**Reflections in a Golden Eye: Exploring the Photographic Art of Margaret Nolan and Shirley Eaton**

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**Abstract** This article offers a new perspective on the much-discussed phenomenon of the Bond Girl through an exploration of photographic artwork produced in later life by two notable Bond Girls: the two ‘golden girls’ of *Goldfinger* (1964), Margaret Nolan, who appeared in the film’s credit sequence, and Shirley Eaton, who played the character who suffers skin suffocation by being painted gold. It is a remarkable coincidence that both women turned to photographic artwork as a way of reflecting back on their careers and on their youthful positioning as sex symbols, exemplified by their highly publicised appearances in *Goldfinger.*

This article places their sixties iconicity into dialoguewith their retrospective, reflective artwork which is by turns critical, celebratory, and ambivalent about their past lives as Bond Girls. Nolan’s feminist-inflected photo-collages render her previous glamorous image uncanny through unsettling and subversive juxtapositions whereas Eaton’s digital remixing of old images alongside contemporary self-portraiture occupy the territory of star glamour more comfortably but extend it by showing the golden girl as older woman.

Nolan and Eaton’s artwork provides valuable insights into the experiential dimensions of having been a Bond Girl, with their creative response through art presenting certain complexities and nuances that written or spoken accounts might not access in quite the same way. In that respect, this article, alongside its specific insights into Bond Girls, demonstrates the value for researchers in engaging with such material.

**Keywords** James Bond;Bond Girls; *Goldfinger*; Shirley Eaton; Margaret Nolan; women artists; photo-collage; photographic self-portraiture; stardom; glamour.

A perpetually debated element of the James Bond film franchise, the figure of the Bond Girl has generated extensive critical and scholarly analysis, from her first appearances in the 1960s through to the latest iteration at the time of writing, *No Time to Die* (2021). While Bond Girls have often been negatively positioned as the epitome of female objectification on screen, with foundational scholarship outlining her ‘construction in terms of erotic spectacle’ (Bennett and Woollacott 1987: 153), they have latterly been celebrated as subversive icons of sexual liberation and female agency whose femininities, according to Monica Germana, ‘are never monolithic, never static’ (2020: 213). Within the extensive academic literature on the Bond phenomenon, Bond Girls have generated their own significant subsection of articles and chapters, as well as books (Germana 2020; Funnell 2015), all analysing how the Bond Girl has changed and developed across her seven decades of existence on film, reflecting and sometimes prefiguring changing social attitudes around female strength, independence, and sexuality.

But in all of this discursive activity, the voice of the Bond Girl herself has not always been foregrounded or heard. She has usually been written and spoken about more than having the opportunity to write or speak for herself, beyond being expected to express the required promotional pieties about the honour of joining the Bond Girl pantheon, and more recently offer a postfeminist defence of the figure’s power and glamour (Luckett 2020: 149). However, one formative intervention in enabling Bond Girls to discuss their often complex feelings about inhabiting this representational space was provided by Maryam D’Abo, a Bond Girl herself in *The Living Daylights* (1987), whose documentary, *Bond Girls are Forever* (2002, updated 2006 and 2012 to include additional material) and accompanying book (D’Abo and Cork 2003) sought to investigate what it means to take on and live with the label of ‘Bond Girl’. In both film and book, interview material with those who had direct experience is centred, including D’Abo’s own mixed feelings about joining the sorority, particularly in relation to its long-term impact on her career: ‘I thought to myself, I’m never going to be able to get away from the Bond Girl image’ (2003: 155). She described the whole process as akin to a dark fairytale:

To be a Bond girl is like living a Cinderella story. From the moment the filmmakers announce your casting, you are feted, celebrated, and whisked off to a whirlwind of adventure, complete with beautiful gowns, exotic settings, and a Prince Charming as a co-star.

There are a few important twists. When the clock strikes midnight, you return to the life of a working actress. And, unlike in Cinderella, there is no anonymity when the party’s over. There seems to be an expectation within the media that once you have been a Bond Girl, you are labelled a Bond Girl forever. (2003: 155)

Other members of the ‘elite sisterhood’ of the Bond Girl (2003: 11) broach the subject of the label’s possible ‘taint’ (160) and ‘stigma’ (163), describing themselves as ‘conflicted’ (166) with regard to its ‘two-edged sword’ (160), which ‘opens a lot of doors’ professionally (163) but seemed to close others very firmly. Many former Bond Girls convey a sense of ambivalence about its deep and lasting effects, and even among those who viewed it more positively, ‘all have found that being a Bond Girl has remained a larger part of their lives than they imagined.’ (2003: 156)

This is certainly true of the two Bond Girls this article focusses on, neither of whom occupy extensive screen time in the Bond film in which they both appear, *Goldfinger* (1964)*,* but whose subsequent personae were irrevocably marked by their status not only as Bond Girls, but specifically as the ‘golden girls’ invoked in the film’s famous theme song: Margaret Nolan (who appears anonymously but unforgettably in the film’s credit sequence and also in a cameo role as Dink, a Miami masseuse) and Shirley Eaton (who plays Jill Masterson, the girl whose dalliance with Bond is swiftly curtailed by her horrible but memorable death, suffocated by gold paint all over her body). Although both women had much longer careers that encompassed an array of roles and genres, including numerous comedy performances across screen and stage (they were both in multiple *Carry On* films, for example), it was nevertheless their identities as Bond Girls that endured above all else. A reference to her Bond role provided Shirley Eaton with the title of her autobiography, *Golden Girl* (Eaton 1999), and throughout Margaret Nolan’s obituaries in 2020, her time as *Goldfinger*’s *‘*golden girl’ was consistently foregrounded. Therefore the sentence with which Eaton opens her autobiography can be understood as equally applicable to both of these very particular Bond Girls: ‘I am the girl covered in gold paint in *Goldfinger* and, in a sense, I always will be.’ (Eaton 1999: 9).[[1]](#endnote-1)

