

BEHIND THE SHOT



Maki Kawakita

Maki Kawakita has two great loves: photography and dance. Since beginning her career as a fashion and portrait photographer, Kawakita has emphasized performative elements in her photographs, whether they feature ballerinas posing in 7-11s or hip-hop artists jumping through the air. Kawakita has photographed celebrities such as Beyonce Knowles and Missy Elliott, and has shot advertising campaigns for numerous fashion design houses. In her spare time, she works on perfecting her tango moves.

To see more of Maki Kawakita's work, visit her [web site](#) or [Marge Casey + Associates](#).

This image was shot in September 2004, in New York. It was a personal project. In 2002, I'd had a show in Paris of images where women were made up and dressed to look like Barbie dolls. This was a kind of extension of that project: I'd had the idea for a long time to do a series of images in which women were presented as gifts, inside boxes. I wanted to call the series "Handle with Care." I told my idea to Hushi, a fashion designer friend who's half of the design team Michael and Hushi, and he suggested using packaging from mailing outlets like Fed-Ex and DHL. Hushi and I have been collaborators for a long time: he's Iranian, but he loves all things Japanese, and I think there's a love of detail in both of our cultures.

The model, Rila, is a friend of mine. The shoot took a long time to set up because the hair stylist had to tie up Rila's long hair and put a tight-fitting rubber cap on her head, then the make-up artist used a special airbrush to make her skin look smooth and flat. All of that took at least 3 hours, and while they were doing that, Hushi and I were making the boxes and the accessories. I'd already sketched out the main concept, which we followed closely, but then Hushi came up with playful details like the Fed-Ex ribbon.

We did a series of 4 images over the course of the day. I put a backdrop on the wall and Rila was sitting on a chair in front of it. I used a Profoto lighting kit with soft boxes. The most challenging thing about the shoot was keeping everyone's energy up. The model had to stay still for a long time with something really tight on her head. After a few hours, she started getting understandably irritable. I had to keep everyone together and focused. I like photo shoots to be cheerful and high energy, so we had lots of healthy food, fresh-squeezed orange juice and at some point we ordered in sushi to keep everyone going. We listened to R&B and hip-hop music throughout the day.

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I used the Olympus E-1 camera to shoot this, with the 14-45mm Zuiko lens at f16. The exposure was 1/125th second. I like the 14-45mm lens because it gives me a nice range and frame, and allows me to work quickly. In a shoot like this one, where the model's going to get tired quickly, that's important.

Since doing this series, I've extended it by getting some of the celebrities I've worked with, like Missy Elliott and Hilary Duff, to pose in boxes. Missy had crinkled gold paper in her box, and Hilary had feathers. When I shoot them on assignment, I'll just ask them if they feel like posing for my personal project. I haven't shown the work to anyone at Fed-Ex or DHL yet. At some point I think would be nice to send it to them, see what they think. Who knows, maybe they'll buy something!

Photographer/stylist: Maki Kawakita

Stylist: Hushi Mortezaie

Hairstylist: Kenshin Asano

Make-up artist: Rika Matsui

Model: Rila (T Models)