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Linda Evangelista: ‘My goal now is to get old. I want to get old, really old’

The top model has survived two cancers, an ex-husband who she accuses of abuse and a failed surgery. Now she returns to release a glossy volume of her work with photographer Steven Meisel

PAUL TIERNEY

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Linda Evangelista poses for the June 1987 issue of 'Vogue,' styled by Carlyne Cerf de Dudzele, hair by Oribe and makeup by François Nars. The image comes from the book 'Linda Evangelista Photographed by Steven Meisel' (Phaidon).

STEVEN MEISEL

“Divine” is Steven Meisel’s favorite word. The legendary fashion photographer uses it often and without irony, especially when a model executes a perfect gesture. For Meisel, an expert in capturing those moments, it is the highest compliment. And [supermodel Linda Evangelista](#) has received it more than anyone else. The union of these two artists is a thing of legend, at least within the confines of fashion and photography. For almost four decades, they have created unorthodox portraits and influential fashion editorials.

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and the memory of that day returns to me in an instant. I turn the page and I feel like another person is looking at me. Who's that? The variety of what we've done and the range of our work, even though it doesn't follow any order, makes me proud."

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a Marilyn-style diva, a renaissance page or a modern Katharine Hepburn. “Both of us love what we do and we’re really dedicated,” the model explains. “But something made us get along from day one. It was love at first sight. We communicate without talking. With the way that Steven tilts his head or looks into my eyes, I know exactly what to do. I’m not afraid at all to try something new and experiment. And I trust that with him it will never turn out wrong,”

Evangelista has returned to the front lines after a few years far from the spotlights. She shows off recent fashion campaigns, an Apple TV documentary series, Vogue covers and, now, the book. Today the model, one of the original supermodels that marked the nineties, is once again seeing her moment. She is having a rebirth, and her fans encourage her to keep going. “I could cry,” she says, while she attempts to hold back tears. “The love I’ve experienced is overwhelming and it makes me so happy. It’s healing me.”

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Linda Evangelista photographed for the February 1994 issue of 'Vogue.' Styling by Carlyne Cerf de Dudzele, hair by Ward Stegerhoek and makeup by Denise Markey.
STEVEN MEISEL

From what? To start, from the trauma of a failed cosmetic surgery that, in her words, [“permanently and brutally disfigured” her](#). The technique, called CoolSculpting, is intended to eliminate localized fat, but for Evangelista, it caused the opposite: paradoxical adipose hyperplasia, or an increase in her body’s fat cells. She hid from the world until she couldn’t any longer. “I was very sad, but I was tired of isolating myself. I didn’t have anyone to go to who had gone through the same thing, and I couldn’t even find anything on the internet about it. Now more cases have been reported and I see that many people have gone through

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able to make images, I see it also as a way to escape my real life. I assumed that things don't always come out as they're planned." The key to the new Evangelista is that she's not trying to repeat her past: the eternal chameleon has embraced her own story with the aplomb with which she used to wear thousands of masks. And she has been more successful than she expected. She spent the week before our interview descending from limousines to sign books, accompanied by her son —her spitting image— and with the radiant appearance of an Italian neorealist diva in all her mature splendor.

The morning that we spoke, she had flown to Italy to attend a Fendi test with designer Kim Jones. (Days later, she was the star of the runway show, dressed in an imposing sky-blue jacket.) The model says she's excited. She appears slightly stunned by all the attention. But despite her nerves, there has a luminous elegance and an innate self-confidence in the star who in 1978 won her first contest —Miss Niagara— at only 12 years old.