What is of particular interest to me in this article is Eaton and Nolan’s shared use of photographic art in later life as a way of reflecting back on their glamorous images, including their status as *Goldfinger’s* golden girls which elevated both of them to a new plane of iconicity. It is a fascinating coincidence that both women undertook different forms of autobiographical artwork, Margaret Nolan creating striking and often disturbing photo-collages comprised of cut-up publicity photographs, and Shirley Eaton deploying a combination of photographic practices from digital image manipulation to self-portraiture.[[2]](#endnote-2)

Although not necessarily consistently feminist in approach, the artwork both women produced is highly amenable to feminist analysis, in the way it offers a commentary on the processes of fetishisation and objectification inherent within female star image-making, but from a reflective perspective afforded by maturity and seniority. Both women had been rendered silent static golden idols in *Goldfinger*; what their artwork offers by comparison is the Bond Girl breaking her silence, speaking back to her image, reflecting upon it and sometimes critiquing it – and crucially, doing that through art. Although we may be familiar with the recounting of the experiences of movie personnel, especially stars, through interviews and published memoirs, these are not the only kind of primary sources available to offer access to the thoughts, feelings and recollections of particular figures. Amelie Hastie’s foundational work in feminist film history (Hastie 2007) suggested the greater breadth of materials, ephemera, and personal curatorial and creative practices that might come within an expanded remit of such research, from recipe books to dollhouses as well as the more familiar memoirs, thereby illuminating our understanding of the experiences of a range of film-connected women in new ways. Along similar lines, I contend that Margaret Nolan’s and Shirley Eaton’s photographic artwork offers new understanding into the experience of having been a Bond Girl, with all the attendant complexities and ambivalences to which D’Abo alludes. For both Nolan and Eaton, the gold paint proved hard to wash off and they had to find ways to live with its residual glimmer.

What follows will offer an account of Nolan and Eaton’s (surprisingly brief) appearances in *Goldfinger,* encompassing both their onscreen signification and extratextual details of provenance, distribution and legacy. This is then placed into dialogue with each woman’s later photographic art, first Nolan’s then Eaton’s, in order to explore how their creative work may have enabled them to think through and retrospectively make sense of their youthful stardom and glamour, with their moment as gilded Bond Girls constituting an important part of that.

**Golden girls appear: Margaret Nolan and Shirley Eaton in *Goldfinger* (1964)**

*Goldfinger*‘s first golden girl appears in the film’s credit sequence. Sixties design guru Robert Brownjohn had previously created the distinctive credit sequence for the preceding Bond film, *From Russia with Love* (1963), projecting the names of cast and crew across the undulating torsos and legs of belly dancers. He had sold the idea by ‘gathering producers and executives into a darkened room’ where he ‘turned on a slide projector, lifted his shirt and danced in front of the beam of light, allowing projected images to glance off his already alcohol-extended belly. “It’ll be just like this”, he exclaimed, “except we’ll use a pretty girl!” (King 2003: 204). This belied the more avant-garde influence of Constructivist artist Laszlo Moholy-Nagy's ‘long-term experiments with projected light’ (207).

Brownjohn’s follow-on commission extemporised further on this idea of projection onto attractive female bodies, this time making particular use of the visual spectacle of a woman’s body painted gold, a key plot point in the film to come. Photographic model and aspiring actress Margaret Nolan would fulfil the role of human screen onto whom scenes from the film were to be projected. Where the dancers in *From Russia with Love*’s titles had been vigorously mobile, Nolan would be made to strike static poses (foreshadowing the static corpse of the girl murdered by gold paint suffocation) with any movement in the image coming from the scenes projected onto her. Showbusiness journalist Tony Crawley conveyed the sense of excitement at Brownjohn’s innovative (and highly eroticised) approach to credit sequences in a report for *Showtime* magazine, describing how scenes from *Goldfinger*

flash around and over the fantastic statistics (41 – 23 – 37) of starlet Margaret Nolan. She appears on the screen, wearing just a 30-guinea bikini, made of gold leather, and covered in gold-paint elsewhere. And what Sean Connery, in his Bond exploits, gets up to over her anatomy is very saucy indeed. (1964: 22)

The lascivious tone of Crawley’s report responded to the *Goldfinger* images themselves but may also have been keyed into Nolan’s previous work as a nude model, under the pseudonym Vicky Kennedy, encouraging reading strategies of the sequence in terms of titillation. However, Crawley also emphasises a level of luxury about the whole enterprise, exemplified by the lavish expenditure on a designer bikini (crafted by Kiki Byrne, Brownjohn’s partner at the time and an influential fashion designer in her own right). Meanwhile Nolan herself emphasised the discomfort and ‘hard work’ the sequence entailed: ‘It took an hour twice a day to get all that gold on, then I had to stand and lie on a hard platform for hours with the projector flickering in my face’ (23).

As already customary in a Bond film by 1964, after *Goldfinger’s* gun barrel introductory shot, there ensues a pre-credit sequence showcasing an especially thrilling Bondian escapade. Itdeftly intertwines humour and style, from Bond’s spotless white dinner jacket under his wetsuit to his summative throwaway pun of ‘positively shocking’ having just electrocuted an assailant, and the quintessential Bondian pairing of sex and violence, as Bond is preyed upon during a romantic assignation with an exotic dancer. He shows a notable lack of gallantry towards the first of his numerous love interests in *Goldfinger,* callously using her as a human shield to take the brunt of a cosh meant for him. This makes her the first of a series of lifeless female bodies on display in the film, although she is at least only temporarily unconscious and her groans of reawakening usher in the credits and the brassily dramatic opening bars of the theme song.

