STALEY • WISE GALLERY

Press Release

William Helburn

Hot Shot!

November 19, 2026 - January 9, 2026

Opening Reception

November 19, 6-8pm

Photographer and director William Helburn straddled high fashion photography along with advertising campaigns designed to appeal to the masses, helping to define visual culture in mid-century America.

Raised in New York City, Helburn learned photography when he joined the army in 1942. Following the war, he returned home with the hope of launching an aerial mapping business. A chance encounter with photographer Fernand Fonssagrives inspired him to then pursue photography, initially taking model agency test shots and studying at the workshops of legendary art director Alexey Brodovitch's Design Laboratory. Helburn's fellow students included Irving Penn, Richard Avedon, Robert Frank, and Diane Arbus. Brodovitch then assigned Helburn to his first *Junior Bazaar* editorial in 1949, jump-starting his illustrious career at the age of 25.

He later became the go-to photographer for the art directors at the legendary Doyle Dane Bernbach, one of the advertising agencies credited with changing the look of graphic design in the 1960s and later inspiring the television show *Mad Men*. "Working for (DDB) did as much for a photographer as working for *VOGUE* or *Bazaar*," said Helburn. "Their ads were like editorial pages. And (art director Bob Gage) was to advertising what Brodovitch was to editorial."

While Helburn shot for *Harper's Bazaar*, *Esquire*, and *LIFE* magazine and created campaign images for iconic brands including Coca-Cola and Max Factor, he also pursued a passion for race-car driving alongside a robust romantic life before eventually raising a family and continuing a career in television as a director of photography until the 1980s.

Helburn enjoyed a lucrative and engaging career but like many of his peers, he gave little thought to his immense photographic archive or to producing prints of his work. Before his death in 2020, Lois and Bob Lilly began working with Helburn and family to manage the archive and to cement his legacy. This resulted in Helburn's first book *William Helburn: Seventh and Madison* in 2014, his first exhibition at Staley-Wise Gallery in 2016, and the inclusion of Helburn's photographs in the permanent collection of the Getty Museum in Los Angeles. In 2025, a box was discovered which contained nearly all of Helburn's missing negatives and files from his extensive work for *LIFE* Magazine. Several of these newly restored images, previously unseen except from within the pages of the magazine, are included in this new exhibition.



William Helburn
Double Vacation: Anne St. Marie, Harper's Bazaar, 1960
© Estate of William Helburn



William Helburn
Snorkelers: Caribe Beach, Puerto Rico, LIFE Magazine, 1954
© Estate of William Helburn

This exhibition will run concurrently with the exhibition "Genevieve Naylor: Brazil to Bazaar".

Press images available upon request.

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