

AUSTRALIAN PHOTOGRAPHY

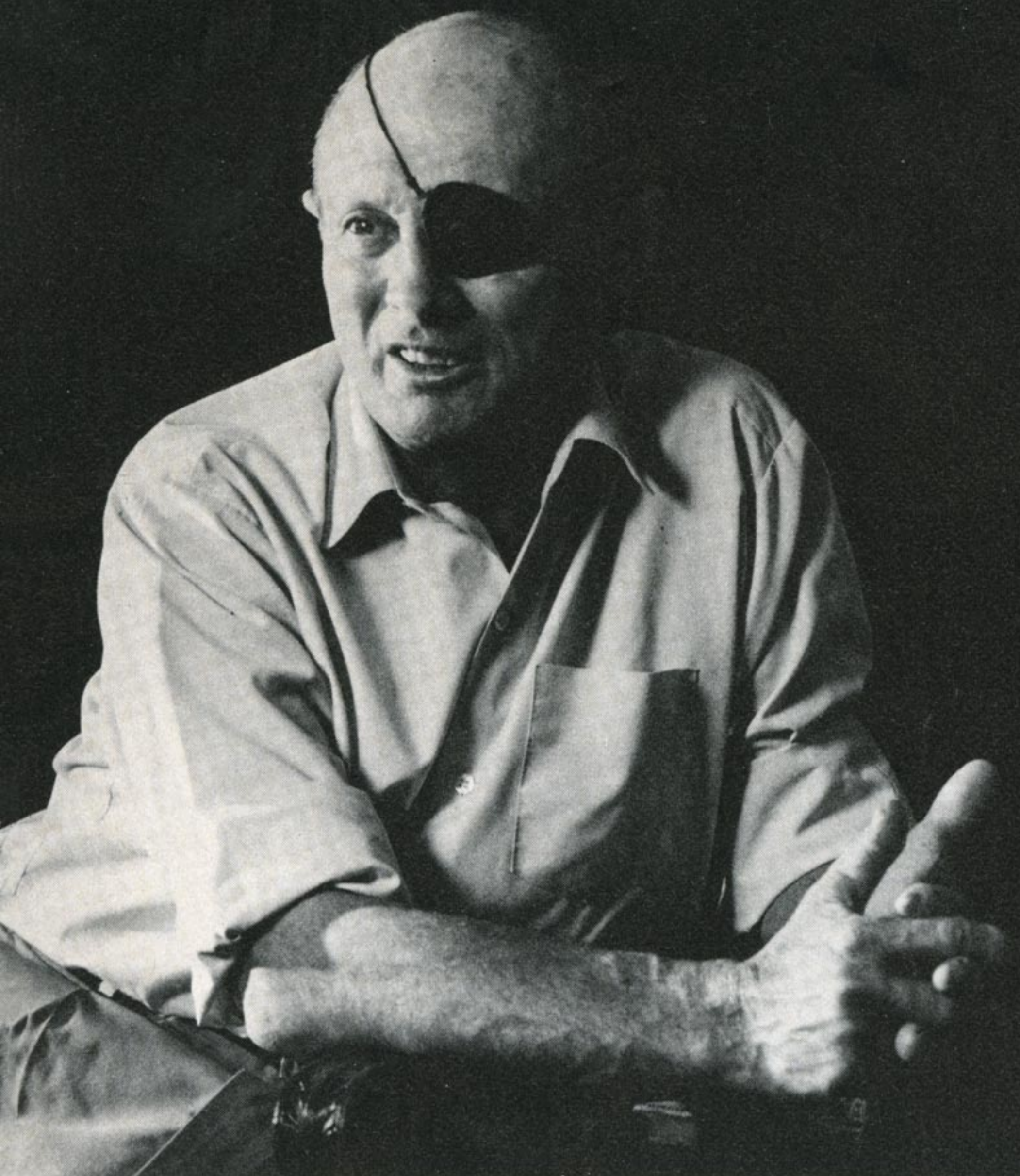
MAY 1979



- Portraits of The Famous By Bern Schwartz
- National Press Photography Awards
- Photographing The Rain Forest
- The Super-Wide Perspective
- Rainy Day Shutterbugging