We see posed against a black background the static gold-painted body of Margaret Nolan, first her hand, then her face in profile, and finally her upright torso shot from the side, showcasing her large bust. Projected upon her gold-painted body are scenes to come and characters yet to be encountered. The sequence makes numerous attempts to create a direct alignment between her and what is projected onto her, as when henchman Oddjob's face is superimposed onto her own, giving her a moustache or when the revolving car number plates take the place of her mouth while her closed eyes approximate the position of headlights. A well-aimed golf ball appears to roll into her cleavage in a moment of facetious humour. A revolver seems to fire from her eye-socket. Successively, her legs, shoulders, chest and back act as screens for scenes of action – planes taking off, men running, cars driving - with the camera roaming the length of her supine form to follow the movement. As the song reaches its dramatic climax, the images on screen become equally assertive: rapidly flickering multicoloured neon signage which brings vivacity to an otherwise still and expressionless female figure, flames appearing to consume her recumbent body as the camera pans its length (flames of passion or a cremation?), and the staging of a barrage of (ecstatic) explosions across the flat surface of her back and bowed head.

Throughout this highly influential credit sequence, women figure as an absent presence. An unspecified ‘pretty girl’ is the addressee of Leslie Bricusse and Anthony Newley’s theme song, and Shirley Bassey performs their lyric of warning with a sense of impassioned commitment, very aurally present but visually absent. Meanwhile the golden girl we see appears to have already succumbed to the man who merits the song’s warning, his ‘kiss of death’ having transformed her from living flesh into statuary. While exciting things unfold across the length of her body and upon her face, she is not party to them and remains reactionless throughout; physically present as a beautiful screen for others’ action but absent as an active participant herself. Although not as a silhouette like so many title sequence girls to come, she is nonetheless still rendered anonymous and inscrutable; exemplary of the ‘barely identifiable hypersexualised girls’ in ‘serial profusion’ that Moya Luckett sees as a defining feature of the Bond aesthetic (2020: 164).

In becoming an interchangeable sexualised surface, the golden girl can be seen as the epitome of femininity’s function in 1960s advertising. No wonder she proved highly amenable to being cross-deployed as a ubiquitous promotional image, earning Brownjohn the (apt) Gold award from the British Design and Art Direction Association for the triumphant execution of his *Goldfinger* concept, which would not only define its entire marketing campaign*,* from posters to tie-in paperbacks to soundtrack records, but also crystallise the look of Bond for decades to come.

Credits completed and into the first proper scene of *Goldfinger* establishing the location as a luxury hotel in Miami, Florida, it is quite difficult to recognise the immobilised golden girl from the credits in the screen character Margaret Nolan very briefly plays*,* a poolside masseuse called Dink, whose honey blond hair, periwinkle blue swimsuit (to match her eyes), and smiling coral lips framing perfect white teeth, all colour-coordinate harmoniously. She is ministering to and physically manipulating Bond’s body as Felix Leiter arrives, and is no sooner introduced to him by Bond than told to say goodbye because what they have to discuss is ‘man talk’, dispatched on her way with a slap on the behind. Despite its placement in the fantasy space of the Bond film, this kind of patronising treatment of women by men obviously had real-world analogues too numerous to mention. It certainly accorded with Nolan’s habitual screen treatment as a ‘dumb blonde’, pretty but inconsequential, an easily replaceable type.

A few minutes later, and we hear the next golden girl of *Goldfinger*, Jill Masterson (Shirley Eaton but dubbed by Nikki van der Zyl), before we see her, as Bond enters Goldfinger’s suite and hears the voice of a young woman coming from the balcony. Jill is helping Goldfinger to cheat at cards by viewing his opponent's hand through her binoculars and conveying the information to him through a radio transmitter disguised as Goldfinger’s hearing aid. Prone on a sun lounger and in a skimpy black bikini, we see her playfully kicking her legs as she relays the information required before Bond interrupts her. She turns to face this intruder, and he then delivers his iconic introduction, ‘Bond, James Bond’, instigating the swell of the Bond theme. Her equivalent introduction merits no such fanfare, and in any case, her moral character is already severely compromised by her collusion with her boss’s mendacity and shameless megalomania. Bond questions her about the basis of her relationship to Goldfinger and deduces that she is not Goldfinger’s lover but merely a decorative and useful assistant (about whom he is dangerously possessive though, as she will find out to her cost). As Bond leans over Jill’s body to ascertain the situation and address Goldfinger on his secret communication channel, Connery and Eaton invoke their mutual pleasure at their physical proximity.

Bond’s insistence that Jill is a ‘nice’ girl has a certain irony. Shirley Eaton had been very keen to move beyond her designation as nice ‘girl-next-door’ type, which was becoming somewhat of a limitation in developing her film career in the newly permissive decade of the 1960s, and coveted the role of Jill Masterson precisely as a means of breaking away from playing nice. Eaton was already an established star, having appeared in numerous highly popular British comedies from the mid 1950s onwards, including *Doctor in the House* (1954) as well as three out of the first four *Carry On* films (1958’s *Sergeant*, 1959’s *Nurse* and 1960’s *Constable*), and was popular enough for fans to mob her wedding in 1957. In seeking to pivot to a more mature image with international appeal, beyond the ‘modern miss in merrie moments’ that *TV Fun* comic had elected her (Eaton 1999: 66), Eaton envisaged Bond as the ideal vehicle and recalled wanting the role of Jill ‘very badly indeed’: ‘*Goldfinger* was to be their most lavish production to date. There was just so much excitement building up around the Bond series that I knew I had to be part of it.’ (10). The fact that she would ostensibly appear nude apart from body paint and some tiny modesty panels was part of the appeal, as she told the press at the time: ‘I did it for the publicity, and because of the gimmick […] there’s a career ahead with an entirely new image’ (Taylor 1964).

