

# OBITUARIES

## Henry Talbot

**Photographer  
1920 - 1999**

One of Australia's foremost photographers, Henry Talbot has died in Sydney after a long struggle with cancer. He was 78.

Talbot was a major figure in 20th-century Australian photography, according to Sandra Byron, a former curator of photography at the Art Gallery of NSW, and whose gallery now represents Talbot. "The legacy from his work and his teaching will be magnificent," she said. "He was a wonderful man with a whimsical sense of humour."

In a career spanning more than half a century, Talbot was not only one of Australia's pioneering fashion photographers, but also an acute observer whose vision was drawn to other genres such as documentary and the nude. He proved to be a gentle but compelling teacher who gave his time freely to many organisations, including Sydney's Northern Suburbs Camera Club, of which he was patron.

On what was the penultimate day of Talbot's life, I met a member of the club leaving Longueville Hospital. He had attempted, respectfully, to show some newly taken portrait montages to the dying photographer.

Talbot was too ill to respond. Even in mortal distress, he could still inspire his students.

Born Henry Stephen Tichauer at Hindenburg, Germany, Talbot displayed an early fascination with photography, which his middle-class Jewish parents encouraged by presenting him with a Rolleiflex on his bar mitzvah. By the time he was 18, Talbot had decided not to enter the family confectionery business and instead left Hindenburg to study graphic design at Berlin's acclaimed Reimann School.

It was here, in a heady atmosphere of social ferment and artistic invention, that he would first learn of a talented photographer named Helmut Neustadter. But their paths would not cross until five years later, in the unlikely setting of the NSW country town of Tocumwal.

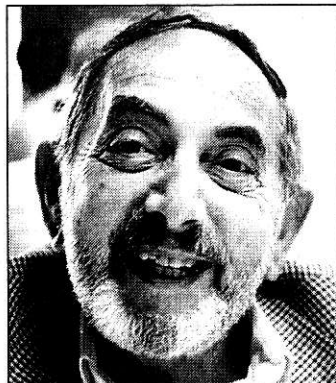
Talbot remembered his time at the Reimann school as leading "a charmed life; we went out dancing [and] to theatres together. Although the Nazis were in full cry - I don't recall any anti-Semitism among the students - we seemed to be [living in] a little island."

In November 1938, all that came to an end. During a recent interview Talbot recalled: "On that [infamous] *Kristallnacht*, the

Nazis went on a rampage smashing places marked as Jewish. The Gestapo also came and took my father to a concentration camp, only to release him after three weeks. They discovered he had [won] the Iron Cross in World War I. I went to the flat of a German friend and waited the whole thing out. When the coast was clear - I went back home."

Clearly it was time to leave Germany. When the young student learned that a British firm, Swallow Raincoats, needed a designer, he bought an air ticket and fled to England. And so began Talbot's personal diaspora. He would not always travel so comfortably.

In 1940, despite being classed as a "a genuine 100 per cent Jewish refugee" and having a job, Talbot was abruptly interned at Huyton, near Liverpool. At that time the British Government pressured so-called "aliens" to volunteer to go to Canada. As his parents had already moved to South America, Talbot thought he might be able to make his way across the US to meet them. He accepted. But as the overcrowded Dunera sailed down the coast of Africa, Talbot and 2,000 fellow refugees knew they were not going to Canada, but Australia.



After internment at Hay, Talbot opted to join the Australian Military Forces and went fruit-picking in the Goulburn Valley, eventually arriving at Tocumwal.

There he became great friends with that charismatic young German photographer named Helmut Neustadter; 13 years later, after changing his name to Helmut Newton, he and Talbot reunited, establishing a photographic studio in Melbourne.

With his international career soaring, Newton moved to Europe in 1963, leaving Talbot to consolidate their studio's status as "definitely the most successful in Melbourne".

During this period Talbot produced some of the most inventive fashion photography seen in Australia. Like Newton and the American Richard Avedon, he liberated his models from the studio and established new freedoms by photographing in

exciting locations, using natural light and unusual props. His best photographs from this time have a remarkable sense of space and light while still meeting the demands of fashion.

Talbot closed the studio in 1974 after disenchantment with high overheads and concentrated on photography lecturing at the Preston Institute of Technology, which he'd begun in 1971. He recruited an elite company of lecturers to assist him, including Mark Strizic, the late Carol Jerrens and Ian Lobb. Also in 1974, he married the artist and mathematician Lynette Mortimer, with whom he would have two sons, Neale and John Paul.

He retired from teaching in 1985 and moved to Sydney, continuing to pursue his personal photographic vision. Last year, though weakened by cancer, he returned to Hindenburg, now part of Poland and renamed Zabrze, to photograph some of the touchstones of his youth.

Talbot was modest about his achievements as a photographer: "I have taken some pictures over the past 60 years which people might enjoy looking at, and relive, perhaps, the feeling I had when I took the picture."

□ ROBERT McFARLANE