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Portrait Photographer . . . **Bern Schwartz**

A successful businessman with a lifelong interest in photography, Bern Schwartz has astonished the world with the success of his ambitious plans to take colour portraits of the leading decision and taste makers in English society, and elsewhere in the world. Princes, popes, prime ministers, stars of opera, ballet, cinema and television, financial and industrial giants, writers, and society beauties — none seems reluctant to join his extraordinary diverse gallery of sitters. Trevor Gett interviewed Bern Schwartz in London for Australian Photography.

On the day I had an appointment with Bern Schwartz at his elegant Belgravia flat, Twiggy was also expected to view for the first time a selection of new colour pictures of herself, some enlarged and framed like oil paintings and resting on artists' easels. On the following day, Schwartz was flying down to Rome to photograph the new Pope. By the end of that week, he would be back in La Jolla, California where he and his wife reside in a *Star Is Born* type beach house with the ocean as a backdrop.

There, sealed and deep frozen for posterity, though accessible when further prints are needed, are some 600 sets of Hasselblad 2¼" square colour negatives, the fruits so far, but by no means the culmination, of Schwartz's dedicated efforts to portray the VIPs of our time.

Though notable Americans, Frenchmen, Israelis, Armenians, Italians and Arabs have sat for Schwartz, it is in Britain that

he has made most headway. This is due to the fact that he has contributed to the Royal Jubilee celebrations by photographing almost a hundred Great Britons for a special exhibition at the prestigious Bond Street Art Gallery of Colnaghi.

For this project, Spring 1977 found Schwartz working against the clock. In addition to the hour or so spent in actually taking the individual portrait, much time was consumed in other directions.

Schwartz insists on knowing as much as possible about his subject prior to the session, so he studies relevant books and articles written by or about the person concerned. He also likes to make an advance visit to the place chosen as location, be it home, office, theatre, cathedral or law court to formulate his *modus operandi*. There's also the post-shooting chore of examining enlarged positive contacts to choose the best pictures, and sometimes to consider beneficial cropping

of the image.

In view of the time factor being something of a *bête noir* with the Jubilee undertaking, I wondered why Schwartz went to the trouble of journeying up and down the country when he could have set up a centralised studio in London. He explained:

"I feel that a background, an environment, tells you a great deal about a person. It's an added dimension as long as you don't get carried away by it to the detriment of your subject. At Blenheim Palace where I photographed the other day, the splendour of furniture, tapestries and paintings was tempting, yet I knew they mustn't overwhelm my sitter."

Continuing in the friendly and measured tones that must put his most self-conscious sitter at ease, Schwartz said:

"It's the challenge of these things, and the ever-differing conditions to work in that gets my creative adrenalin going.



