

FACE OF FASHION

By Giorgio Di Marzo

Fashion is one of the most used words of the last one hundred years: on serious newspapers and gossip magazines, on the Big Brother and within the news, all talk about fashion. But just a few have a clear idea of what fashion is, as just a few are the active characters of fashion, that is those who create it, those who make trends linked to it and create the myths of the latest generations.

The exhibition *Face of Fashion* at the National Portrait Gallery explains to us, through images, why the top fashion photographers, among these the much Italian Paolo Roversi and Mario Sorrenti, are among the major fashion-makers. In the image-age, in our visual culture, them, "The Lords of the Images", the fashion photographers, mould our ideals of beauty, sensuality and sexuality and give new shape to our myths and our fantasies, sometimes going along and re-enforcing the most classic aesthetic canons, sometimes crushing and re-inventing them.

Paolo Roversi, who lives and works in Paris, mainly uses traditional techniques to render the naturalness, and at the same time the atemporality, of the portrayed subjects. According to Roversi his studio is any place where he can use his camera, and more than a physical place is a corner of his mind where to mystically and spiritually search for the deep mystery embodied in beauty. Maybe these words sound more appropriate for a Navajo medicine man rather than a Western photographer, but by staring at his portraits one can be able to understand that Paolo Roversi is a kind of modern wizard able to capture the soul of the subjects he photographs: of Natalia Vodianova, a Russian model, very young but with a glance that recounts a life made of hardships at the beginning and of prosperity now; or of John Galliano, one the greatest designers of our time, who embodies the voluptuous and elitist essence of fashion; or of Tilda Swinton, actress belonging to the oldest English family, showing a glance without time, maybe mindful of *Orlando*, the character of the homonymous novel by Virginia Woolf interpreted by her on the big screen.

Mario Sorrenti, the second Italian photographer of this exhibition, was born in Naples but has lived in New York since the age of 10. He is a self-thought, helped by the fact that his family counts a number of photographers and artists. Mario's camera is a tool for experimentation: he uses it to reach a resonance between style and subject. His approach is based on empathy and through the reciprocal trust with the photographed subjects, with the complicity of the dresses representing the fashion of the moment, he tries to reach the truth that, being subjective by definition, is far... but at every shot he feels to get closer and closer.

And this empathic approach is evinced by Catherine Deneuve, diva *par excellence*, who shows herself close to the beholder, and yet unreachable; or Sharon Stone, who thanks to a wise use of light and shadows opens herself to us though staying shrouded in mystery; or, to conclude with the icon of the fashion icons, Kate Moss photographed during their brief but intense and stormy relationship, for the launch campaign of the perfume *Obsession* by Calvin Klein... the obsession of a look and a body that obsess an epoch.

An exhibition to be visited, to understand why fashion has so much grip in the life of all of us and to discover and rediscover the magic of photography. Until 28th May.

The video of the exhibition is available on our website www.giorgiostudio.co.uk.

For further information:

Paolo Roversi: www.paoloroversi.com

Mario Sorrenti: www.mariosorrenti.com

National Portrait Gallery: www.npg.org.uk