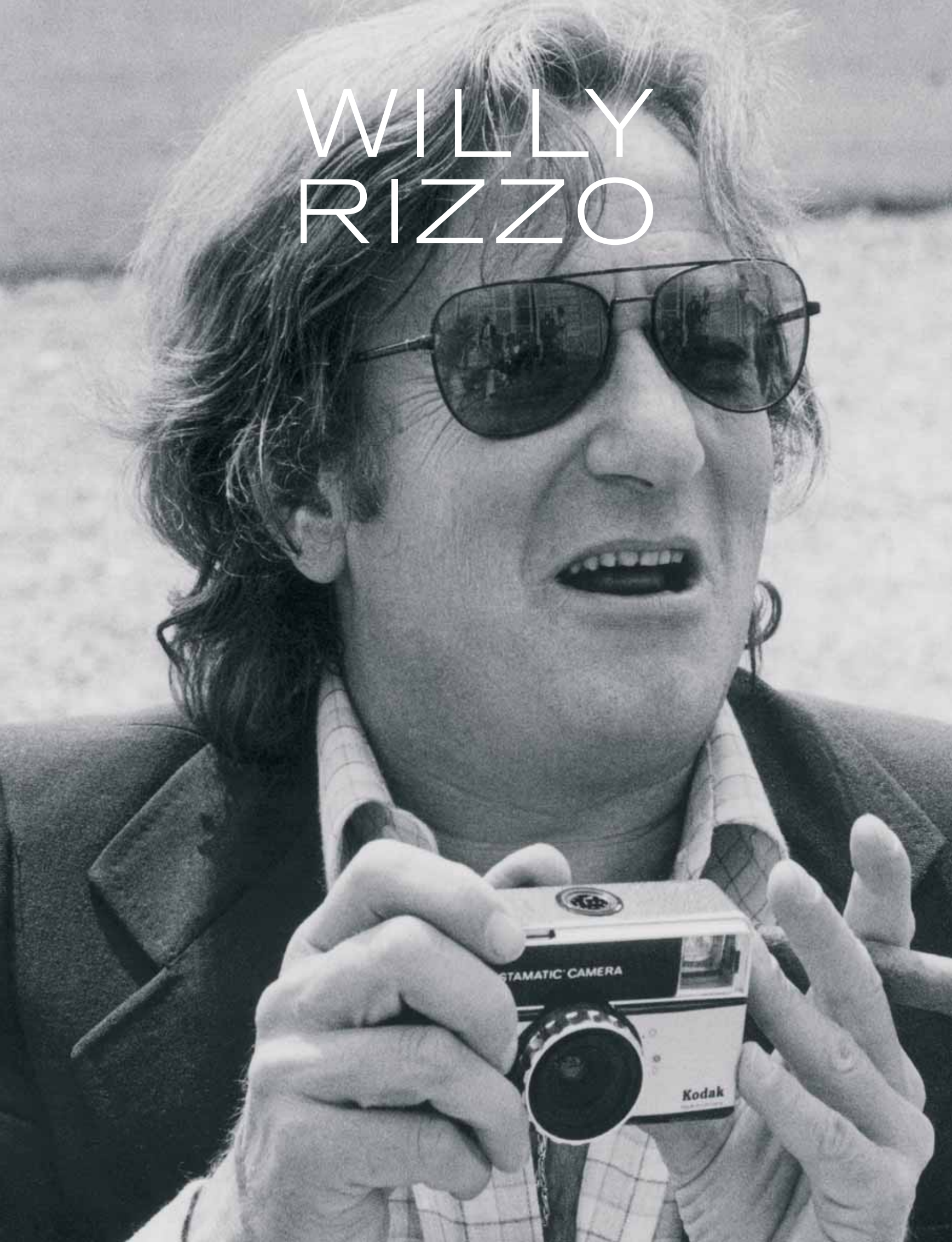


# WILLY RIZZO





orking with Willy and his wonderful wife Dominique has been one of the most stimulating and fascinating aspects of life at Mallett over the last few years. Since our first exhibition of his vintage work and portrait photography we have been amazed and delighted by the interest that has been generated both in Europe and in America. Many old friends and clients of Willy have been in contact and a whole new generation of enthusiasts has been born.

