

# INDELIBLE PIXELS

Ahead of their much anticipated debut in Dubai, Sheikha Lulu Al-Sabah, founder of JAMM, answers Deepa Rajan's questions on photographs, art et al



**B**rigitte Bardot once said, "A photograph can be an instant of life captured for eternity that will never cease looking back at you." Take a look at the works of French/Algerian photographer Michel Haddi and you will see what she means.

It is this magical quality that has made Michel a name to reckon with, revere, and be inspired by. Michel, one of the world's leading fashion photographers, has worked in the industry for over 20 years. His editorial collaborations include *Italian Vogue*, *French Vogue*, *British Vogue*, *Tatler*, *Vanity Fair*, *GQ* and *Allure*, amongst others.

It is no wonder then that JAMM, an independent

art advisory founded in 2009 by Sheikha Lulu Al-Sabah and Lydia Limerick, chose this celebrated artist for their inaugural exhibition in Dubai. The exhibition, sponsored by HSBC Private Banking, will feature limited-edition prints from Michel's *Celebrity* series, as well as limited-edition prints from his recent series on the *Youth of Morocco*.

According to Sheikha Lulu, "When I think of fashion photographers, past and present, I think of names such as Cecil Beaton, Irving Penn, Richard Avedon, David Bailey, Helmut Newton and Mario Testino. Their works are now sold at galleries and at auction and viewed as art. We felt it was time to showcase the work of a fashion photographer from our own region. Being part Algerian, Michel Haddi represents the mix between East and West."

The exhibition also marks the launch of a new venue space, Toby Arts, which is situated in close proximity to Al-Serkal Avenue where many of the top art galleries in Dubai are located. Toby Arts is a collaborative project between JAMM and Toby, the brand by Saudi fashion designer Hatem Alakeel.

Signature spoke with Sheikha Lulu on the debut exhibition, photography and more...

**Why did JAMM choose Fashion Photographer Michel Haddi as a medium for its first foray into Dubai? Why was Dubai chosen as a location?**

"JAMM chose Michel Haddi for a number of reasons. As JAMM's inaugural exhibition in Dubai will also mark the launch of Toby Art, we sought a medium that combines both fashion and art. Michel Haddi also embodies the mix

Sheikha Lulu Al-Sabah



**Exhibiting photographs is one thing and trying to auction them, something different all together. How does a photograph become an authentic work of art and thus valuable?**

“There are many factors that make a photograph an authentic work of art. These include the subject matter, originality, mode of production, rarity, demand, as well as its historical, critical and social context. Vintage photographs by Irving Penn, for example, sell quite well at auction because of his masterful use of light, balance and composition. Penn stated that, “Photographing a cake can be art,” when he opened his studio in 1953. Due to his high standard in the field of photography, he established a reputation and his works are now viewed as valuable works of art.

“Most would agree that photographs by Henri Cartier-Bresson, Hiroshi Sugimoto and Richard Avedon, for example, are authentic works of art. Fine art photography, which is an expression of the artist’s vision, differs from photojournalism and commercial photography, which provides visual support for stories. Of course there are overlaps whereby photographs that are commercial or photojournalistic in nature are also authentic works of art. In some cases, the line between a mediocre photograph and a photograph that is an authentic work of art is questionable and subjective.”

**Digital platforms are increasing becoming a useful medium for art experiments, especially in the photography industry. Given that, how does one identify fashion pictures as an art form?**

“The first ever fashion photography shoot

occurred 101 years ago when photographer Edward Steichen was ‘dared’ to promote fashion as a fine art and the resulting photographs, featuring gowns designed by couturier Paul Poiret, were published in *Art et Décoration*. These photographs did not simply illustrate the object but elevated it in a unique, stylistic way. Since then, there has been a number of extraordinary photographers- Cecil Beaton, Richard Avedon and Horst P. Horst to name a few- who had succeeded in elevating fashion photography into an art form. These esteemed fashion photographers of the past had used traditional methods of production, namely a manual camera and gelatin silver prints which, in the hierarchy of mediums, is viewed as having more intrinsic value than digital prints.

