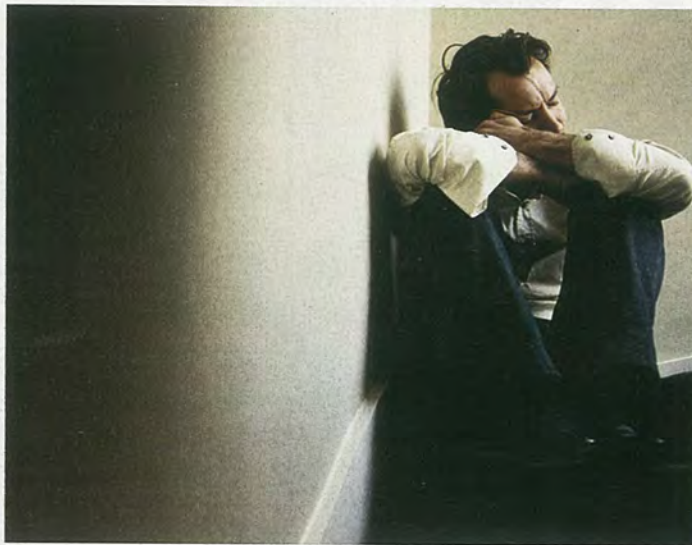
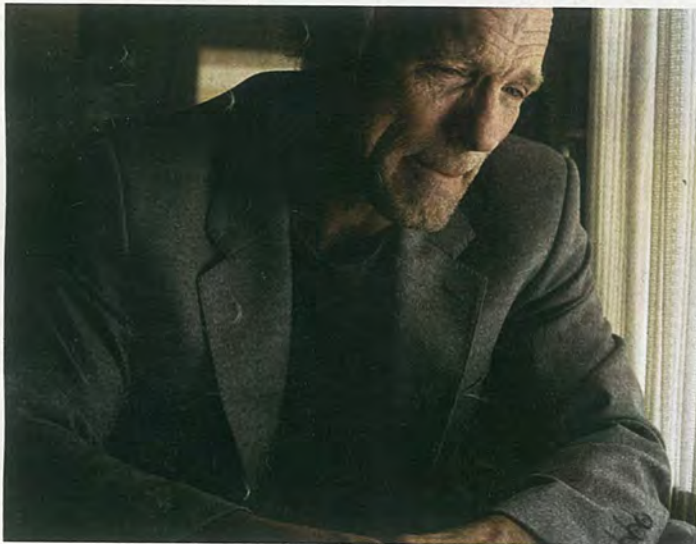


Play Misty for Me

AS THE ARTIST SAM TAYLOR-WOOD'S NEW BOOK REVEALS, CRYING IS NOT FOR GIRLIE MEN ONLY. KLEENEX, ANYONE?



In “Cool Hand Luke,” Paul Newman sits on his prison bunk moments after learning his mother (the incomparable Jo Van Fleet) has died. For a moment he is a boy again, picking out what must be her favorite song, “Plastic Jesus,” on his banjo.

It will betray my own cinematic infatuation, but the single shot goes on for 1 minute 45 seconds. A few tears and a snuffle. He’s all alone in the world. It’s devastating.

On the other hand, Marlon Brando sits beside his wife’s corpse in “Last Tango in Paris.” She has not left him alone; he has always been alone. She has, however, left him angry and confused and very mortal. He speaks to her, attempting some impossible resolution. His anger finally turns to grief — for her, for himself. In the end, he can only leave her with the tears he cries onto her body.

Tears are a powerful form of communication. With Newman and Brando, we understand the context in which their tears are falling. We know why they’re crying. The tears shed in Sam Taylor-Wood’s photos (from “Crying Men,” her new book from Steidl; they also appear in her fall show at the Matthew Marks Gallery in New York) are separated from their context. Their source is a mystery. I find it unsettling. Are we invading their privacy? Are we watching a performance? Are they tears of introspection? Of mourning? I don’t know. What’s clear to me is that with the help of Taylor-Wood, the actors have all found better roles here than they’ve been allowed by the emotionally dried-up conglomerate brute that Hollywood has become. Maybe, just maybe, they’re weeping because there’s no place else to do it.

BRIAN HELGELAND

Once more with feeling: the actors Ed Harris and Jude Law (above, from left) and Steve Buscemi (opposite) play the crying game with Sam Taylor-Wood.



PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF THE MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY