

# EYES OF THE WORLD



Fashion Industry titan Nigel Barker recently sat down for a long ranging discussion with Lapalme and offered his unique perspective on the future of fashion, the role of social media on the industry. More importantly, Nigel offered insight into some of the philosophical underpinnings of his amazing work on both sides of the lens shaping the image, stating that he often joked, "I'm in every picture I've ever taken. Look into the model's eyes and you'll see a reflection of me."

**How has the impact of the rise of Sports Illustrated, particularly its swimsuit edition, reshaped the landscape for the modern model age?**

It started in the '80s really, and really became big with models like Christie Brinkley, Paulina Porizkova and Elle Macpherson. Really, Elle was on the cover what, five times? Sports Illustrated isn't a fashion magazine - it's a men's magazine that doesn't even sell swimsuits - it got these models to become household names and changed everything. Big brands started realizing that they should use these high fashion models and the industry just exploded.

**How is Social Media changing the future of the industry?**

It's completely changed it. We have no idea where it's going to head and where it's going to end. Think about how many people Cara Delevingne has following her on Instagram. Now when you do a deal with her, you perhaps do it so she puts images up on Instagram - which is how all these deals work these days - and you have instant access to that many people well in excess of the subscription base

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of whichever magazine the person is on the cover. With campaigns, the photographer or designer would previously have to sit down and find the right image, whereas now a model can run six or ten images on their social media, see how it does, and the one with the most likes you have for the campaign. A lot of testing can be done without taking a huge risk of buying a large billboard in Times Square.

**Speaking about barriers to entry, Kanye West recently made waves claiming discrimination in the industry based upon his sexual orientation. While he is obviously prone to hyperbole, are his statements potentially damaging to the industry's willingness to freely discuss new lines and new designs?**

That's an interesting perspective to some extent. People are always going to comment on new lines, any number of editors will comment positively or negatively on what they do. If he wants to come out and actually say something about his own lines or give an explanation for why it's doing the way it's doing is part of the process. But I believe his collection is actually doing quite well. It sold out pretty much everywhere almost immediately. It's another way of marketing. He, and certainly his wife and everyone around him, are extremely good at marketing themselves. The fashion industry is no longer this elitist exclusive club and the landscape is changing completely. Fashion's progressive nature tends to keep it two steps ahead of society.

**Do you think that is due to industry's ability to predict or its ability to shape?**

It's a bit of both. A majority of the high end designers are unquestionably leaders who think outside the box and take risks. And when you take risks, especially in fashion, it's not for the faint of heart. Whatever that risk might be is usually not immediately accepted by the majority of the public at first – it's not understood, or too sexy, scandalous, or outrageous – yet it's also based in dreams and fantasy and that then trickles down. It's always going to be a few years ahead since it always takes some time to accept something.

**Your photography is heralded. Has being behind the lens provided you with a unique perspective on new experiences and the movement of life itself?**

I think so. You become very lucky if you become a successful photographer getting to meet new people and travel the world experiencing and seeing things that many people don't have the opportunity to see. I always try to keep my feet on the ground and appreciate what I'm looking at and also be a part of it, not be a bystander or onlooker capturing something with my lens, but to help sculpt it – to have an opinion and voice of what I'm looking at.

As a fashion photographer you are not a reportage photographer, you're not just shooting something, but taking it and giving it an opinion or a sense of humor. You are a part of that conversation that is going on.

**What is something about you or your early career that perhaps people don't know?**

One of the things people don't often realize is where I come from. I'm part Sri Lankan and part English and modeling was never really in the equation for me. I had intended on studying medicine and studied the sciences in school. It was only when my mother entered me in a competition on TV and the irony is that I went on to judge in another sort of modeling competition with America's Next Top Model but I, myself, got my own break through that exact same type of opportunity and process.

**Finish the following: "I am most happy when I am \_\_\_\_\_."**

I don't want to sound trite, but I'm most happy when I'm with my family and with my children. There's something about my children's innocence and the way they view the world which is so incredibly refreshing and honest. It keeps me grounded in a way that lets you dream. A child can look at anything and see the marvel in it.

**What advice do you have for those trying to make their own path in this fast-paced and ever changing industry?**

Number one is you have to believe in yourself. We live in a world where people are desperate for attention and approval – we're all hoping for likes. The reality is to be a success you have to be willing to be polarizing. You have to be willing to be disliked as much as liked. In fact, sometimes just the fact that you're creating something that is controversial or pushes buttons is the sort of thing that people will take notice of because it has a point of view and perspective that isn't for everyone. There isn't an artist in history that everybody loved. Yes, everyone might think Andy Warhol is cool, but there was a time where everyone thought "what on earth are you doing - a Campbell's Soup can? That's ridiculous." There's the idea that you've got to take the risk and you've got to believe in yourself and say, "I don't care what everyone else thinks, I think this is great and I'm going to do it."

**What will you conquer next?**

I'm actually working on a combination of things. I'm actually coming out with a cookbook soon that I've written with my mother, which is way out of my comfort zone. I've loved cooking for years and always enjoyed it and was taught by my mother. It's a Sri Lankan cookbook full of great ethnic recipes. I love taking on projects that I've never done before and taking on odd challenges.