Sitting in Willy's dining room in Paris eating delicious pasta washed down by a glass (or two) of wine, one is constantly inspired by Willy's sense of humour and energy. Many a time he would walk around and point to himself and ask me "why does everyone want vintage? Am I a vintage? Here I am." He jokes that he is his own 'père et fils'. In our minds we see the sign above the shop "Willy Rizzo, père et fils". It is also true, he has had a long and successful career but he is also keen on the future and thinking about what next. Following the success and sell out of his last show his creative brain went into overdrive planning and trying to improve and reinvent the best pieces. The product, two years later, is the exhibition and catalogue that accompanies it. Included are some completely new pieces, others inspired by his creations from the 60's and 70's and finally adapted pieces from previous designs. All are offered with certification and, except for the lamps, are limited edition.

In addition and perhaps with an eye to the 'père' sobriquet we are offering a collection of limited edition silver gelatine prints taken by Willy of dance and the ballet in Paris in the 1950's. This collection is largely unpublished and never before produced at this size. For both the enthusiast and the amateur we hope the marvellously conceived and executed images will prove enticing. To accompany the collection Willy has designed and made a new steel frame.

We hope you enjoy the catalogue and have a chance to visit the show either in London or in New York. Please contact any of our sales team if you have any questions.

Thomas Woodham-Smith

Left: Willy Rizzo at Gunther Sach's Paris home in 1963  
Overleaf, Willy with Audrey Hepburn in 1966



during the Fifties Willy Rizzo, master of the scoop, one of the world's greatest photojournalists in a golden age of reportage, was travelling around the world to cover the hottest stories. His Leica and Rolliflex recorded the tragedies of war in Indo-China (now Vietnam) a coup d'état in Egypt. He was first in the Vatican to photograph the new Pope Pius XII. His colour portrait of Winston Churchill made the first cover of *Paris-Match*. He took pictures of the Kings of Morocco and Jordan and newly elected Presidents of France, where no one else could penetrate the protocol.

Opposite, *Paris Match* covers photographed by Willy Rizzo between 1949 and 1957

A Rizzo photo reportage devoted to Maria Callas inspired Hergé to create 'Walter Rizotto', the ultimate cameraman, for a Tintin adventure *The Castafiore Emerald*.

Away from the heat of reporting, he was preoccupied by an extraordinary variety of subjects. He carried out original research into the lives of Jules Verne and Leonardo da Vinci, and, not surprising given his love of movie stars, the history of Los Angeles.

Willy Rizzo enjoyed being part of a charmed circle in Paris during the fifties. He was the 'grand seigneur' among a new photo-aristocracy. The houses of such cultivated friends as the surrealist artist Jean Cocteau, and Louise de Vilmorin, writer of exquisite novels, inspired him to start interior decorating, where he always put structure and space ahead of bibelots.

Rizzo has always understood fashion, ordered his own suits from the finest tailors, adored beautiful elegant women. In the Fifties Alex Liberman art director of Vogue (Rizzo has always known EVERYONE), a creative genius who had commissioned such masters of photography as Kertesz, Capa and Brassai, asked him to 'use his eye' for haute couture.

This was an immensely difficult new technique for Rizzo to master, after the immediacy of reporting. It meant experimenting with different lighting techniques, taking on an altogether unfamiliar artistic discipline.



Above and opposite, spreads from *Paris Match* between 1949 and 1955

To follow his successful pictures of high fashion, the next step for Willy Rizzo was to catch the spirit of dance, an art form he has always loved. As a child he took modern dance and tap lessons, later classical ballet classes in the academies of the Champs Elysees.

Another technical challenge to be faced, he had to devise a way to seize that airy leap, or fleeting expression, and to inspire the dancers. He told them to imagine being filmed by a movie camera which records 24 frames in a second.

His ingenious device was a 'kalart' (invented in 1930 for military purposes) attached to the front of his Rolleiflex which allowed the focus to be synchronised with flash lamps. This system allowed him to catch natural movement on a still camera, impossible if he had to rely on natural or theatre lighting.



Only flash will allow the camera to be set at a fast enough speed. Progress came years later when cameras were manufactured with an internal synchronised flash mechanism.

An artist but also a gifted technical innovator, Willy Rizzo greatly expanded his photographic repertoire during the fifties from portraits of actors and reporting. He transformed fashion models into dream creatures and miraculously caught dancers in flight.

His social life informed his interest in design and decoration, leading to furniture design in 1968, a new chapter in his life. Willy Rizzo has equal gifts as creator of unforgettable photographic images, and furniture on pure neo-classical lines, which will stand the test of time.