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Wild Ambition: Raphael Mazzucco's Africa Collection

Renowned photographer Raphael Mazzucco recently debuted his latest work in Singapore; a collection which depicts scenes of Africa to magnificent effect

BY ANNABELLE TEO
24 MAR 10:30

"I'm a bit of a nature boy," says Raphael Mazzucco. Beside him, Anthony Russell chimes in, "He's an honorary Kenyan, or 'Shompolean', as we say," leaning forward on the couch in the alfresco area of Mimo Kitchen and Bar. It is a sunny afternoon when Asia Tatler meets with the dynamic duo in this tucked away location surrounded by greenery - most apt, given the topic at hand.



(Anthony Russell and Raphael Mazzucco)

"This is a great place, the whole feel of the horses and the grounds, the architecture - it's really like a bit of Nairobi," muses Russell. Born and raised in Kenya, he is an artist, designer, musician and, above all, a conservationist who creates special retreats in Africa that merge the aspects of conservation, commerce and community. The result is luxury destinations that merge with their environments, such as the aforementioned Shompole Lodge, which is a community project with the Maasai people. "We protect lions there - we started with six and now we have about 70," he tells us with pride.

The project is at the heart of the very reason Russell and Mazzucco are in Singapore on this afternoon - to debut their new Africa collection, comprised of 39 pieces that the pair worked on for two years. The full collection has never been shown anywhere else before, and its debut in Singapore can be attributed to the friendship between Mazzucco and Alicia Zarou Scanlon. She sparked the idea of bringing his art to Singapore, a country she has lived in for the past 15 years.

Even if you aren't familiar with Mazzucco by name, chances are you have seen the work of this acclaimed photographer and artist on many occasions. He has shot for Sports Illustrated several times, as well as for the advertising campaigns of Victoria's Secret, Guess Jeans and Ralph Lauren, all of which evoke the same sense of gritty sensuality that seems to emanate from the man himself. With his ripped jeans, just-out-of-bed hair and disarming insouciance, Mazzucco could pass off as a rockstar.

While he continues to do commercial photography, it's apparent that he gravitates towards creating works of fine art. "I've been working with this medium now for the last eight years, and I've done many shows in Florence, Milan, New York and LA. I'm obsessed with collage and layers and it can go on forever," says Mazzucco.

With a base of stunning photographs shot in the Shompole Conservancy and the Masai Mara in Kenya, the pieces of the Africa collection are sealed in with layer upon layer of resin.



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With just a mere sweeping view of the collection, the graphic nature of the images immediately rouses your senses. Then, upon closer look, one is rewarded with a treasure trove of details - embedded in the resin are anything from insects to beads and traditional tribal jewellery, and most bearing the handwriting of the artists. One truly feels the spirit of Africa through these works, the result of unbridled creativity and fortuitous processes.



"That's the most exciting part - starting and not knowing," notes Mazzucco. "That's a big reason why we love to work with the resin. We'll put the photograph down and apply the resin and build the layers, but we completely have no idea [where it's going to go], and that's the joy of it. The way we work together is very organic and spontaneous. It's never forced. We just had fun, enjoyed Africa, and made the best out of being there."

Part of the proceeds from the sale of this collection will go to the Asali Community Trust, which aims to provide funding for important social development projects in rural communities in Africa. Through this exhibition, Russell hopes to spread a positive message, "I really hope people will look at this collection in the light of conservation and community, and remind them that there are places that need help. And through people, we can develop other areas like [Shompole] in Africa and keep the land free for lions."

The Africa collection is on display until April 14 at Gallery Reis, #03-01/02 Palais Renaissance. Tel: 6836 0370. For more information on the collection, please visit www.azsproductions.com. Read more about Raphael Mazzucco [here](#), and discover Anthony Russell's Shompole project [here](#).

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