

Beautiful boxes

Raphael Mazzucco tells Richard James Havis how he combines travel, fashion and beauty

The gap between fashion and fine art is wide. It's difficult for artists to express themselves when they are creating works for hire at the behest of a client. But photographer Raphael Mazzucco, who has shot advertisements for companies such as Guess, Intimissimi and Victoria's Secret, doesn't have a problem with it.

"For me, art and fashion are married together," Mazzucco says from his home in Montauk, New York State.

"Most of the fashion shoots I do have the same raw aesthetic as my artwork. My fashion shoots are based around the art that I do - they are not typical fashion scenes. Whenever I use a camera, I feel like I am expressing myself. I always feel like I am doing my art."

Mazzucco will be in Hong Kong this week for the world premiere of his exhibition, "Layered", at The Space gallery. The show is a colourful collection of photographs that are augmented by the addition of a textured resin to form collages. The pictures feature models from his shoots and landscapes from his trips to locations such as Africa.

The photographer says art, for him, is a journey and his photos are a map. "The photos are all quite large, and I paint over them with resin to make them look multi-dimensional. I like to get a textured look, and that's what attracted me to resin. You can build up layers with it, and that makes the work into a kind of collage. I pour it on... sometimes it comes out two inches thick."

Photography revolves around light, and Mazzucco admits he is obsessed with it. The colours of sunset dominate the works in "Layered". "I like reds and oranges. Strong colours appeal to me. If it's a blue, I like it to be a turquoise. I am attracted to iridescent colours which become a bit luminous. They seem to work well with the resin."

Each place he visits has unique colours at sunrise and sunset, he says. "If I go to Africa, the quality of light is different to anywhere else. I really like natural light. I always want to go to places that I've never been, to see the light and see the sun. I like the raw organic quality of working on location."

"That location is sometimes closer to home, in New York City. The light is fantastic in Central Park. New York is great for shooting... There is always a kind of haze over the sun. It has a beautiful silver look to it."



Born in Vancouver, Canada, Mazzucco started his professional life pursuing a different art: football. He was quite good, he recalls.

"When I was very young, I played for Blackpool in England. I was also at Ipswich Town when Bobby Robson was there. I played in the under-18 squad. I also played in Canada for a while, but I stopped when the North American Soccer League closed down in 1984." (The league restarted last year.)

Mazzucco began by shooting pictures of his musician friends, and that was how his photography career started. "From there, I just evolved into a photographer. Travelling around inspired me. I moved to Milan and stayed there for four years, then I moved to New

York, where I've been for 13 years." His gregarious nature led him to pursue photography over the other arts, he says. "I wanted to be a painter but I didn't enjoy working in the studio alone. I like being around people. I chose photography as you are working with the hairstylist, the make-up director and other people. You get an energy from that. I love that energy very much."

Since then, Mazzucco has carved out a niche in the fashion world for shooting exotic advertising spreads. He has also shot pin-up features for America's *Sports Illustrated* magazine, a rise renowned for its pictures of women in bikinis. His photo-book *Culo*, which is Italian and Spanish for "bottom", went a stage further: it consisted entirely of



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RAFAEL MAZZUCCO, PHOTOGRAPHER

pictures of women's behinds. Famous posteriors included those of Lady Gaga and Paris Hilton. During a party for the book in Miami, British artist Damien Hirst spent about US\$750,000 on 15 Mazzucco art works.

While not pornographic, the book doesn't do anything for the image of women. "The idea was to shoot photographs which embody female sensuality," Mazzucco says. "A lot of the women I shot were friends of mine. They all wanted to be in it."

The shoot, which continued off and on for two years, was something of an education, he says. "I thought I knew everything, but that shoot showed me I didn't. One photographer who has



Raphael Mazzucco's *Life* (left), *African Honey Bee* (above) and *Freedom* (below) feature in his exhibition *The Space self* portrait (below left). Photos courtesy of Raphael Mazzucco



successfully mixed fashion shoots with serious photography - mainly portraiture - is David Bailey. The British legend was an influence, Mazzucco says.

"I love David Bailey's work. I also like British photographer Nick Knight, and the late Richard Avedon, who also lived in Montauk. I am a big fan of famous photographers like Helmut Newton, Annie Leibovitz and Irving Penn. It's so beautiful to look at their styles. When you look at a picture by Bruce Weber, for instance, you instantly know that he shot it."

Mazzucco has spent 20 years photographing fashionable women. So what does he think is the essence of beauty? "I think that most of all, a girl that is beautiful inside is

beautiful outside. If she has great energy, it looks natural," he says. "You never know what you are going to get with photography, that's the beauty of it. You don't pre-ordain anything, you just see what happens. You shouldn't try to manipulate the image too much, you just have to go with it," he says. "Combining a beautiful woman with a beautiful place is magic. I work quickly, like the model to feel free and happy. That's true for me, too. The more freedom I have, the more likely it is that I will find where I really want to go."

