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IN BEAUTY

Luscious Lips for Life

MAKI KAWAKITA
CELEBRITY FASHION
PHOTOGRAPHER

CAREER

Olympus Visionary Photographer Maki Kawakita - Behind the Camera

Click. Missy Elliot. Click. Makirama. Click. Beyonce. Click. Fashion Week. Click. Paris Hilton. Maki Kawakita, born and raised in Tokyo, Japan, began her love affair with the camera in 1997. What she saw through the lens for the first time during a trip to Paraguay and Brazil changed everything. "The colors were bright, the fruits, plants and ocean. The people were so positive and colorful too. It was very inspiring," shares Maki. This experience has transformed into a signature style of Kawakita's images, vibrant and full of color, yet so crisp and clean. In less than ten years and only 32, New York based Maki has already established herself as an industry elite. In 2004 she was selected as a Visionary through the prestigious Olympus Visionaries Program created by Olympus America Inc.

Kawakita joins several Pulitzer Prize-winning and Magnum photographers, as well as other internationally renowned photographers. However professional success and hard work usually comes with a price. In the past few years she has had a few physical challenges. To juggle a chaotic jet setter's life and a personal life can be exhausting and physically taxing, but fortunately Maki's positive energy and outlook always shines through. In October we met at the Mandarin Oriental hotel in New York City to of course talk about her success and work, but for me it was important to take a more in depth picture of the woman behind the camera!

ASIANCE: Why was Maki selected as an Olympus Visionary Photographer?

Olympus: "Upon meeting Maki, I was impressed not only with her very exciting and creative use of the media, but also with her personality and ability to represent her work," said John Knaur, senior product manager, Olympus Imaging America Inc. "It is rare to find a talent with a unique style and the high approachability that Maki embodies. Olympus is quite fortunate to have her as a Visionary and a spokesperson for the Olympus Digital SLR cameras, and to have her beautiful and cutting-edge work represent both our quality and hers."

ASIANCE: Tell us about MAKIRAMA and what the next series is about.

Maki: MAKIRAMA is an autobiographical photographic piece, a diary like project. In other words, the context and feeling of imagery changes as my emotion and thoughts change day-by-day, or week-by-week. I like to focus on the moment and what's influencing me then. The two previous were MAKIRAMA "Tokyo Pop" and "Futurama". "Confessions" will be the first series to feature self-photography. Originally I have not been using myself as the subject in any of the MAKIRAMA pieces, but since it's about me I thought why not. It's a series of 25 images,

which I started to work on since 2005. It was a good period for me. MAKIRAMA "Confessions" will premiere in Paris next year and will hopefully launch simultaneously in New York City.

ASIANCE: Share the experience from your second shoot for Gekkan featuring Lina of MAX (Asiance's November 2006 Cover pic).

Maki: Recently right before I left for Europe, I photographed a whole fashion related magazine called Gekkan. It usually focuses on one celebrity and exposes their sexuality, their erotic and sensual side. It's really great because it's your personal project. They give me everything I want to do; it's almost 100% freedom. Gekkan gave me the assignment six months ago to give me enough time to think about it. This piece was really challenging. I went back and forth in my sketchbook and reorganized ideas many, many times. This time I wanted to take it in a different direction similar to a short film. I made up a story and did a storyboard. It goes from morning to night and the characters have names. Lina, a singer from the popular female Japanese pop group MAX (like Destiny's Child here in the U.S.), would be the feature. She and I had a really good time and she was so open to do anything. Sometimes she would get very shy and say, "Maki, I never posed this way not even for my boyfriend." It goes from morning to night and the characters have names. It was a really challenging piece. The shoot was three days starting from 8am to 7pm and it was pretty intensive as it was in different locations in the city. Luckily I had a producer to coordinate these things, but I still like to go and make sure this is what I want. This issue should be out in December/January 2007 (Note: Gekkan can be found in most Japanese book stores)

ASIANCE: What other special projects do you have happening now?

Maki: I am also working on publishing a series of books. The first is a conceptual book of pop art images. This will basically be a portfolio of my work.

ASIANCE: How do you stay focused with so many projects and assignments happening at once?

Maki: I have this obsessive personality of once I start something I stick with it usually. I have no problem focusing on one thing for a long. In my philosophy it is either zero or one hundred percent, you either do it or not.

ASIANCE: Were your parents always supportive of you?

Maki: If they knew we were good at something they would always encourage us. Also my whole family does art. My mom is a dancer/performer and my dad doesn't do it as a profession but he does oil painting and likes to invent things (especially for the house). My sister is an illustrator in Atlanta and my younger brother is a stage designer based in New Jersey. Now my parents visit once a year and I go back to Japan twice a year. They like that I have shows in Paris and other cities, so they can come. My family is very close, so we're always in contact.

ASIANCE: Is there something in photography or another medium that you would like to explore?

Maki: There is always something for me to learn or test because there is always something new. I don't know how many cameras Olympus produced last year, so keeping up with the technology is one thing. With the digital camera there's always different tricks and finding your own way to do things. Play around, always play around.

ASIANCE: What other things do you enjoy doing?

Maki: Hmm. I guess in that sense I really am a workaholic. Whatever I do is always connected to photography. I watch movies sometimes and will take interesting elements and bring them to my work. Dance is definitely my hobby, friends and traveling. Making time for friends is a challenge, it's a big challenge I think. At some point, I look at the watch and say "Time to go!" and turn off the computer.

Also Greg, my husband, and I are really into wines. We like both red and white, white for summer and red for winter. I've been enjoying wine for a long time, but since my husband also really likes wine we are thinking about taking wine classes to understand a little bit more. There's a great place called Vintage that features local wines and I actually bought one from Long Island.

ASIANCE: What kind of food do you like?

Maki: I like everything and cook a lot, a lot, a lot. Since I mostly cook Japanese at home when going out it's usually French or Italian. I am a big fan of tiramisu and for this I went through my zagat's and went to almost every place and finally found one on 73rd Street and the corner of Madison Ave. You should try this one. There are two kinds of tiramisu, but you should order the one that is bigger. The presentation is interesting; it's not your typical tiramisu. You would probably see it in Italy, but not here. I won't tell you too much because you have to experience it. It's very, very good. Sorry I forgot the name of the place.

ASIANCE: If you could stop time, press pause, what would you want to do right now?

Maki: Become pregnant! It's great that I met Greg. He is a former ballet dancer who has a doctorate in philosophy, yet teaches technology at IBM. This is just one of the many things we have in common. It's nice to have him; he has helped me to not forget about my own life.

ASIANCE: How have the physical challenges influenced your work and life?

Maki: Just like I incorporate my daily thoughts and activities into my work, these moments (surgery) in life are definitely reflected in my work. My surgeries made me stop and think about everything I did at the time. I learned many lessons from the experiences. It also made me realize what's really important in my life. I can't just run through my life alone and selfishly. There is timing for everything, but making

the right choice when the time is right is always on you.

ASIANCE: Where are you off to now Maki?

Maki: Actually a tango dance class!

For more details on Maki Kawakita www.makiphoto.com

** Photos courtesy of Maki Kawakita*