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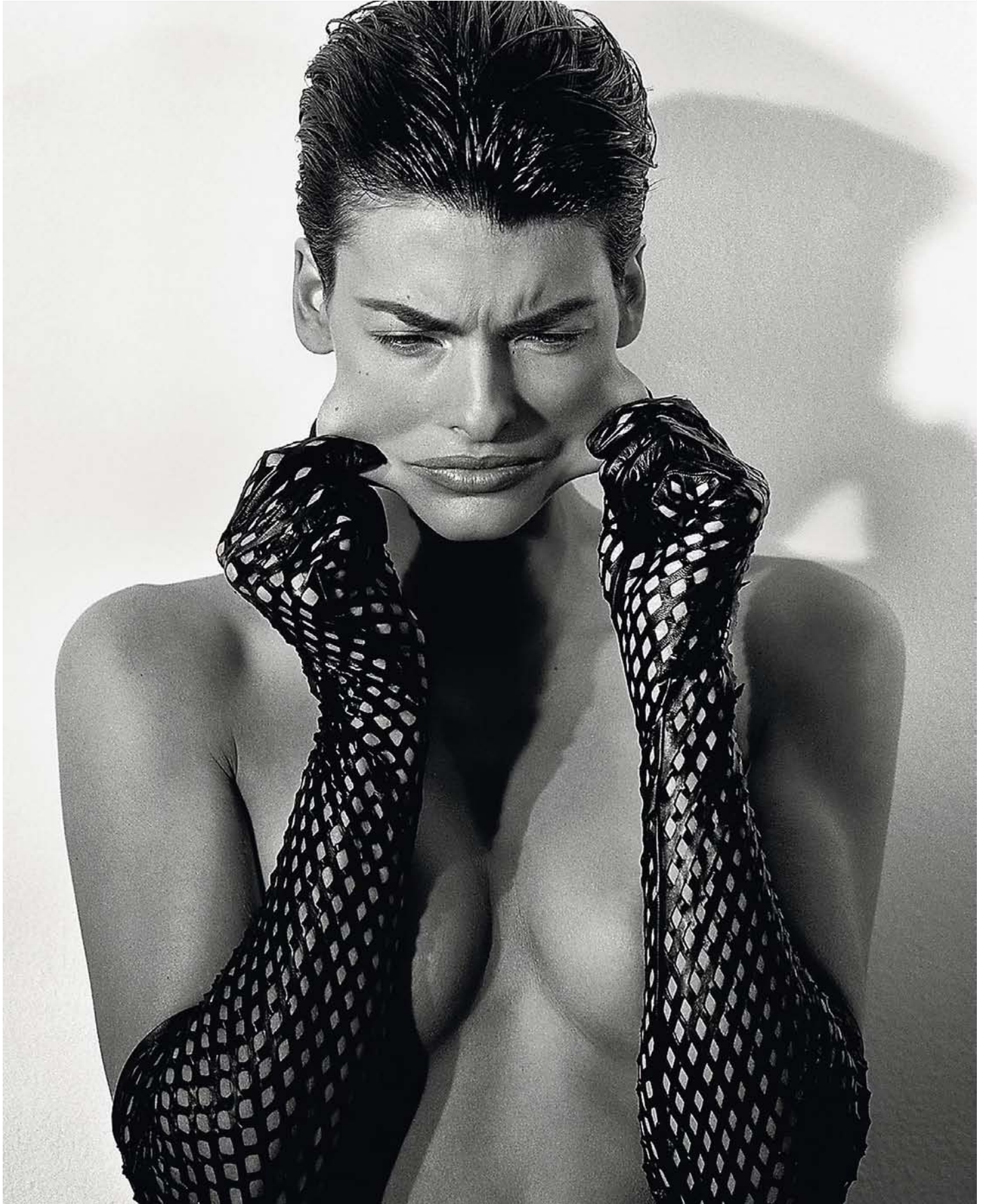
Linda Evangelista and Steven Meisel in 1992.
PHAIDON

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pop stars. At the height of her fame and beauty, George Michael called her to star in two music videos. In 1992's "Too Funky," the Canadian played an exaggeratedly kitschy version of herself.

When she wanted to escape, Evangelista retreated to Casa Linda, her elegant refuge at the top of an Ibiza hill, which she bought with her modeling earnings but which no longer belongs to her. "Yes, I lost that house. The man I was married to forced me to leave it," she states drily. She refers to Gérald Marie, the fashion titan accused of rape who was the head of Elite Models, Evangelista's agency. She accuses him of abuse and says that if Marie didn't touch his face, it is because it was "his source of income." The ex-agent has denied the accusations from Evangelista and other women who have denounced him. (The French justice system closed the investigation in February because the crimes' statute of limitations had expired.) But Evangelista doesn't forgive him. "Don't bring that up," she says, visibly upset. "You can put this in writing: he has that house now, but it is mine. I paid for it."

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The model poses in the 'Vogue Paris' 1989 summer issue, styled by Nicoletta Santoro, with hair by Oribe and makeup by François Nars.

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Clinton or Bart Simpson, the miracle occurred on the catwalk or before the camera. I witnessed it in winter 1994 in New York as she shot an editorial for Harper's Bazaar with David Sims. Manhattan was covered with snow, and she entered the studio dressed for an Arctic fantasy, wrapped in a bulky Isaac Mizrahi fur. Half an hour later, she left the dressing room in a toupee, sheathed in a Yves Saint Laurent tuxedo, transformed into another person. "She was brilliant," Sims says. "She had an extraordinary capacity to channel characters. She is a perfectionist, a fashion expert that knows the references, knows what it's all about and puts in more effort than anyone else to capture a moment. Whatever the photographer or stylist wants, she gets it. Always."

Luis Venegas, director of the publications Candy and Fanzine137, insists that the model's signature has always been her talent to reinvent herself over and over. "Madonna talks about herself as the queen of reinvention, but I think Linda was first. Her images were always alive. She seemed to say: who are we going to be today? Am I Lucille Ball or a grunge girl?" With those credentials, has she ever thought about acting? "No, that was never my dream. There are models who go down that path and do incredible things, like [Charlize Theron](#), but it never seemed like the right thing for me. It wasn't where I wanted to go. It's not that I was opposed to it, but it just didn't happen. My head wasn't there."

In a world where youth seems to be everything, Linda Evangelista isn't afraid of getting old. In fact, it's the interview question she most easily responds to: "My sector has done a pretty good job with becoming more inclusive," she declares. "With respect to body types, age and skin color. Now it's much more tolerant than before." And how does she see herself in the near future? "My goal now is to get old," she announced. "That's what I want to do. "I want to get old. Very, very old."

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