



**Layered works:** Top international lensman Mazzucco (left, with conservationist Russell) is in Singapore this week to put the finishing touches using heavy resins to a few dozen new works (below), based on Kenyan images, for his debut Asian exhibition

PHOTOS: YEN MENG JIN

## Resin's edge

By GEOFFREY EU

TAKING photographs of beautiful creatures is all in a day's work for Raphael Mazzucco, whose expressive, evocative pictures of perfectly proportioned supermodels wearing swimsuits (and much less) in exotic locales around the world have made him one of the planet's most sought-after photographers.

What really moves him, though, is combining boundless reserves of energy with strong artistic sensibilities to create powerful works of layered art featuring his photographs, a variety of man-made (tribal jewelry) and organic ingredients (feathers, butterflies, stones), bright oil paints and gallons of high-quality resin. The resulting pictures, framed, and sometimes bound, in hand-stitched materials like beads and leather from beds in tribal Africa, have a hypnotic quality, eliciting positive responses from galleries and collectors.

The much-travelled Mazzucco is in Singapore this week to put the finishing touches to a few dozen new works in time for his first-ever Asian exhibition, which opens at Galley Reis in Palais Renaissance next week. The collage-like works feature pictures of landscapes, people and wildlife he took during a visit to Shompole, a luxury eco-lodge in a conservation area of Kenya's Great Rift Valley, near the border with Tanzania.

There on assignment, he met and bonded with Anthony Russell, a conservationist and architect, who built the lodge with input from the local Masai community. He is an integral member of a lion protection movement and it's no surprise that Mazzucco's Africa series – created in collaboration with Russell – features several spectacular photographs of Shombole lions. "We have a general idea of what we want to create, and then we go for it," says Russell, whose lion conservation fund will benefit from proceeds from the two largest works at the exhibition.

There is a strong element of spontaneity associated with the works. "When I shot these pictures, it was right after working on a big fashion shoot and I never thought about doing this," says Mazzucco, who had already been experimenting with thick layers of resin for years, featuring the process in previous exhibitions in Europe. He says the creative process is what truly excites him, whether it's a fashion shoot or crafting his unique art pieces. "I love how the resin builds layers – the vibrancy of the colours is something you can't get with glass or anything else," he says.

"It's the actual process, of not knowing



what the end result will be, that interests me," says Mazzucco, 45. "There are a lot of surprises and I love the more abstract part of it – with fashion, it's not about having perfect hair or too much make-up, I like to photograph a girl looking like she just woke up, or like she was at the beach all day."

Mazzucco's iconic images and cover shots are commonly described as sensual and seductive and have been seen by millions around the world. He is perhaps most well known as a regular on the Sports Illustrated Swimsuit edition and for work on global campaigns with Guess and Victoria's Secret. He has also worked with musicians and Hollywood celebrities like Lady Gaga and Matt Damon. In a previous life, he was a professional soccer player with the Vancouver Whitecaps and a member of the Canadian Olympic soccer team.

Mazzucco now lives in Montauk, an upscale beach resort on Long Island New York, and also a refuge for fellow famous photographers like Bruce Weber and Peter Beard. He was persuaded to come to Singapore by Alicia Scanlon, an expat who had been collecting his work for some years. "I've wanted to bring him here for a very long time because I think people are ready for this type of art – it's exciting and different," says Scanlon, who also has a home in Montauk. "I look at the layers and textures and see something different each time."

The works that will be exhibited next week have journeyed almost as far as Mazzucco. After taking the African photographs that form the basis of the artworks, they were processed and printed in Montauk and then sent back to Africa where the creative process continued and now they are in Singapore (in a specially created studio space in Scanlon's home) where resin is poured and the final details are added. "It's an organic space and it goes with the art – it's a real natural process," says Mazzucco.

*Africa by Raphael Mazzucco in collaboration with Anthony Russell, will be shown from March 15 to April 15 at Galley Reis, 390 Orchard Road, Palais Renaissance, #03-01/02, tel: 6836-0370*