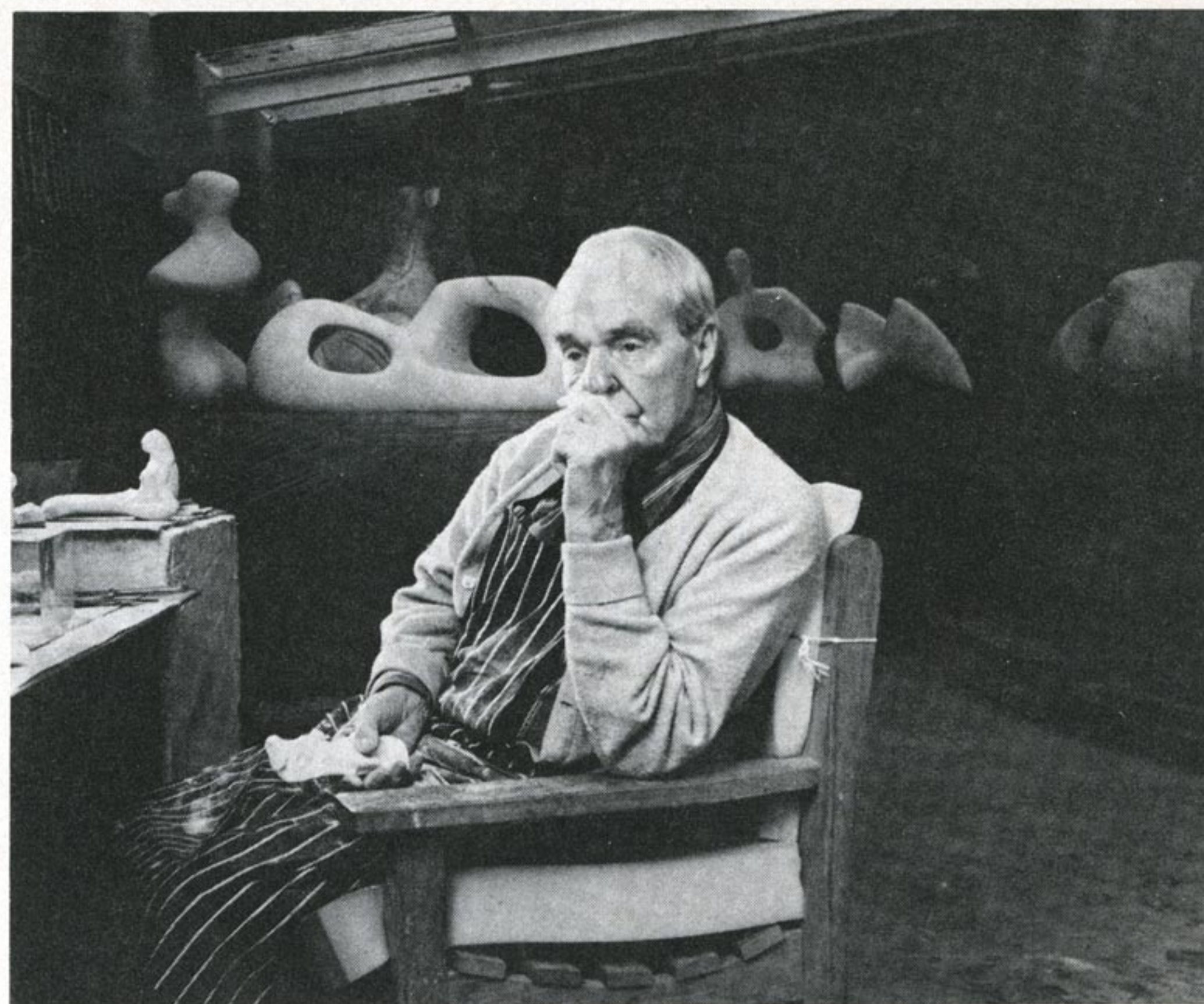
(far left) MOSHE DAYAN has held key posts in the Israeli government for 25 years. Schwartz's strong side-lighting and the deep shadows suggest the tensions daily facing Dayan. There is decision and a sense of direction in the interlocking hands photographed at a moment when they give diagonal impetus to the composition.

(near left) The Rt. Hon. MARGARET THATCHER, Conservative Party leader, may enter the history books as England's first woman prime minister. Her direct gaze into the lens suggests the intelligence, confidence and qualifications necessary, should the people vote her into office.

(above) Lady DIANA COOPER agreed to wear the pale pastel gown that Schwartz felt was ideal for the romanticism with which he wished to endow this charismatic personality, a member of the Royal set at the time of the controversial abdication of Edward VIII.

(above right) In 1526, Hans Holbein came from Germany to paint the Tudor Archbishop of Canterbury, whose present day successor, the Most Rev. and Rt. Hon. DONALD COGGAN, posed in the same Lambeth Palace for the photographer from California.

