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The Prints and the Showgirl

Norma Jean was a struggling pinup girl when she stretched out like a cat, nude on a roll of red velvet for a 1949 photo shoot. Today, the woman who became Marilyn Monroe is a global enterprise.

Since she died in 1962 at age 36, her image has been used to hawk everything from cookie jars to "Marilyn Merlot." But condoms? Or a phone sex line? These are days of worry for the keepers of Monroe's image and the \$10 million in yearly royalties it earns.

On Thursday, March 22, 2001 Butterfields, an eBay subsidiary, plans to auction five pictures from the photo shoot that produced Monroe's legendary *Playboy* centerfold, bringing an estimated \$1 million to Tom Kelley Studios of Ventura, California.



The concern is that Tom Kelley Jr., whose father took the pictures, plans to include negatives and the photo release Monroe signed.

That doesn't irk Philip Jones Griffiths, former president of Magnum photo agency. "Were it not for Mr. Kelley," he deadpans. "Monroe might have remained in the obscurity she most richly deserved."

Her estate sees things differently. Fearing the buyer could license her likeness for "Marilyn Monroe condoms and Marilyn Monroe beer," Mark Roesler, head of CMG Worldwide, which represents the estate, said his company will "sue in a heartbeat" if anyone attempts to use the images commercially.

And what would Monroe say? "I don't think she would like this loss of control," says Carl Rollyson, author of *Marilyn Monroe: A Life of the Actress*. She protected her image, he says, only agreeing to one TV ad, for gasoline, early in her career.

But he doubts any use of the photos could sully her stardom. "She's an icon. I don't think anything can damage her myth now."

-Kit R. Roane