



Fotografiska

Chen Man

Fearless & Fabulous

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The title says it all: Fearless & Fabulous. It takes both courage and magnetic attraction to achieve the position held by Chinese photographer Chen Man. And her success is a significant (Chinese) sign of the time. Chen Man is undoubtedly the pioneer of China's fashion photographer. Throughout the years, Chen Man has firmly established herself as the most sought-after and certainly the highest paid fashion and portrait photographer in China. Her works have featured across a range of leading publications, including Vogue, Elle, Harper's Bazaar, Cosmopolitan and i.D.

Her vigorously retouched images comprise several layers of narrative and in her pictorial world the current image of China is interpreted and reinterpreted. In a country in convulsions between the old and the new, Chen Man may be regarded as a representative of her generation – the Generation Y, as in »why«.

In her photographs, Chen Man stages fusions between the past and the present, east and west, tradition and renewal, questioning and reformulating norms and beauty ideals. Film stars and captains of industry all want to be photographed by her. Her megastar status defies description, as she moves in the most varied of social circles of the Chinese elite. China's No.1 leading actress Fan Bingbing will only be photographed by Chen Man, international superstars such as Rihanna, Keanu Reeves and Nicole Kidman come to China to be portrayed by Chen Man. She also undertakes major assignments for brands such as Dior, Hublot, Adidas and Absolut Vodka and is herself the face for many international brands.

The fact that a 37-year-old woman in a country traditionally with conservative views regarding gender role is allowed to challenge the prevailing order and become as much her own brand as a successful photographer, shows us which direction China is heading to. Her artistic practices continue to surprise us by the fact that she constantly finds new forms of expression. The multi-tasked Chen Man has stretched her artistic talent to both fashion design and product development, and this summer she was signed by the American Creative Artists Agency (CAA).

With her inquiring eye and artistic skill in mastering modern digital technology, Chen Man adds new, exciting dimensions to fashion photography, creating images that sometimes raise the question: Is this really photography?

For images, please contact
Fotografiska's Head of Communications
Margita Ingwall +46 (0)70 456 14 61
margita.ingwall@fotografiska.se

IN BRIEF

Chen Man was born in the old quarter of Beijing in 1980 in a family with an artist father. She received training on classical Chinese painting, calligraphy, and other techniques since a young age. She was admitted to the prestigious Central Art Academy in Beijing after three attempts and she chose photography as her particular form of expression that is keen to her heart. Today, in addition to being China's most sought-after fashion and portrait photographer, she has also achieved international success.

Fearless & Fabulous at Fotografiska is her first solo museum exhibition outside China

– The exhibition displays the multifaceted production that is Chen Man’s distinctive characteristic. Curator Kaimei Wang has made a selection from Chen Man’s artistic projects and commercial assignments, all of which share the common denominator of attracting both the eye and the imagination. Here we see a colourful aesthetic combined with sharp comments about our contemporary times that deserve to be illuminated with both intelligence and a portion of humour, says Johan Vikner, Exhibition Manager at Fotografiska.

Chen Man was born in the old quarter of the multi-million city of Beijing and lived in the middle of this pulsating conurbation, in a mixture of ancient Chinese culture, with a grandmother who sat and played Ma Jong next to her bed, and the glamour of the modern metropolis. The old and the new. The ultra traditional and the supermodern. The ancient dragon and the one who wants to shed skin...

An image of duality that is characteristic for Chen Man’s expression and impression. An impression that corresponds perfectly with the Chinese self-image, which in Chen Man’s pictorial world clearly looks to its roots – ancient roots that here have been pulled up and analysed – in pictures that ask questions about the collective identity, of which Chen Man is the most astute expounder.

– Once we have achieved all we need materially then it is time to seek something more existential. And for this we turn to our Chinese roots. In my latest project, inspiration comes from my interest in classical Chinese philosophy, the wisdom of the Chinese daily life and my great commitment to traditional Chinese medicine. This is why I go back to the roots of Chinese philosophy and seek harmony in nature to find a balance between Yin and Yang, between outer beauty and inner wisdom.

Chen Man is young and fearless. For her generation, far departed from the Maoist past of her parents’ generation, today’s rapid changes are a prerequisite.

– China is moving rapidly forward and is opening up to the world. It is a matter of the encounter between the old and the new. I always say that my generation of young Chinese is the generation that is witnessing how the dream of a more commercial society is being realised. But once we have achieved material happiness, what do we really need? ●

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