

'I AM AN OBSERVER'

French photographer Fabien Lemaire dabbles in the unconventional and unfolds some intriguing tales in the process. He talks to *City Times*

LAYLA HAROON
Contributor

WHETHER HE works with a celebrity ego or captures ordinary urban life on the streets, French photographer Fabien Lemaire goes beyond the cold rooted aspect of a snapshot and builds a picture out of whatever pertinent items can be gathered and placed together to tell the story - thanks to his talent as a graphic designer, his love for painting, the naturalism of the subject and artful technologies.

Through aesthetic excellence he masters the art of photography is such a way that his exposures are often revolutionised as paintings where water and light move into substance and make-up. The slough of the elements acts like a visual effect. Everything mingles: natural mineral and urban life, eternity and fleeting instants; distances get closer and moments merge. Beyond globalisation and materialisation, further, he brings a more spiritual vision into his work, often natural and always humane. There is warmth coming from the light captured by the camera. The invisible becomes obvious.

Are you a self-taught photographer or did you have a mentor who set you on your way?

It all started when I was 12 years old, when I discovered an old camera in the closet, which belonged to my father. Since then, I kept a passion for this art and devoted my life to photography of nature and of reports. I studied graphic design at Claude Garamond and Maximilien Vox, but still pursued my passion in this period by taking photos day and night of my environment. Step by step, I discovered the digital

art of photography, like a painter discovers his pencils. While searching for my creative identity, I travelled all over Europe and Canada, Middle East, Morocco, going back home full of inspiration from urban landscapes melted with humanity and nature. After working as junior artistic director, I went to the South of France where I lead an art-therapy workshop. The city remains the heart of my artistic work.

What do you have in mind when you photograph?

I am an observer, and a photographer should be. I feel the instant through my senses till I get the green light to start. The sensation comes to me. When this happens, my ambition is to produce a vision of that place and that vision has to be unique. It must reveal the hidden aspects of that place. I can't come here and show pictures of France and say: 'Ok, I'm French, and these are pictures of France, buy these, thank you, and bye.'

Something should be there that attracts and hypnotises my viewers. In fashion, as I have different objectives like design, the choice of models, light, photographic equipment (film, digital SLR, medium-format), places and the requirements of the customer... my ultimate goal is that the technique should not take precedence over my artistic touch. Sometimes, the reverse can happen too, because having ideas is good, but they should be feasible from the point of view of technical and financial assistance.

Do you feel that your identity changes when you lift the camera? Do you act differently?