“This poses a challenge to contemporary fashion photographers in the digital age. It may also explain why a 1951 Vogue cover photograph by Irving Penn sold for \$28,750 at auction while a recent photograph by celebrity fashion photographer David LaChapelle only sold for \$3,000. On the other hand, there are only a select number of fashion photographers that

between East and West, which is an integral characteristic of our own brands. Dubai was chosen as a location because it is the hub of Middle Eastern art.”

**The event also marks the launch of a new venue space, Toby Arts, collaboration between Toby, the brand by Saudi fashion designer Hatem Alakeel, and JAMM. Can you tell us how this came about?**

“Hatem and I have been friends for over 15 years and have shared a passion for creativity in all its forms. We have great respect for each other’s work in our respective fields- fashion design and contemporary art, and felt it was time to collaborate on a project that will give us an opportunity to showcase what we are passionate about. Toby Arts is a space where creative minds can meet and ideas can be shared. It will be a platform for contemporary art, fashion and design.”



# ART

have the talent and creative vision to elevate fashion photography into a fine art. Among the most famous today are photographers Patrick Demarchelier, Steven Meisel, Mario Testino, Peter Lingbergh and Annie Leibovitz. Photographs by such talents will very likely rise in value over time. Fashion pictures become an art form when they are beautiful, original and shot by an exceptional photographer, regardless of whether they are digital or otherwise."

## If a picture is worth a thousand words, what do you think Michel Haddi's photos say?

"Michel Haddi's Celebrity Series are quite intense and intimate, indicating a level of trust between the subject and photographer. In the photographs of Angelina Jolie, Isabella Rossellini, Kate Moss, Keanu Reeves, Denzel Washington and Nicholas Cage, the subject looks directly into the camera and into the eyes of the viewer. The result is so direct that it appears the subject is looking at you rather than the other way around.

"Those usually being gawked at return the stare. In each of his photographs there is a sense of fun and defiance. The photographs of Jean-Paul Gautier, Marion Cotillard and Martin Scorsese stand out for their expression of high drama and their ability to capture the subjects in ways never seen before. Haddi's Youth of Morocco series are equally bold and poetic. Some of the images, such as the boys on the beach, capture the innocence of youth while others portray their aspirations to emulate the West in fashion and style. In all of Michel Haddi's photographs, the message is to be

yourself and to be free."

## What's next for JAMM?

"JAMM will continue to host exhibitions in Dubai at Toby Arts. Our next auction in Kuwait will take place in November 2012."

## What do you suggest that one should look out for while purchasing a photograph in an auction?

Key things to look out for:

**The provenance.** It is crucial to know the sales and acquisition history of the photograph. Essentially, where it originated from and the

hands it passed through prior to reaching auction.

**Price comparables.** It is important to look at the prices of other works by the same artist in the same medium to determine the accuracy in pricing.

**The rarity.** It is a must to know whether the photograph is unique or part of an edition. If the latter, then how large the edition is and what edition number it is.

**The condition of the photograph.** It is important that the photograph is in excellent condition. Not bent, damaged or faded **SI**



## Art Bytes

### Your favourite photograph

"My favourite photograph was taken recently, after the birth of my second child. It is a photograph of my daughter holding her newborn little sister in her arms."

### A photographer you admire

"I admire Lee Miller (1907-1977). She was an established fashion and fine art photographer in Paris in the 1930s and 1940s. During the Second World War, she became an acclaimed war correspondent for Vogue covering events such as the London Blitz, the Liberation of Paris and the concentration camps at Buchenwald and Dachau. There is a famous picture of her in Hitler's bathtub after Berlin was liberated."

### A painting that you think could make a good photograph...

"Any of Edgar Degas' paintings of ballerinas would make a good photograph."



## The celebrity photographer

Michel Haddi, one of the world's leading fashion photographers, has worked in the industry for over 20 years. Whilst living in the US in the 1990s, Michel had the opportunity to photograph many high-profile celebrities, including Clint Eastwood, Martin Scorsese, David Bowie, Uma Thurman, Johnny Depp, Kate Moss and Angelina Jolie.

**The Michel Haddi exhibition will run from March 18 – March 31 at Toby Arts - Block 1, Warehouse 11, Al-Quoz, close to Al Serkal Avenue, Dubai. Timings: Sunday-Thursday from 11am – 6pm.**