As with Margaret Nolan, the process of being transformed into a golden girl was arduous, involving sustained discomfort in both applying and then removing the gold body paint. Although Nolan had experience of nude modelling, it was actually Eaton who would be wearing less for her ‘golden girl’ scenes in the film, a spectacle which generated plenty of press interest, and which EON’s publicity department played up to, with 28 licensed photographers installed to capture the moment according to the film’s pressbook (United Artists, 1964), relaying their tastefully composed but still revealing photographs to a worldwide readership. Although the sexualisation of Shirley beyond being a British comedy ingenue had begun with her Mickey Spillane film *The Girl Hunters* (1963), the process would be successfully completed by *Goldfinger.* Jill’s readiness to accept Bond as a lover after minimal preamble offers a striking contrast to her roles of just a few years before, expressive of how quickly the new morality had gained dominance in British popular culture: the shot of the couple’s first kiss on the balcony dissolves into their first (and only) date, where the food goes untouched and they are already in bed together, sharing a pair of powder blue pyjamas (another harmonious pairing of blonde and blue).

When Felix interrupts Bond’s love life again, this time via telephone, Jill uses a tress of her long loose hair to tickle and tease Bond while he’s on the phone. He rather forcefully rebuffs her and shoves her back onto the bed where it looks like another bout of lovemaking will ensue. The next interruption comes from Bond’s consternation at the champagne being too warm, eliciting his rather fogeyish ‘my dear girl’ speech about serving such a superb vintage at the incorrect temperature being ‘as bad as listening to the Beatles without earmuffs’. But the conversation, and the reprised seduction, go no further than that; at the refrigerator, a mysterious assailant renders him unconscious with a blow to the neck. When he comes to, seemingly after some time has passed, he returns to the bedroom to discover Jill’s lifeless naked body, painted gold from head to toe. As Penelope Gilliatt evocatively describes the moment: ‘there she is: a used object, a jewelled utensil in a Pharoah’s tomb, a relic of dead pleasure’ (Gilliatt 1964: 27). John Barry’s eerily atonal four-note musical motif and the use of ethereal instrumentation from finger bells and harp underline the spectacle’s unsettling combination of beauty and horror, and Bond’s sense of shock at what has occurred. We have to wait till the next scene to receive our explanation of the cause of death - ‘skin suffocation’ - but we know instantly that Goldfinger is the culprit, his ego demanding a perverse lethal punishment for any act of disloyalty.

When Bond rings Felix and tells him ‘the girl’s dead’, Felix responds ‘Dink?’: an indication of the rapid turnover of Bond’s lovers but also the possible interchangeability of these two golden girls, both of whom have completed their appearances in the film barely seventeen minutes into its running time (and neither of them appears until seven minutes in). Despite their scant occupation of screen time, their image reverberates through the entire film, and as aforementioned, the golden girl was the linchpin of the film’s branding. In addition to Nolan acting as its poster girl, Eaton also agreed to have the gold paint reapplied for a photograph that would end up on the cover of *Life* magazine in November 1964, helping to sell the film to US audiences who ended up being very receptive to another exciting cultural import from Britain, in the wake of Beatlemania.

Lobby stunts suggested to promote the film placed the figure of the golden girl centre stage:

Costume a model entirely in GOLD: leotards, blouse, shoes, jewellery (even her make-up), and white gloves with one GOLD finger. She is your hostess at all Golden Screenings. She handplants all your material at the papers, radio, and TV stations (with a GOLD attaché case handcuffed to her wrist, of course). She tours in a GOLD car and she delivers the GOLD film cans to your opening night wingding. (United Artists 1964: 11)

Eaton fulfilled this role for some US screenings, as part of her general promotional role, wearing a different gold outfit to each personal appearance (D’Abo and Cork 2003: 159).

It was a fortunate coincidence for major perfumier and cosmetics company Goya that they had launched a ‘Golden Girl’ make-up range around this time and they were able to deliberately orientate their branding to forge connections between their products and the Bond Girl: one typical advertisement featured in *Photoplay* August 1964 depicts the model at acasino’s gambling tables accompanied by a suave dinner-jacketed man reminiscent of Bond. In such extratextual reverberations, the golden girl was constructed as an object of admiration and aspiration despite her silence, stasis and horrible death at the hands of a sadist in the film itself.