(right) HENRY MOORE, sculptor, was photographed with face partly obscured, and emphasis on hands, forehead and eyes, an artist's most salient features. Schwartz resisted the temptation to illuminate Moore's exciting sculptural forms and draw attention away from their creator.



Much more than in a studio where there would be limited possibilities for lighting set-ups and props. For instance, when I saw David Hockney's studio skylight, I knew that this would give me almost all the illumination I needed. And the plush scarlet and gilt decor of the Royal Opera House auditorium did more to relate to Sir Geraint Evans than any studio prop possibly could.

"On location, you're sharp, you're thinking, dealing with rooms where you might have 20, 30, or as little as 7 feet to work in. With the Sonnar 150 mm and the Planar 80 mm lenses that I like to use, that doesn't give much leeway. I don't favour distortion in portraiture, so ideally I need about 8 ft between camera and subject, for a head and shoulders shot. Even more, of course, for a full length.

"Space was a problem when I photographed Henry Moore in the small shed where he devises maquettes in the

early stages of developing a sculpture. His work-table is right next to the door which meant that I had to move my camera outside, even though it was raining, to get the composition I wanted. My resourceful wife, Ronny, protected the equipment with an umbrella while I was shooting.

"You see, I avoid the wide-angle lens because it can lead to a caricature effect. And I'm not interested in that, or in anything gimmicky. I want pictures that show people the way they really are."

When I observed that most of Schwartz's portraits were taken indoors, he commented:

"On the whole, people are more relaxed sitting at a desk or in a favourite chair rather than standing. But I guess you've noticed that sometimes I incorporate landscape as seen through a window, as in the picture of the French president where the Arc de Triomphe forms an

appropriate background. And the delightful garden seen through a pattern of leaded glass seems to underline the Englishness of the Archbishop of Canterbury."

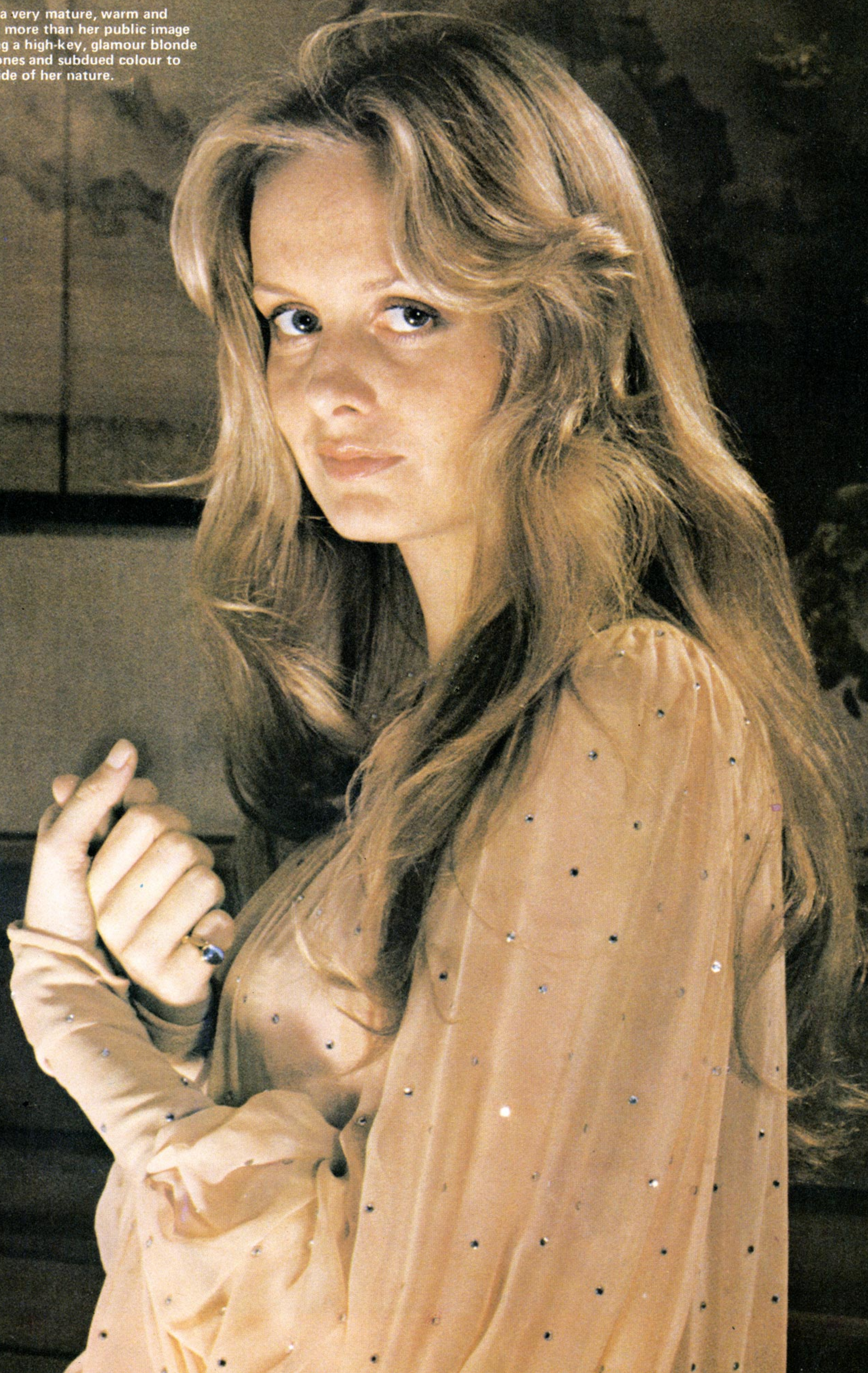
My admiration of the Earl Mountbatten portrait led Schwartz to remark on the effects of official robes or uniform on people, and to regret that he wasn't around in the Renaissance with a camera to record the courtly splendour of that era. Schwartz stated:

