No Girls Allowed

By Nancy Caldwell Sorel

Photograph by Antony Penrose, taken in Lee Miller's study from "The Lives of Lee Miller" by Antony Penrose (Thames & Hudson: 216 pp., $24.95 paper)

In the summer of 1960, American author and critic Elizabeth Mehlis interviewed the legendary photographer Lee Miller at her home in East Hampton, Long Island, New York. Mehlis asked Miller about her time working for Vogue magazine, where she began her career as a model and later became a celebrated photographer. Miller recounted stories of the famous Vogue covers she had shot, including one of herself with her husband, the painter Roland Penrose. Mehlis was struck by Miller's vivid anecdotes and her passion for life, and asked her if she could write a memoir. Miller agreed, and the result was "The Lives of Lee Miller," published in 1991.

Mehlis's interview with Miller forms the basis for the essay "No Girls Allowed," which appears in this issue of The Los Angeles Times Book Review. In the essay, Mehlis reflects on her conversations with Miller and the insights she gained into the world of fashion and photography during the 1930s and 1940s. She discusses Miller's relationship with Penrose and her role as a model and photographer for Vogue, as well as her own experiences in the fashion industry.

The essay is a tribute to Miller's life and work, and a reminder of the contributions made by women in the fields of art and fashion during a time when gender roles were rigidly defined. Mehlis's reflections on her conversations with Miller offer a glimpse into the world of the 1930s and 1940s, and a reminder of the impact that women have had on art and society.