**Golden girls reflect: Margaret Nolan**

After her apperance in *Goldfinger,* Margaret Nolan went on to enjoy - or endure - a parallel existence within British media culture during the 1960s and 1970s. Her extraordinary statuesque figure, particularly her large bust, made her the go-to voluptuous blonde across a range of screen and stage comedies. One role she took the same year as *Goldfinger* would set the template:the glamour girl in the low-cut dress Wilfrid Brambell encounters in a casino in *A Hard Day’s Night* (1964), of whom he observes, surveying her bust, that she must be a good swimmer. Such a moment is indicative of her recurrent role as butt of sexist jokes, although she did manage to have some carnivalesque fun in certain comedies, ferociously fighting as beauty contestant Dawn Brakes against her rival Hope Springs (Barbara Windsor) in *Carry On Girls* (1973), or discombobulating Harry H. Corbett as ‘am-dram' actress Nemone Wagstaff in a 1972 episode of *Steptoe and Son* (BBC, 1962-74). Nolan also had a long-standing collaboration with Spike Milligan, appearing in his surreal television sketch shows *The World of Beachcomber* (BBC, 1968) and *Q* (BBC, 1969-80), which offered her opportunities to play different kinds of roles but increasingly she found that what was required was ‘more pin-uppey sort of stuff’, as she later described it (in Prescott 2007). Drama series like *The Newcomers* (BBC, 1965-69) and episodes in the anthologies *Armchair Theatre* (ITV, 1956-74) and *The Wednesday Play* (BBC, 1964-70) offered more range but these roles were outnumbered by stereotypical turns as, in her words, ‘a dumb blonde or a nice bit of fluff’ (Prescott 2007). Offscreen, Nolan was a highly committed leftist, later to join the Workers’ Revolutionary Party, active in agitprop and socialist fringe theatre, with these political activities and allegiances running parallel to her mainstream career as standard-issue sexpot. This may explain why, when she came to make artwork in later years, the depiction of divided, split selves would be one of her dominant tropes.

Nolan began to make art in the early 2000s after she had stopped acting, having moved to in the 1990s to a farmhouse in the Andalucian mountains to pursue an interest in ecological sustainability and permaculture. She had taken everything with her during this relocation, including a large amount of publicity photographs, the majority being headshots she had used when seeking work. As she later explained:

when I arrived in Spain and eventually got round to going through all my photo stuff, wanting to throw everything away really, I just looked at them and thought that they’re too good to throw away. Some of them were by very famous photographers. Because I had lots of copies of some of them, about half a dozen or so, I started cutting them up [...] I didn’t go to any other source at all, so they were all made up of just these half a dozen or so photographs. (in Prescott 2007)

From these deliberately restricted ‘found’ materials, Nolan went on to create a number of arresting photographic collages in which she subverted the version of femininity she had been expected to present to the world as an actress and pin-up. Initially exhibiting some of this work in Spain, she then did so more extensively in the UK after she had moved back around 2007 (a full list of exhibitions is provided on her personal website, [www.margaretnolan.co.uk](http://www.margaretnolan.co.uk)).

Nolan’s inclusion in the 2013 feminist exhibition ‘Equals’, held at the BlankSpace gallery, Manchester, suggests the feminist intent of her work, as does her choice of a lengthy quotation from John Berger’s *Ways of Seeing* on the operations of the male gaze as landing page text on the art gallery section of her official website. For Nolan, Berger’s words ‘summed up my feelings’ about the gender dynamics she had experienced as a model and actress and that she now sought to explore in her work:

To be born a woman has been to be born, within an allotted and confined space, into the keeping of men...this has been at the cost of a woman's self being split into two...she must continuously watch herself...and so she comes to consider the surveyor and the surveyed within her as the two constituent yet always distinct elements of her identity as a woman. Men look at women, women watch themselves being looked at...her own sense of being in herself is supplanted by a sense of being appreciated as herself by another...thus she turns herself into an object - and most particularly an object of vision; a 'sight'.

(Berger quoted on [www.margaretnolan.co.uk/art/](https://www.margaretnolan.co.uk/art/))

This was precisely how she had been positioned in *Goldfinger,* and she saw it as typical of women’s representation in the 1960s which insisted on

this kind of passive “look”, which is part of what it was like in the sixties. If you look back on all the photos, even the model ones of people like Jean Shrimpton […] we weren’t allowed to have an expression on our face. The idea was really to just look beautiful, and passive, the way men liked you to look. (Prescott 2007)

Nolan explained that what she wanted to do in her artwork was to go back to moments and images such as these, and reveal her own awareness of and feelings about being the passive object of the gaze

the idea that I was there as this passive woman, being looked at, but behind it all, behind my eyes, of course I knew what was going on. Hopefully that comes out in the material, that I’m looking at you looking at me – that I’m acting coy but I know what it’s all about! (in Prescott 2007)

In doing so, she felt her re-made images ‘more accurately reflect an image of the 60's and 70's than the originals in their context’ ([www.margaretnolan.co.uk/art/](http://www.margaretnolan.co.uk/art/)), revealing hidden truths about the gender politics of the gaze.

Insert Fig 1 (or weblink, or QR code linking direct to image) around here.

Caption - Figure 1: Margaret Nolan, ‘My Divided Self’, photographic collage, undated. Image of the work uploaded 9 July 2012 onto personal Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/MargaretNolanArt/photos/pb.100069216019723.-2207520000/361561513915431/?type=3>

The motif of a split self resonates across much of her work. ‘My Divided Self’ (figure 1) is an especially good example of this, with its literal image of ‘a woman’s self being split in two’ as Berger described. Against a black background, as with the *Goldfinger* titles, Nolan presents a collage of images of herself. But here glamour is queried and rendered incoherent rather than smoothly perpetuated, and its alienating toll on the individual’s psyche strongly suggested by images of fracture and partition. The stuff of feminine allure - seductive eyes, pouting lips, cascading lustrous hair – may still be present but has been roughly chopped up and disconcertingly (mis)placed, as with the upside-down eyeballs floating in the bottom right quarter of the piece, or the random hanks of hair enclosing and bisecting the more conventionally glamorous close-ups in the centre.

Duplication and replication are key visual motifs throughout Nolan’s work, and in ‘My Divided Self’ we can see that not only through its composition through multiple images of the same woman but also through specific visual devices like echoing images in silhouette, as with Nolan’s profile at the top of the collage. Other works by Nolan like ‘China Doll’ and ‘Fan’ use multiple versions of the exact same image to create unsettling compositions of massed cloned femininity, highly reminiscent of Luckett’s characterisation of ‘hypersexualised girls’ in ‘serial profusion’ in Bond title sequences (2020: 164), as is Nolan’s use of silhouette. Luckett contends that ‘repetition, recycling and seriality’ (150) that defines the Bond Girl, and Nolan’s work frequently plays with the same kind of ideas, not least in using an art practice founded on the recycling of old images.

