

# EYEMAZING



# Alex & Felix

## Queens

In their latest work, *Thirteen Queens*, the Swiss photography duo Alex and Felix have devised a new universe presided over by fantastical queens: they are Queen Vinyl, Queen Marzipan, Queen Happy, and a host of other beguiling divas who wear their realms on their bodies. Every object that adorns their sinewy figures has symbolic value; every queen has her own regal story. Without the use of computers, Alex and Felix hand make every detail of these images in a multi-faceted process that is both painstaking and impassioned. *Eyemazing* talks with the two photographers about the project.

**Clayton Maxwell:** The images in *Queens* are very whimsical. I love some of the more outrageous details, the bread on Queen Spoon's shoulders, the egg carts over the breasts of Queen Happy. Even the names of the Queens are very amusing. Were you going for a very playful tone with the Queen series?

**Alex and Felix:** Yes, indeed. On the one hand we played with material and form, but on the other hand, we looked at it from a more complex and distant point of view. It is also an intellectual piece of work. These are not just funny clothes; although seeking for the details and figuring out what these things are in daily life might be a special pleasure. There is more in it; nowadays, every single person searches for his own way of life. We all want to be somehow different from others. There is a general trend in societies towards individualisation. Everyone proclaims himself king in his own kingdom. But how to be unique in a world where nearly everybody has access to everything, where norms and standards became so important at the same time? At the end of the day, what counts is creativity, spirit and the stories you create yourself. On this note, the queens' clothes stand for the fingerprint.

**CM:** Would you say that the Queen series is very different from your previous work?

**A and F:** In one specific aspect, it is very different from our previous work. In earlier pictures we posed models in complex, picturesque, elaborated sceneries. Now, there is no more complex scenery around the queen, the queen herself wears the scenery. Her clothes became the stage. We consider this as a further development of your work.

**CM:** Please tell me about the process of creating these photos. Do you conceptualise the image first? Do you first do the design on paper? Who creates the costumes and the backgrounds? The images are so richly detailed, how much time does it take to create one from start to finish?

**A and F:** We do it all. We are the designers, the manufacturers and the dressmakers. This is an important aspect. And we do not conceptualise or create on the computer. It is all handcraft. And this is, we think, what probably differs us from others. There is neither planning or designing on paper first. We think and discuss the topic and the quintessence of the work first intensely. Then we search for suitable objects and material we could use for the sceneries. Creating the clothes is a long process and it ends by trying the clothes on display dummies first. Sometimes it takes ages. It is difficult to break down, as it is all different every time.

**CM:** What part of the process do you enjoy the most?

**A and F:** There are mainly two parts we enjoy very much. The moment we look at our work shortly before we take the picture. It is a moment full of satisfaction, because we know that in the very next moment, a mental picture will come true and become reality, in a way. And, of course, to get the final printed picture is a big moment too.

**CM:** Why did you choose to leave all of the queens bald?

**A and F:** There are different reasons. On the one hand, we wanted to give the queens an aura of a sculpture. They are not human; they stand for statements, ideas and stories. As hair is something very close to the human being, our queens need to be bald. On the other hand, there is a technical reason. Reduction leads to attention; the crown is shown to advantage when there is no hair.

**CM:** I would like to know a few things about the specific photos. What is the object across Queen Glitter's chest?

**A and F:** On a visual level, it is simply a cake pan. Intellectually, we use it as a stage. There is a tragedy

going on in this theatre. The queen suffers from inner conflicts. She probably leads an unhappy life, torn between norms, moral questions and personal pleasure.

**CM:** I love Queen Sandwich's headpiece – please tell me how you came up with it, did you yourselves make it?

**A and F:** We made it. These are simply little maps you get in bars or bistros to put your drink. The Queen Sandwich stands for a person living in places such as "St. Pauli" in Hamburg – rather rough places. She could be the one who rescues others, although she is a crude personality herself.

**CM:** Why does Queen Vinyl have a brain on her head?

**A and F:** She is a very intelligent person. She is also calculating, rather cold-hearted, someone who perfectly knows how powerful she is. She is aware of her skills and knows that she is able to affect. She knows that she can easily have an effect on other people and manipulate them. Therefore, her brain is oversized and outside of the body. There is something diabolic as well. Therefore, we chose the colour black as a main colour. The disks stand for something repetitiv – like a curse, being said all the time to manipulate. Queen Vinyl is the most dangerous queen of all.

**CM:** Were there any objects that were particularly fun to work with?

**A and F:** Yes. It happened just recently. Actually, there are 13 pictures—three of them are still in progress. Therefore, we will later entitle the work 13 Queens. There will be a "Queen Marzipan." Her clothes will be light and lucent. One day, in a second hand shop, we discovered a clothes hanger just perfect for this Queen. Of course, for everybody else this clothes hanger would have been just an ugly item with no value, used for selling rather ugly and cheap second-hand clothes. But for us, it was like having found gold. We decided to use this clothes hanger as the Queen's bra. Happy about it, we wanted to buy it, but the lady in the shop said that the clothes hanger was not for sale. We finally offered about 20 Swiss Francs for that old clothes hanger—probably it became the most expensive article in the shop. But still she said it

















© Alex & Felix – Queen Glitter



© Alex & Felix – Queen Slide

was not for sale. Finally, we left the shop without it. There was no chance. But then later on, an employee of the shop surprised us. He brought us the hanger; he had just stolen it!

**CM:** Does every object have symbolic value to you?

**A and F:** Yes, there is no object without symbolic value. Awareness is important for our work. We have a story in mind, which we follow during the whole process. But the story we tell is not the only possible one. We actually love it, when the viewer creates his own story, based on our work.

**CM:** Can you please tell me about your background as photographers? I know you have been a team for over ten years, how did you meet? What were you both doing before you created Alex and Felix?

**A and F:** Alex used to be a goldsmith and also did an apprenticeship as a photographer. Felix used to be a hairdresser, for a short time, and then became a graphic designer. We met at a party and decided there to work together. The first picture we took together was in Felix's flat. We moved everything around – changed the accommodation nearly completely – and from this moment, we knew we wanted to continue to work together.

**CM:** Why do you love what you do?

**A and F:** It is passion. And it is an authentic way of working. We do not design on the computer, as we mentioned before. It is all handcraft, which fulfills our demand for quality and originality. There is no trying and repairing and moving – it is about making a decision and fulfilling it in one go. There is only one chance for every picture.

**CM:** How do you work as a team?

**A and F:** After 12 years, we know each other very well. There are no difficulties – no basic questions need to be discussed. There might be sometimes some very specific obscurities, but nothing we could not resolve.

**CM:** What/who are your influences?

**A and F:** Everything, everywhere and always. We are like sponges. We are as much influenced by football as by medieval painting and the shop window around the corner.

TEXT BY CLAYTON MAXWELL

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