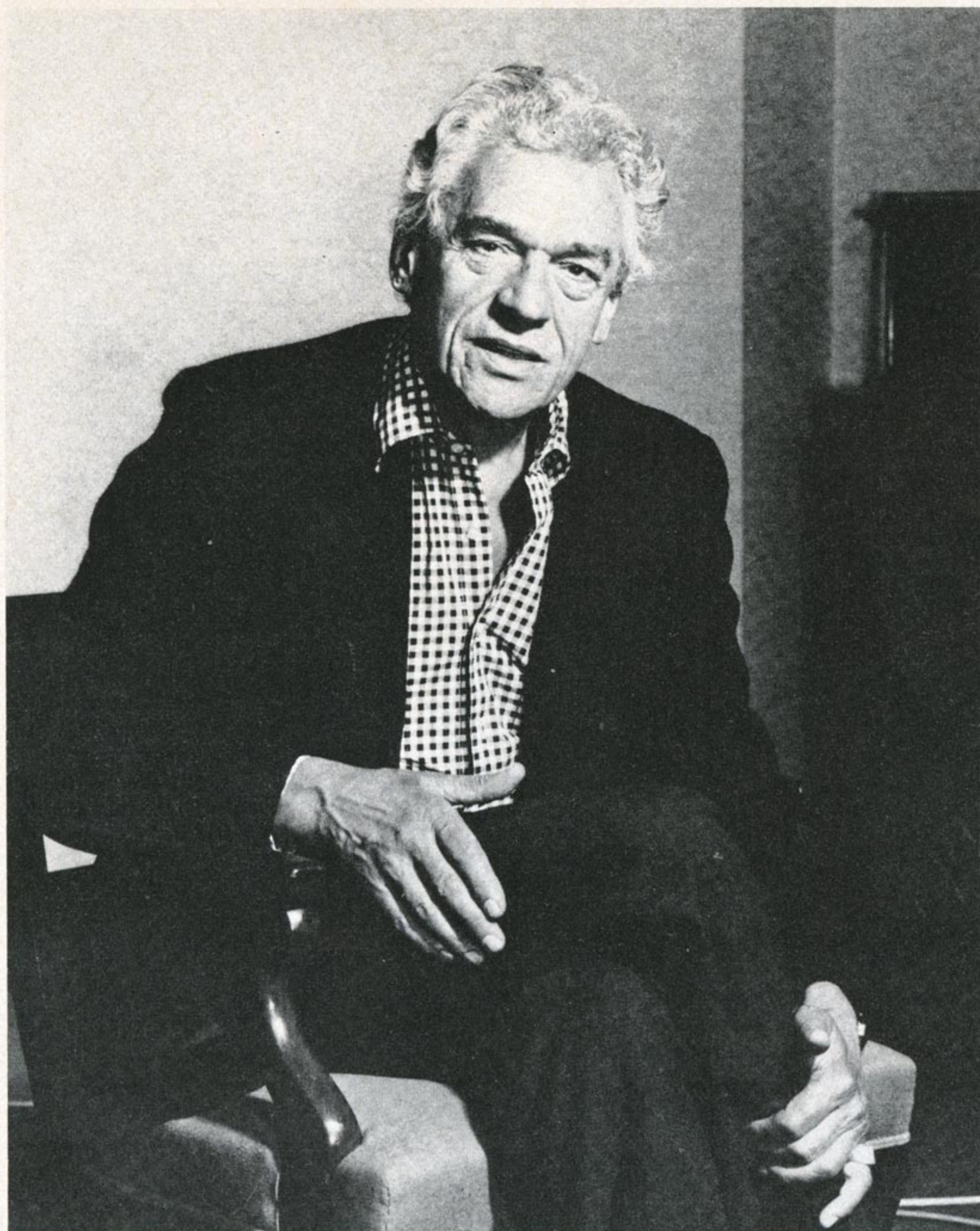
"When a man dons a uniform, his manner changes, becomes more commanding and resolute. That's what I wanted to show of this great man's personality. And, as with all of us, one side of his face is more photogenic, more revealing of character, than the other. In his case this was the right profile. That nose is so patrician. •