It is interesting to note that the two visual artists to whom Nolan links on her Facebook page are Andy Warhol and Annegret Soltau; the former's interest in celebrity and replicatory imagery having clear analogues in Nolan’s work, but the latter being an even more intriguing reference point. Soltau is a feminist collage artist, who uses black thread to suture photographic fragments (usually) of her own face and body, alluding to the reduction of women to atomised body parts, either fetishistically admired or medically problematised and therefore seen to require surgical intervention, with her work’s stitched-up aesthetic especially redolent of the markings and scars of cosmetic procedures. In many respects, it makes sense to place Nolan’s work in a lineage of feminist photo-collage work that encompasses the likes of Soltau, Martha Rosler, Linder, right back to Hannah Hoch, whose groundbreaking 1919-20 Dadaist photo-collage ‘Cut with the kitchen knife...’ has a title referring to its domestic provenance and rough edges that seems equally applicable to Nolan’s own cut-ups. As numerous feminist art historians and theorists have noted, photographic collage is a form especially germane to feminist art practice, often enabling an ironised or angry perspective on women’s assignation into set gendered roles, and generating provocative juxtapositions (see Lippard 1976; Raaberg 1998; Knelman 2020).

Nolan spoke of her desire to make some aspects of her artworks ‘quite grotesque’ (Prescott 2007) and the way she uses hair in her compositions is crucial to this. Working using only a finite amount of photographs, Nolan initially feared that she might run out of hair but this fear proved unfounded: ‘as it happens, because of the fashion at the time, there was hair everywhere!’ (Prescott 2007). Hence hair proliferates across all her work but it is very rarely presented in a conventionally beautiful way, and it is often nightmarish. ‘Scorpio’ is a collage made almost entirely of photographed blocks of hair which form a sabre-toothed scorpion whose screaming mouth is Nolan's. Her collage ‘Yeah Yeah Yeah’, with its paradigmatically sixties title referencing Beatlemania as well as perhaps her own compliance with whatever was being asked of her in the sixties, has the open mouths of her interlocking portraits all choked with tresses of hair or perhaps vomiting it up. The pin-up's open-mouthed sexual willingness is remade as an image of gagging and retching, the hair rendered abject rather than alluring. The blocking of her mouth recalls the moments in *Goldfinger* where different objects cover/replace her mouth, most notably the Aston Martin’s revolving number plates. Nolan’s cutting and pasting of swathes of hair across her eyes and mouth re-uses the same kind of imagery that had been applied to her by Brownjohn but in a less eroticised, and much more disturbing and explicitly critical way.

Hair is also important to the vulval imagery of ‘Abyss’ (figure 2) which places into bold counterpoint the fuzzy black hole at the heart of the picture with the scrap of pleasing, smiling face above. It is deliberately confrontational and ugly but also, like much feminist art, is intended to be savagely funny about the mendacious masquerades of femininity, as per Nolan’s insistence that she wanted her art to ‘take the piss out of’ the business of playing to the male gaze (Prescott 2007). The horizontal lines of the venetian blinds echo similar barring projected across her face and body throughout the *Goldfinger* credits but their jagged arrangement to roughly frame a vaginal hole could not be further from the glamorous facade created by that original sequence. Although elsewhere Nolan drew parallels between the female form and landscape - ‘A beautiful woman’s body is very much to do with the environment; the undulating lines [...] they’re both connected. We’re geared to find the human body beautiful and to find the environment beautiful because our impetus is to survive’ (Slidel 2012) - which suggests some interesting, ecofeminist ways of reinterpreting the moments in the *Goldfinger* titles when Nolan’s body is turned into a landscape that men clamber over and hide in, this kind of interpretation is firmly rebuffed by ‘Abyss’. A natural background of long grass and trees only accentuates the sharp contrast with the uncanny feminised void at the centre of the image.

Insert Fig 2 (or weblink, or QR code linking direct to image) around here.

Caption - Figure 2: Margaret Nolan, ‘Abyss’, photographic collage, undated. Image of the work uploaded 9 July 2012 onto personal Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=361561770582072&set=pb.100069216019723.-2207520000>

What emerges from Nolan’s photo-collage work above all is her critical reflection on being rendered a repository for male fantasy: ‘living behind this screen of men’s expectations’, as she put it, in an image that strongly recalls her own function as a screen in *Goldfinger* (Prescott 2007). Inhabiting the role of ‘golden girl’ in *Goldfinger,* she described herself as ‘completely steeped in the concept of the artifice of women presenting themselves. It was just another job – posing in front of a camera for the titillation of men’, which was something she ‘absolutely embraced’ in her youth (in Slidel 2012). But over time her view began to change, as she felt she gained greater knowledge of her positioning along with a stronger sense of self: ‘it’s only now that I feel much more assertive and secure that I can look back and say how awful some of it was’ (Prescott 2007); a retrospective reckoning with past sexism that prefigures elements of the #MeToo movement. In recycling her old photographs and re-assembling their various elements in disruptive, disturbing ways, Nolan was able to move from object to subject, using her artwork to critique and slyly deconstruct an entire gendered visual economy, retrospectively revealing the rich inner life behind the inscrutable gilded facade.