My personal work is very different compared to my fashion shooting. I search for

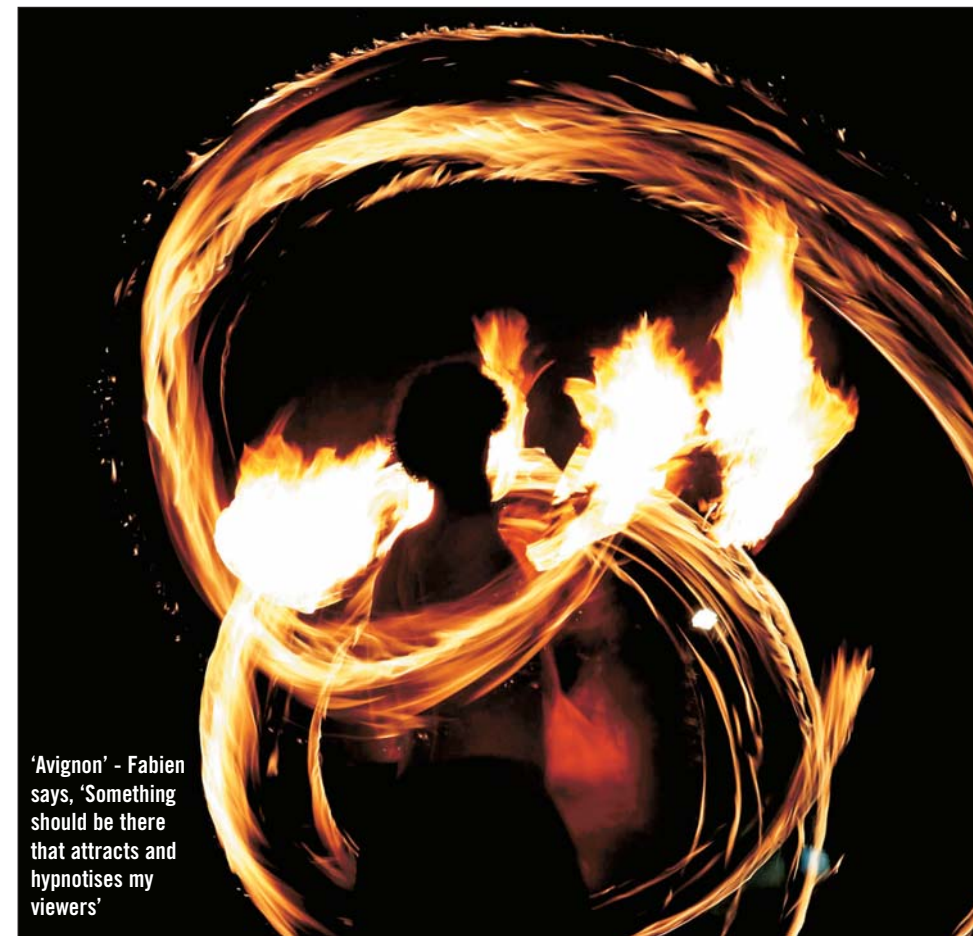
inspiration in every small detail with an eye of curiosity and then I create a painting with my camera. It is all decided in the city, when I walk the whole day and night as a spectator. But still it's not just 'clac-clac'; the photographs are a reflection of my vision that develops during the hypnotic synchronicity of my meeting with the elements of nature. It's completely different when I make a fashion shooting for a brand. At that time I am the chief of the orchestra, I search for what I want, I am more relaxed and discreet as I cognise how I have to develop the image that I have in my mind.

Ever since digital photography was first introduced to the mainstream photographer there is a debate on which format is better - film or digital. What are your comments on this?

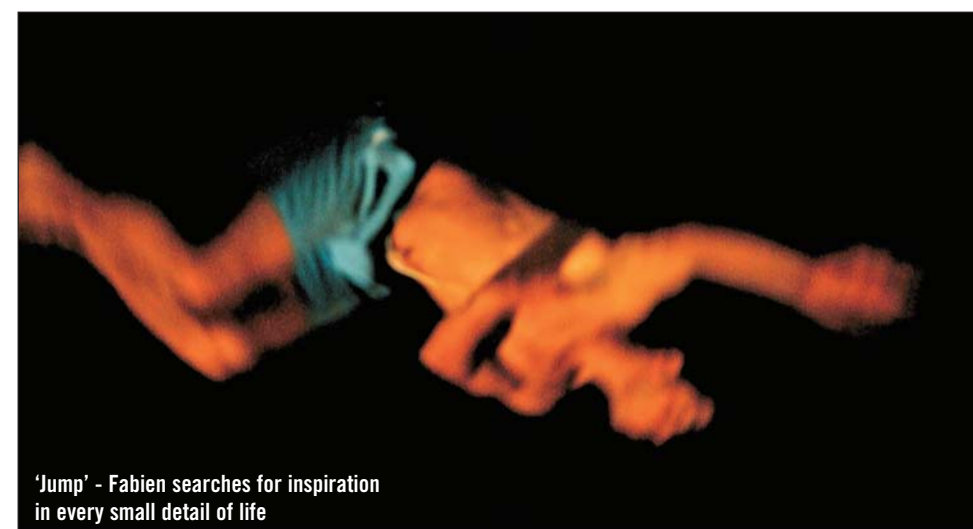
I think traditional photography is better and more beautiful, but much more expensive and slower in the process. The problem with digital technology in photography is that it has a very special and artificial effect on development. I don't like that effect; in fact I try to bring a qualitative change and delete that outward appearance and generate the natural sensation of film, but it's not simple every time. On the other hand, ecologically and economically, digital is relevant. But for a professional photographer it's not just the camera or the number of mega pixels; it is the lens, the project, the light and the spirit.

