

Interview with Christina Rahme:

A Fashion Photographer Based in Beirut

Yasmine Nachabe Taan

Christina Rahme holds an M.A. in photography from Université Saint-Esprit de Kaslik (USEK) and is currently teaching photography at LAU. Yasmine Nashabe Taan interviewed her for this issue of *al-raida*.

Yasmine Nashabe Taan: Fashion photography, similar to most creative design and advertising oriented fields, is a highly competitive field. I bet you had to dig your own path in the market.

Christina Rahme: It is indeed a highly competitive, tough field. Although I would like to focus exclusively on fashion photography, I often find myself multi-tasking or working on a diversity of projects such as architecture, interior, or jewelry photography.

In Lebanon, the market is limited. Even though each type of photography requires specific skills, photographers should be ready to take up a range of photography projects and not be restricted to one type. Another crucial element in this field is meeting deadlines.

Most, if not all, fashion photography projects are time-sensitive. There is also the persona of the photographer. When working on a project, the photographer is leading a large team. In addition to the models, there is a group of around 10 employees among them the make up artists, the hairdressers, the assistants, the graphic designers, the agents, the lighting personnel etc... It's all about team work.

Y.N.T.: Christina, who are your major clients?

C.R.: I have local clients as well as international clients. I work with advertising agencies such as *Grey World* and *Impact BBDO*, but I also have clients in the United Arab Emirates, KSA and Qatar. Some of my clients in Lebanon include *Elle Oriental*, *Aishti*, and *Officiel Levant* among other magazines.

Y.N.T.: How is fashion photography different from other kinds of photography?

C.R.: Fashion photography is about recreating worlds. It is a crucial marketing tool to propagate innovative fashion styles. Fashion photography is about creating desire through glamour. It produces the pleasure of looking into photographs. As opposed to photo-reportage or photo-journalism, it is about generating a world of fantasy. It does not necessarily document aspects of 'real' human life.

Y.N.T.: Did you establish your own studio?

C.R.: A few years ago, in Paris, I had the privilege



Sample of Christina Rahme's work.

of working with the internationally renowned photographer Andre Rau. It was a totally different experience than working in Lebanon. Here I have had to purchase all the equipment and establish my own studio and photography equipment. However, in Paris, photographers can rent the studio as well as their equipment for photo shoots. So yes, I have had mine since 2006.

Y.N.T.: How do you work on your photography concepts?

C.R.: First, I brainstorm with the clients and then I present them with a concept that I had previously thought of in relation to the product/service. Then comes the serious work which entails recreating the whole context for such a concept. Concepts can range from a complex jungle setting to a simple bed room. Constructing the stage gradually takes place, of course, with the mutual creative efforts of my team. In most cases, due to budget constraints, we recreate the scene rather than actually travel to the site. This is partly why I am so passionate about my job: it is all about imagination [eye blink]!

Y.N.T.: There is a contradiction in the experience of you being a woman photographer who is also the producer of images that, in a way, are degrading for women – I mean photographs that reproduce stereotypes of women being only sexy and beautiful. How do you deal with this?

C.R.: I think women are very beautiful and I don't think that showing the beauty of a woman's body is necessarily a degrading thing. It all depends on how it is presented.

Y.N.T.: Ok, then I will rephrase my question: I saw the amazing photos that you have taken of the young gorgeous male model for Purrl, was it? Can you say something about your experience in depicting women as sexy and men as sexy... tell us more about photographing nudes or semi-nudes.

C.R.: I think there is beauty in both the male and the female form. I see beauty in many different things and I love to highlight it. Beauty can be found in people, young or old, in forms, shapes, in nature, etc.

Y.N.T.: How do you deal with the issue of depicting



Sample of Christina Rahme's work.

women's bodies as criticized by feminists today?

C.R.: If the photographer is working on the theme of the *femme fatale*, *talon aiguilles*, *rouge/noir* etc., the photographer guides the model into enacting a *femme fatale*. However, not all clients require a *femme fatale*. *Elle* magazine, for example, expects women to be sweet, coquettish, and fashionably modern. I do have clients, and they are many, mostly the locals, who insist on the "pin-up" image. Perhaps this helps them fantasize [smile]. They love it and they strongly believe that it is the only strategy to sell their products. Local clients are focused on making profit.

Y.N.T.: Do you see yourself as an entrepreneur?

C.R.: Good artists are bad entrepreneurs [laugh]. I am an artist ... That is why I am seeking a partner, a business partner.

Y.N.T.: So fashion photography is about imagination?

C.R.: Yes, of course ... When we turn off the light, a new world emerges: a surreal, fantasy world, a recreation of dream, a world of floating cotton candies [smile]. We live the moment till the light is on and when we are back to reality the magic is gone. We leave the exciting, 'surreal' world of photography to return to the 'real' world. I think that photographers capture the magic of the moment. You don't really control the photograph. Photography is magical, it just happens instantaneously.