Layered, The Space, 210 Hollywood Rd, Sheung Wan. Inquiries: 2361 1210, Tue-Mar 25

ARTISTIC IMPRESSIONS

KEVIN KWONG

Everyone seems to have a story to tell about the Hong Kong City Hall, which celebrates its 50th anniversary this year. If you were, like me, born in the mid-1960s and lived in the city, chances are that you or your parents got married there. If you are artistically inclined, you may even have performed there. A friend told me recently that the venue held fond memories for her as she used to walk past it to school every day four decades ago.

"I've been thinking of writing a letter to my kids, as they've all forgotten that their first public performances were in City Hall. Some of our happiest days were actually spent running around backstage," she tells me.

Our government now calls it "the cradle of local arts and culture", which is true. But in the early days, the Marriage Registry and the restaurant probably recorded more human traffic than the concert and exhibition halls combined.

My earliest memories of the place are of the library in the High Block, where my father used to work. There, I would read illustrated storybooks and, as I grew older, borrow Agatha Christie novels. I actually performed there once, when I was about four or five, in a kindergarten show.

But City Hall has never been solely a performing arts centre. It's really an arts venue, a community

hall and a government office all rolled into one. I certainly didn't realise the 7,680-square-foot Exhibition Hall on the first floor of the Low Block was once a ballroom where, according to the government, "the expatriates in Hong Kong could organise balls".

You can find out more about the venue's history in the "Hong Kong City Hall 50th Anniversary Commemorative Exhibition", running until April 9, at the Exhibition Hall.

There is a wealth of information about drama, Cantonese opera, classical music, dance/multimedia and films. There are also recorded interviews with (and essays by) local artists, posters, live concert recordings from the archives of RTHK, and rare stage costumes.

The film segment sounds particularly interesting, as it charts the history of independent and experimental filmmaking in Hong Kong. It looks back at the activities and screenings organised by the amateur-run Film Society of Hong Kong and Studio One that were held at City Hall in the 1970s.

On show are five experimental films including one by director John Woo Yu-sun.

There is also a large panel of old photos on display, which will bring back many happy memories - and stories - for most of us. [Kevin Kwong](http://www.kwong@scmp.com)

PREVIEW

Eatitz
Hidden Agenda

For Israeli art rock band Eatitz, the mainland is still a mystery and that's why the six-piece outfit are joining this year's JUE Music + Art, an arts and music festival in Shanghai and Beijing. The group want to explore the mainland and its indie music and art scene. Eatitz will also be appearing in venues in Wuhan, Nanjing and Hong Kong.

According to guitarist Guy Ben Shetrit, the band had never thought of playing on the mainland as they didn't know there was an audience for their music. That music, says fellow guitarist Or Bahir, is a kind of "complicated pop", which is quirky and "poppy and melodic".

Eatitz met Macau-based Panda Artist Management at last year's South By Southwest, one of the biggest annual music festivals in the US. Panda suggested they should tour this region, and connected them with JUE. Eatitz jumped at the chance to play in Asia.

Fronted by female lead vocalist Lee Triffon, Eatitz regularly collaborate with visual artists and their music is often accompanied by video and animation. For their Asian tour, they have teamed up with fellow Beijing illustrator Yan Wei. Shetrit says the band came across her work at NeochalDGE, an online platform for cutting-edge Chinese artists. "We fell in love with her work. It's trippy and has manga and comics influences," he says.

Though their music is still relatively new to the mainland, their video work has already garnered recognition there. They won awards at events such as the SxSWan TV Festival, the China Kixian

International Animation Festival, and the China International Animation and Digital Arts Festival.

Bahir says their music and art is universal, and crosses cultures and boundaries. "We put our heart and soul into it. We are glad it speaks to people all over the world. The truth is, we were surprised to get such amazing prizes at Chinese festivals. But it's encouraging to know that in a world of reality shows and mediocrity, art and culture that is challenging can still get recognition and respect."

He says the visual aspect, which includes flyers and videos, is an extension of the band's artistic vision. In the past, they have worked with Grammy-nominated directors Yuval and Merav Nathan. Shetrit is also a 3-D animator and a director.

"The videos set a creative high-water mark for Eatitz. We try to top ourselves every time we do one," says Bahir. "That's why we spend so long working on them."

"The music video for *Hey* took three years to be realised. That's the amount of time it normally takes to produce a full-length feature film."

Tonight, 8pm, 25 Tai Yip St, Kwan Tong, Kowloon. HK\$150 (adults-in only). Inquiries: 079 6072



Here to play: art rockers Eatitz