**Golden girls reflect: Shirley Eaton**

Where Margaret Nolan’s photographic worked within a single mode of practice, drawing on deliberately limited source materials, Shirley Eaton’s approach to image-making is, by contrast, more eclectic. Eaton became more interested in art after she had stepped away from acting after her role in *The Girl from Rio* (1969) to focus on her young family and avoid the kind of international nomadism film production increasingly entailed. She took painting classes twice a week at Camden Art Centre, later enrolling in a sculpture course there (Eaton 1999: 129-131). For her, it functioned as a source of ‘creative satisfaction’ when she felt occasionally ‘stifled by domesticity’ (129). Despite working across multiple media, it was through photography later in life that Eaton seemed to undertake her most personal and autobiographical art. This took two forms. Like Nolan, Eaton re-edited and creatively embellished her old publicity photographs from the 1950s and 1960s, albeit in a less savagely iconoclastic way to Nolan, to create new work. She also took new photographs of herself and used the new possibilities afforded by digital photography to manipulate and combine images.

Insert Fig 3 (or weblink, or QR code linking direct to image) around here.

Caption - Figure 3: Shirley Eaton, ‘Complicated Me’, photograph, undated. Image of the work sourced from gallery section of [www.shirleyeaton.net](http://www.shirleyeaton.net), created 2013, made available via Internet Archive Wayback Machine [https://web.archive.org/web/20131102055822/http://shirleyeaton.net/gallery.php?id=collarts](https://web.archive.org/web/20131102055822/http%3A//shirleyeaton.net/gallery.php?id=collarts)

Several of Eaton’s self-reflexive images make direct reference to *Goldfinger*, including ‘Complicated Me’ (figure 3), a piece which layers together multiple images of Eaton as Jill Masterson, or rather a candid publicity still taken during the filming of Jill’s death by gold paint since it shows her gilded but alive and well. The focus is on Eaton’s face rather than near-naked body here, unlike most of the photographs that would have emerged from the original photoshoot. The repeated, increasingly magnified, image of her face places the emphasis on her facial expression in that sideways glance, and its possible meanings: is she quizzical, seductive, vigilant? The piece, as well as its title, speaks of a complex, multiple, enigmatic self, thereby suggesting parallels with Nolan’s work. But Eaton’s work is less radically confrontational. The different versions of Shirley/Jill are visually united in ‘Complicated Me’ by a rippled wash of blue and gold tinting applied across the piece, helping to create a more harmonious image that embodies glamour and feminine mystery rather than savagely deconstructing it, while still suggesting its multivalence. ‘Complicated Me’ reanimates the cold, dead girl of the filmed sequence in *Goldfinger* with renewed expressivity and potential agency.

One important artistic analogue for this kind of approach to glamour, which simultaneously intensely scrutinises and sensually revels in the enchantments of femininity, is provided by the work of British Pop artist Pauline Boty. Occupying the identity of beautiful blonde herself, like Nolan and Eaton, as well as doing some acting for films and television in the 1960s too, Boty struggled to flourish as fully as she might have done due to sexist assumptions about what serious art, and a serious artist, should look like (Tate 2013). She was fascinated by blonde celebrity femininity and the golden girl to whose image she returned recurrently was Marilyn Monroe, who seemed exemplary to Boty of the objectified under-estimated woman, acting as a form of self-portraiture. Boty’s oeuvre has been latterly rediscovered and increasingly celebrated as remarkably insightful on what it is to occupy the position of female spectacle while also attempting to enact a degree of desiring agency and self-possession (Smith 2016). In this respect, her concerns are akin to those that animate Eaton and Nolan’s work (although unlikely to have been a direct influence on them due to her work’s prolonged unavailability and reputational marginalisation until quite recently).

The emphatic blondeness of the ‘golden girl’ returns us to the semiotically rich matter of hair, and as in Nolan’s artwork, hair is a key constituent and motif across Eaton’s image-making. Sometimes the way Eaton’s long golden hair is presented is straightforwardly expressive of glamour. But the tresses she teases Bond with in their bedroom scene in *Goldfinger* can be made to take on more uncanny dimensions. In her photograph ‘Sleeping’, her blonde hair visually dissolves into the honey-coloured fur rug on which she is curled in a foetal position, nude. In a multiple self-portrait entitled ‘3 Spirits’ (figure 4), her hair appears to take on an expressive life of its own, forming into petal-like white points which levitate away from the bowed kneeling naked body beneath. It is simultaneously beautiful, reminiscent of flowers, but also disquieting in its negation of human recognisability while the tripling within the image creates an uncanny female triumvirate, recalling the three Fates of classical myth. or the three witches of *Macbeth.*

Insert Fig 4 (or weblink, or QR code linking direct to image) around here.

Caption - Figure 4: Shirley Eaton, ‘3 Spirits’, photograph, undated. Image of the work sourced from gallery section of [www.shirleyeaton.net](http://www.shirleyeaton.net), created 2013, made available via Internet Archive Wayback Machine [https://web.archive.org/web/20131102055822/http://shirleyeaton.net/gallery.php?id=collarts](https://web.archive.org/web/20131102055822/http%3A//shirleyeaton.net/gallery.php?id=collarts)

While ‘3 Spirits’ departs from the conventions of glamourous portraiture into wilder territory, the greater majority of Eaton’s photographs adhere much more closely to its standard rubrics. But this in itself can be read as a subversive act, since merely undertaking the act of self-portraiture as an older woman and daring to place oneself centre-frame, more so if showcasing a naked older body (even one as enduringly lithe as Eaton’s), mounts a challenge to the tacit assumption that the ideal female nude in photography should be young, like Jill Masterson’s perfect golden form laid out on the bed for sublime contemplation in *Goldfinger*.

