



Uma Thurman.



Angelina Jolie.



Nicolas Cage.



Johnny Depp.

IN FOCUS

Michel Haddi has photographed some of the biggest names in fashion and entertainment. Art lovers in Dubai can now zoom in on his work at a new exhibition

By David Tusing
Deputy *tabloid!* Editor

It takes a bit of eccentricity to be able to hob nob with celebrities, get up close and personal and take intimate pictures of them. And that is exactly what renowned photographer and publisher Michel Haddi has been doing for the past 20 years.

From Uma Thurman to Johnny Depp, Kate Moss and Angelina Jolie to the Red Hot Chilli Peppers, France-born Haddi, who is of Algerian descent, has done them all. Starting off as a fashion photographer in the '80s with *Vogue* editions in France, Italy and the UK, and for magazines such as *Tatler*, *Vanity Fair* and *GQ*, Haddi is revered for his contribution to fashion and celebrity photography.

The UAE will get a taste of the artist when he comes to Dubai today to inaugurate an exhibition of his best works at Toby Arts, a new art gallery space in Al Quoz. A collaborative project between art advisory Jamm and Toby, the fashion brand by Saudi fashion designer Hatem Al Akeel, Haddi's exhibition will also mark the gallery's debut in the UAE art scene.

"When I think of fashion photographers, past and present, I think of names such as Cecil Beaton, Irving Penn, Richard Avedon, David Bailey, Helmut Newton and Mario Testino.

Their works are now sold at galleries and at auction and viewed as art. We felt it was time to showcase the work of a fashion photographer from our own region. Being part Algerian, Michel Haddi represents the mix between East and West," said Shaikha Lulu M. Al Sabah, partner and founder of Jamm. *tabloid!* caught up with Haddi before his trip.

In the past 20 years are there any particular subjects that stand out as most memorable?

My most memorable trips have been my trip to the mountains in Yemen (I was lucky to have the name Haddi thanks to the tribe Al Haddi in Yemen); to work with Tim Burton on *Mars Attacks!* and to have British *Vogue* send me for three weeks to America all alone to shoot in New York with Debbie Harry, in Detroit with Aretha Franklin, in Houston, Texas, with Bobby Brown, the ex of Whitney Houston, in Texas shooting Willy Nelson, then going to Los Angeles with Jill Jones and back to London. What a wonderful trip.

How has photography as an art evolved, in your opinion?

Photography was always an art, just only few will be able to transcend the commercial into an art form. Nowadays, because of the range of media and the speed of communication, you are able to have more talented youngsters being able to try but again, only few will remain.

Celebrities are not the easiest of subjects. How do you make them comfortable so you can get your money shot?

If you are honest and if you have a point of view and if you know exactly what you are going to do, you have no problem. If you pot around and try to be a star, then you will lose it. It's the same experience to go and see a doctor: What do you want when you meet a surgeon? A precise guy who tells you exactly what he will do and then you feel secure.

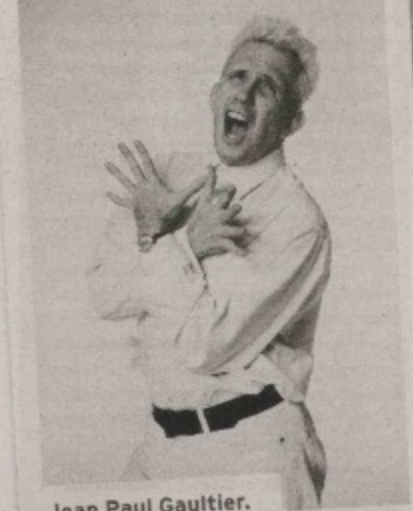
Any favourite celebrity you've most enjoyed working with?

I did adore Blondie, she was so sweet. And Veruschka [von Lehn-dorff, German model and actress] because she always used to call me "Little Buddha".

What has been your most memorable shoot?

It was with the Red Hot Chilli Peppers in Berlin in 1989 for an interview. We were to shoot in a studio and suddenly all the people in the studio were talking, watching the TV and guess what? Two million people were on the wall breaking it down. So I got the idea and we jumped into a cab took and went to the wall and I shot them breaking the wall down while the East German police were booting us.

But the best was yet to come: Now, there were two million people in Frie-



Jean Paul Gaultier.

drichstrasse [a major road and shopping centre that was once bisected by the Berlin Wall] and there were no cabs, nothing. I saw a French car moving slowly and jumped in front of it and I said to the guy: 'If I told you I am with the Red Hot Chilli Peppers, what would you do?' The guy looked at me and said, 'Come on, that's impossible.' Then with a grin on my face, I said, 'OK, if I am with them, will you take us back to our hotel, deal?' And he said, 'Deal.' So the crew jumps in the car and all the while this kid is gobsmacked, unable to believe his luck.

In the end, all the boys signed on his forehead.

Any worst celebrity subjects?

There was a young actor I did in New York for a magazine interview. She was so obnoxious and guess what? She never made it.

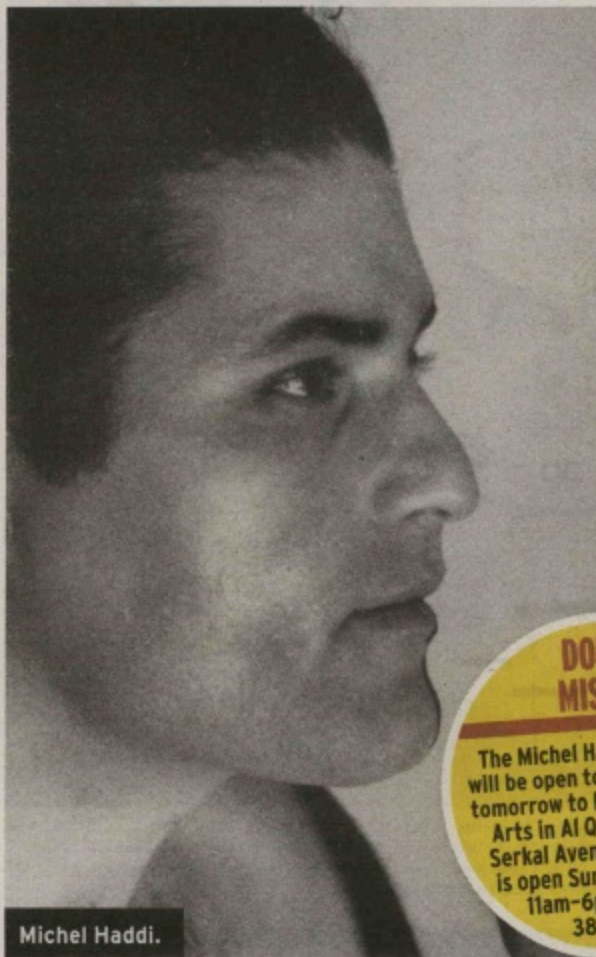
Any celebrity you would love to work with but haven't done?

I would love to do a project on Madonna. I have never worked with her.

How did your interest in fashion photography develop?

I love women and I love clothes in the true sense. I mean, I love artists and I can make people happy for two seconds. I am not a doctor nor a rocket scientist, but if I can bring two seconds of happiness when people look at my photos, then I am happy.

To an aspiring fashion photographer, what would you say is the most important skill? Emotion.



Michel Haddi.

DON'T MISS IT

The Michel Haddi exhibition will be open to the public from tomorrow to March 31 at Toby Arts in Al Quoz, next to Al Serkal Avenue. The gallery is open Sunday-Thursday, 11am-6pm. Call 04-3805292.