

# L'ŒIL DE LA PHOTOGRAPHIE

## Collezione Ettore Molinario : Dialogues #40 : Anonymous / Peter Hujar

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Ettore Molinario

January 28, 2025



This is the 40th dialogue of the **Collezione Ettore Molinario**. I am pleased to resume our dialogues by paying homage to one of the authors I love the most and who I am proud to have in my collection, **Peter Hujar**. A woman's glove worn by Ethyl Eichelberger and nearby a man's glove that has the refinement of the most precious female accessory. I enjoyed starting 2025 this way, wishing you a free and surprising year.

**Ettore Molinario**

He was imposing, over six feet tall, and to that height were added stiletto heels and an eighteenth-century-inspired wig. When he appeared on stage, possibly on the stage of the Pyramid Club or P.S. 122, Ethyl Eichelberger paid homage not only to the verticalism of New York, not only to the drag culture, of which he was the greatest interpreter, not only to the grandes dames of tragedy and history, Nefertiti, Jocasta, Clytemnestra, Medea, Lucrezia Borgia, but also, and in retrospect, to a formidable decade, the 70s and 80s of the Lower East Side for which I feel, like many, a devouring nostalgia. Some might say: «Paris in the 1920s». I say: «1979», when Ethyl posed as Auntie Belle Emme, a parody of *Gone with the Wind*, in the studio that Peter Hujar owned at 189 2nd Avenue. That space where David Wojnarowicz, Hujar's partner and extraordinary artist, would live until his death, was a loft above the Eden Theater, formally occupied by Jackie Curtis, Andy Warhol's drag diva and star of a film like *Flesh* alongside Joe Dallesandro, Candy Darling and Patti D'Arbanville. Remember the song *Lady D'Arbanville*? It was her when Cat Stevens loved her, and these were the coordinates of the time, sublime. Yet, among all of them, the artist I would have really liked to know is Peter Hujar, because I love his juxtapositions, his depth and sincere immediacy, his "Avedonian" technical perfection and his sentimental closeness to the subjects he portrayed, that belongs to someone looking for a new family, warm, authentic, far from the devastating version that the registry office sometimes imposes you by chance.

In Peter Hujar's family there was Ethyl, a name that in Old English was feminine and whispered nobility. And together with Ethyl there were people like Vince Aletti, Susan Sontag, Fran Lebowitz, Divine, John Waters, William Burroughs, Paul Morrissey. What wasn't there, lucky them, was the quote. Everything was authentic at the time, true alternative culture opposed to true dominant culture, true and powerful drag freedom against true patriarchy, but let's also add matriarchy, of a white, racist, macho society.

And those immaculate gloves on Ethyl's arms and that glove that protected the hand of an Elizabethan gentleman, then, what do they tell us? According to legend, gloves were invented by the Graces, who rushed to wrap scented bandages around Venus's bleeding fingers. In a moment, gloves, historically a fashion of barbarian peoples, become a sign of authority. Variants: receiving a glove was an oath of imperial and papal loyalty, throwing a glove at a defendant was declaring his guilt, and it was enough to touch the opponent's cheek with a glove for the duel to begin. Here, I would like to do the same, I would like to lovingly remove Ethyl's white gloves and I would like to declare guilty a society that homogenises and digests everything, including the revolts of the past and the ruins that were a welcoming setting for those revolts. I would like to do justice in the most chivalrous way and avenge a revolution that a community of artists paid for with their lives, and which today has become a cheerful and very expensive ride on the fashion catwalks.

**Ettore Molinaro**

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