This question of age relates to the changing meaning of the term ‘golden girl’. Beyond its most obvious signification of precious metal or yellow colour, the appellation of ‘golden’ which can mean perfected, idealised or victorious, can equally be used to indicate age or longevity, as with golden oldies or golden wedding anniversaries. Indeed, a wholly different type of ‘golden girl’ from those addressed in the theme song for *Goldfinger* has circulated within popular culture since the 1980s: the titular ageing heroines of the popular US sitcom, *The Golden Girls* (NBC, 1985-92). Shirley Eaton in particular leaned into these double meanings of ‘golden girl’ when she agreed to be gilded one more time at the age of 78 for a 2015 feature for *Daily Mail Online,* wearing the gold paint with confidence on skin and a body bearing the inevitable signs of age, and daring to strike the same pose as her *Life* magazine cover from 1964, regardless of the risk of being seen as diminished in comparison with her youthful self. In the accompanying article, she is quoted as saying ‘It was fun - and a challenge. I like challenges. And I did it for the older ladies.’ (Wilkes 2015). This redeployment of the original imagery of the ‘golden girl’ as a vehicle for age-positivity, age-acceptance or perhaps even age-celebration runs counter to the idea that ‘golden girls’ must remain eternally young, their youth artificially fixed and frozen through metallurgic preservation. Instead, the older golden girl defiantly wears the marks of her age and experience with pride rather than shame, and maintains that identity across a life course from youth into seniority. Eaton was wearing gold as an honoured guest at the premiere of *Skyfall* (2012) just as she had on her original promo tour for *Goldfinger* (Ruby 2012), connecting past and present. The phenomenon of an elderly Bond Girl problematises Luckett’s contention that these women are inevitably ‘framed as creatures of their time with limited capacity to progress and develop’ (2020: 149); both Eaton and Nolan’s propensity to look back and reflect on their shared identity suggests the opposite.

**Conclusion: gilt trip**

Both Margaret Nolan and Shirley Eaton used their photographic artwork, in distinct but interconnected ways, to critically and creatively reflect upon their own positioning as pin-ups and sex symbols, exemplified by their moment occupying the position of ‘golden girl’ in *Goldfinger*. Both experienced what Dana Broccoli, wife of producer Cubby Broccoli and his uncredited creative collaborator, called ‘the tremendous pressure of the Bond film world’ (in D’Abo and Cork 2003: 180) and it left its mark on them. Making their own art seems to have belatedly offered these women a form of agency they were sometimes conspicuously denied in their screen roles, and both Eaton and Nolan expressed their pleasure at being able to transfigure their personal experience into creative endeavour, with Eaton suggesting how ‘finding new ways of expressing myself was marvellous’ (1999: 131), and Nolan emphatically stating ‘I love being an artist – I feel much more in control of my life.’ (in Prescott 2007). They were keen to make their work and to share it, both using open digital platforms to that end. Their work evidently had great personal value to them, but it also speaks much further beyond their immediate experience to illuminate a wider landscape of 20th century British femininity and women’s life courses, not necessarily limited to the entertainment industries. Their art expresses deep, sometimes inchoate, sometimes ambivalent feelings and has the potential to say much about how women in a postfeminist cultural climate reflect back on their pre-feminist past. Creative personal responses expressed through art, as I hope I have demonstrated, can be an incredibly rich resource for the historian, illuminating affective experiences with a polysemic richness that solely verbal sources would struggle to articulate. In this particular case study, the medium of photographic image-making offered two Bond Girls a unique place where they could ‘reflect’ on their alchemical transformation into cultural icons, not shiny gilt mirrors but as thinkers and creators in their own right.

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1. In spite of their representational connection, neither woman has much to say about her fellow golden girl. Eaton mentions being puzzled by the use of ‘the gold-painted other lady during the credits’ (1999: 18). This splitting of the golden girl role may have had its origins partly from contractual difficulties and disagreements relating to the promotion of *Goldfinger.* Firstly, Eaton settled with EON out of court when they did not honour their promise to give her equal status billing to Honor Blackman and Gert Frobe. Once this was resolved, Eaton agreed to undertake extensive promotional activities for the film in the US. In the meantime, Nolan had turned down a two-year promotional work tour for the Bond films because, as she later recounted, ‘of what was going on politically at the time, and I wanted to do more serious stuff and be taken as a serious actress. Also my husband didn’t want me to go away for two years as well’ (Prescott 2007). She recalls EON and United Artists being ‘quite pissed off because they’d already spent loads of money on me.’ [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Nolan states in Prescott (2007) that she began making her photo-collages about five years earlier, and so by triangulating this with information available via Nolan’s personal website and her social media accounts, it is possible to date most of her work to c. 2002-2013. Eaton’s photographic gallery was uploaded to her redesigned personal website in 2013. They did not appear on the original website from 2009 but this may not help in dating definitively any of the images, which may well predate 2009-13. However Eaton’s appearance in the recently taken self-portraits suggests this work probably dates to approximately the same period as Nolan’s work, c.2000-2013, but this remains an unconfirmed estimate.

Images of Nolan and Eaton’s artwork have been accessed through a variety of online sources. For Nolan’s work, the fullest collection of images I have been able to access has been through the photo section of her personal page hosted by Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/MargaretNolanArt/photos_by> . However I was also able to access galleries of her photomontage work from earlier iterations of her personal website <https://www.margaretnolan.co.uk/> captured via Internet Archive’s Wayback Machine. This was the sole mechanism I had for accessing Eaton’s photographic work, since her personal website <http://shirleyeaton.net> is no longer extant (Wayback Machine’s last recorded capture date was 15 Feb 2022). [↑](#endnote-ref-2)