

Michael Chia: Picture perfect

WRITER: JAMES DREW

By his own admission, one half of our editors' partnership, James Drew, is not particularly photogenic – what better subject, then, for Brussels-based photographic artist Michael Chia to work a little magic with? Read on – and take your chance to win one of three professional photoshoots with MC himself.

With some people, from the get-go, you just know you're in the hands of an artist. The real deal – someone who cares, passionately, about what he does. And that's Michael Chia for you – at 44, he has spent the past 20 years in sunny Brussels, building business, after moving away from his home in Singapore in the late 1980s, to share his vision with the world.

BACK TOGETHER

In fact, Michael is no stranger to the pages of *Together* - as far back as our edition #7 (March-April 2008), our writer **Hélène Noël** who tragically passed away

Hotel Silken-Berlaymont Photoplate Award, which he had won with his photo collection *Happy Rain* – check out the original article at www.together-magazine.eu.

But enough of the past – it was time to put myself in his capable hands, to see if I actually could be made to look good in photos. I won't pass comment on my own shot, which adorns these very pages along with far more beautiful people, as you can see, but will instead leave that up to readers to decide. No answers on a postcard, thanks...

The pleasantly airy Creatifimage studio, which is to be found just off Avenue Louise was, to be fair, pretty much as I expected – very arty, easy to relax in, with a splendid terrace for the post-photoshoot smoke and glass of vino. Pretty much a summation of Michael's approach to his work, as he explained to me: "Photography is now very accessible. To the extent that anyone who can now buy a digital camera, can now also call themselves 'a photographer'. A snapshot is now called a photograph. The days of going to a photography studio for a real photoshoot is perceived as being something reserved solely for the rich, famous, beautiful or glamorous. Not many people now appreciate the true value of portrait photography as an art form. But why not? It is art, because art comes from the imagination, imagination needs



1. JD

2. Petra Jordan:
Singer/songwriter



IN THE FRAME

And what of those who are adamant that 'I don't need a photographer because I just bought a camera!' Michael is similarly adamant in return: "You are not hiring a camera. You are working with an artist who does not use the camera in 'auto' mode. Just as a painter paints a portrait, I use a camera to 'paint' or capture my clients' personality."

Well, that is certainly telling me – better do as the artist orders, what do you think? In fact, 'ordering' is not Michael's style - depending on what you want your photoshoot for (for myself, it was for a mixture of professional purposes and a little bit of not-so-innocent fun), the artist is only too happy to help you select a costume from your own wardrobe that he feels both sums up your look and personality best, but the final decision is yours, naturally.

TIME TO SHOOT

And so my own shoot began – ever the vain one, I had opted for a very pleasant Scabal suit (keeping my other sponsors happy there, www.scabal.com), with

cigarettes – but Michael, ever inventive, had it in his mind that garish sunglasses would work a treat with such formal attire. He wasn't wrong, either...

And thus, 200 shots flew by – Michael was kind enough to tell me that I was a pleasure to shoot and, to be fair, I did enjoy the 'acting' side of things, as emoting for camera is not something I get a chance to do that often.

As Michael told me: "My role as photographer is to explore my clients' lives. Maybe do a role play. I talk to them, tease them, shout and at times even insult them, to get their true self onto an shot. I try to ooze every bit of their inner self that they rarely show to others, and capture it. Most of my clients are exhausted after a shooting session with me!"

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