

FRENCH FLAIR



FRANCOPHILIA HITS BANGKOK once again as the annual La Fête French/Thai cultural festival comes back to town from June through to October. Photographer Pascal Blondeau is one of this year's new exhibiting artists, and has produced a collection entitled 'Nice to Meet You' in collaboration with Thai artist Michael Shaowanasai. The work takes a look at male beauty and the growing superficiality of body image. We caught up with Pascal to find out what his perspective is of fine art photography.

2magazine: Where are you from originally?

Pascal Blondeau: I was born in Paris. My parents are Parisian and I was raised in Saint-Germain-des-Prés, a district that's famous for arts, fashion and jazz. I remember as a child going with my grandmother, a very elegant Parisian woman, to the couturiers – that was my first encounter with the creative world.

2: Where do you currently live?

PB: I live in Paris, but I travel worldwide for my business. My exhibitions often take me far from France, and I like discovering new countries, new cultures. I spend a lot of time in airports and planes.

2: Have you always been a photographer?

PB: No, I started my artist's life in music as a singer. Then I became a scenographer [set designer] before being a photographer.

2: When did you first get interested in photography?

PB: When I was 20. My godmother gave me my first camera, a Pentax K1000. I'm still using it today.

2: Did you receive any formal training?

PB: Yes, I studied photography in school for two years under a famous and highly-respected teacher of the American Center in Paris. After that I went on to work under several other photographers.

2: What has been the best professional advice you've received?

PB: To be sincere, to take the photos which I like, and to go where my eye leads me. Every photo I make is a small part of my soul; a reflection of my personality.

2: When did you first get your work exhibited in a gallery and sell your first piece?

PB: Ten years ago.

2: Have you ever exhibited in Thailand?

PB: No, this will be my first time. I'm very happy and proud to exhibit my work at the Bangkok Arts and Cultural Center (BACC), within the framework of La Fête, organized every year by the French Embassy. You know, this cultural festival in Bangkok is world-famous; people have spoken to me about it in New York.

2: Where do you draw inspiration from?

PB: Magazines inspire me enormously, as do the worlds of fashion and music, especially rock. But above all I take inspiration from life; the world that I observe around me. It is life's joys, sufferings, and often nonsense which truly inspire me.

2: What, for you, are the most important aspects that go into creating a great image?

PB: The light is very important. The way lighting works has always fascinated me and it's one of the first things I learnt how to utilize. But the subject is perhaps most important; capturing the magic of a precise moment and telling a story. A good photo must be alive, meaningful.

2: Do you have particular recurrent themes in your work?

PB: The fragile nature of human beings interests me, as well as the real/surreal sides to life. The quest for aesthetic perfection and violence are present subjects in my work.

2: What have been the most fundamental changes in your work over the years?

PB: There is more mystery in my photos today. I facilitate a tragic dimension, sometimes with a certain sense of violence. The expression of suffering plays a big role in my work right now.

2: What photographic equipment do you use?

PB: My digital camera is a Canon Powershot, but I also use a classic SLR camera, the Pentax K1000, to create argentic [silvery] images.

2: How has the digital age changed photography as an art medium?

PB: Digital has made a lot of people think they can compose a photo and become a professional photographer, but in reality we are invaded by hideous images that show little talent.

2: Which photographers/artists have most influenced your work?

PB: Andy Warhol, David Hockney and Jean-Baptiste Mondino. I also like very much the work of fashion photographers, such as Peter Lindbergh and Herb Ritts. The work of David LaChapelle pleases me a lot, as does Pierre and Gilles.

2: Which photographers/artists working today do you admire most?

PB: I love Jeff Koons, I find his work very funny. And I have a passion for Matthew Barney – he's the best for me.

2: Do you have any particular favorite images?

PB: Matthew Barney's 'Cremaster Cycle' videos fascinate me.

2: What do you think separates fine art photography from commercial photography?

PB: Commercial photography is not born from the same level of research; it does not

represent the same sincerity. But both are justifiable and can give good results. There is less freedom in a commercial piece of work.

2: Do you ever feel the need to balance commercialism with artistic creativity?

PB: The commercial aspect can sometimes help to center the subject, and to stay focused. But everything is a question of dosage, talent and honesty.

2: Can you tell us about any upcoming projects you are working on?

PB: I'm preparing a short movie about an extraterrestrial who visits big cities the world over, discovering art galleries and museums of contemporary art. This is for an upcoming festival of video artwork.

2: What are your other interests outside photography and art?

PB: I have a passion for music, mainly pop and rock.

2: What advice would you give to somebody trying to pursue photography as a career?

PB: You must have passion, talent, and be prepared to put in a lot of work... **2**

Nice to Meet You can be seen every day except Mondays from July 3 to August 10 at the BACC (9th Floor). Admission is free.