So, what tools and techniques do you use to create your art?

A Mac Pro in my office with Adobe Photoshop, a Powerbook for travelling with a Canon 5D with lens and two or three flashes for fashion shooting. I prefer to use traditional, but sometimes when I am short on the time and economic factor like during the fashion



'Avignon' - Fabien says, 'Something should be there that attracts and hypnotises my viewers'



'Jump' - Fabien searches for inspiration in every small detail of life

shoots, digital is my option. But, my photography is not influenced through digital effects; there is no special effect of any digital software like Photoshop, there is no transparency, no colour changing tricks. Once the picture is transferred to my computer, using my own technique I model it as I had pictured it in my mind for perfection.

Can you recall any memorable moment from your time in this profession?

In fashion my best souvenir is the shooting of a diamond worth 1.5 million euros. In

reportage there is one from Berlin 1999 - the love parade - I think 1.5 million people were there for street dance. I walked the whole day and night... that was an incredible experience.

What works have you brought to your latest exhibition 'Impulse'?

Dubai and the Middle East are not just hotspots for oil and the dollar. They have an original and cultural mix of life. 'Impulse' is an invitation to an insightful, abstract and subtle voyage to this life through the senses. It is a creative and sensitive con-

cept that contributes to the new power art movement in the Middle East and simultaneously creates a bridge between the lights of Paris and those of the new Dubai through various visual, olfactory and musical ambiances. Based on a theme very dear to me, which is the 'city', the portfolios are inspired by the two elements which dominate Dubai: water, omnipresent in spite of the desert, and movement, perpetual in this city where nothing ever stops. They can be divided into different series: firemen with abstract movement, hot sensation,



Every picture tells a story; Fabien creates 'paintings' with his camera

natural ambience of rainbow water, the body of a dancer in the air and the night ambience of the creek in Dubai. These 35 pictures are the extract of my vision of France and the UAE. I used Diassec, the best quality material to print these images. Diassec is similar to plexiglass, but has a special effect on the colour, the sensation is better. The photo turns out to be a design object and gives a fresh look of urban life.

Your previous project 'Transparence' was a huge success. It became the subject of your exhibitions. Tell us something about it.

'Transparence' was a compilation of photographs full of life and colour. I focused on unusual places, situations and details, using the superposition principle and playing with transparency and colour saturation. The project gives a soul to cities and objects as it takes it away from human beings. One can discover new visions of famous European cities such as London, Paris, Hanover, Bologna, Berlin, Venice, Budapest... a completely

EVENT DETAILS

WHAT: 'Impulse' - a photography exhibition by Fabien Lemaire
WHERE: Heritage House Gallery, Bastakia, Bur Dubai
WHEN: Till July 31

new vision of mixing day and night, flesh and substance, skin and sunrays. Comprising of 12 panoramic photos of two and three metres, I have another project ready for an exhibition. Then another new project in Middle East is in process; but it's a secret for the moment.

Many photographers conform to a spiritual approach in photography. Do you ever feel this way or do you think some have a 'natural eye' for photography?

I think I am very spiritual. I like all traditions and cultures because I think there is just one power and that is love. I think everyone has a personal vision of life that can change. For example, when I explore a city and find that it is boring and lacks a city life, I reconstruct its poetic image of what I want it to be. My art then becomes spiritual work in both ways: affecting the spirit or soul and concerning sacred matters. It becomes my prayer to make a revelation that is beauty. Nevertheless, it is not of pretension or ordeal judgment. I am an ordinary man who loves loving and revealing the beauty of old places and of people of different nationalities like locals, Filipinos, Indians, Pakistanis, English, French... ■