on Feb. 25 at the age of 84 (according to most biographies), was known for many things — his poignant portraits of Marilyn Monroe taken in the weeks before her death, his coverage of the first Cannes Film Festival, [his long career with Paris Match](#), his equally prolific work as a furniture designer, his appearance as an actor in “Hoffa” with his friend Jack Nicholson — the photographs he took of the fashion scene in postwar France are especially compelling. They captured the story precisely.

When Coco Chanel, whose associations with the Germans during the war had tainted her reputation, returned to Paris fashion in 1954, financed by the Wertheimer family, Mr. Rizzo was sent by Hervé Mille, the director of Paris Match, to document her studio. Mr. Rizzo began to photograph the behind-the-scenes activities of the cabine, and photographed Chanel as she established her comeback, making the designs, like the boxy silk tweed jacket, for which she would be best known.

Chanel was taken with Mr. Rizzo’s wife at the time, Paule, who became one of her favorite models, along with her friend Suzy Parker. The resulting images are part of an exhibition of “Les Instants Chanel” on display at his design store on the Left Bank, [Studio Willy Rizzo](#), at 12 rue de Verneuil, until May 15.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/21/fashion/remembering-willy-rizzo-versatile-and-prolific.html? r=0>