EARL MOUNTBATTEN OF BURMA: With the classic simplicity of an imperial Roman coin, this profile view achieves an hieratic flavour, further enhanced by the interplay of light and dark, and the splendour of gilt. Schwartz's picture has been adopted by Wedgwood as the basis of a white-on-blue cameo plaque.



Schwartz: "TWIGGY is a very mature, warm and intelligent person, much more than her public image would suggest." Avoiding a high-key, glamour blonde approach, he uses low tones and subdued colour to convey the thoughtful side of her nature.





(left) To play the roles of his personal choice, **PAUL SCHOFIELD** has resisted superstar opportunities, and is very much his own man. Schwartz captures his self-possession, inner strength, and enigmatic charm at a moment when these qualities are indicated by the unique, lived-in face, and the strong but sensitive hands.

(below left) By juxtaposing the real **DAME MARGOT FONTEYN** with her idealized painted image, Schwartz achieves the picture-within-a-picture effect of Vermeer, the Dutch master whom he greatly respects. Of the ballerina, Schwartz says: "It is not often one meets one's idol face-to-face, and I was not disappointed."

(below) Schwartz seizes the opportunity to stress the monumental tradition of the Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem by spotlighting his imposing official chair, and contrasting it with the geniality of the man himself, **ARCHBISHOP YEGHISHE DERDERIAN**.



(right) DAVID HOCKNEY stands beside his portrait of his father, and in front of a self-portrait. Schwartz asked him if he still had the rugger shirt of the painting. He recalls: "I waited with bated breath as he searched. At long last he reappeared wearing it, and the composition of my portrait suddenly sorted itself out."



(below) One can almost hear the music emanating from YEHUDI MENUHIN'S violin, thanks to the strategic lighting and close-in composition of this portrait. The man and his instrument are as one.

