

A MAGAZINE #5

## MARC ASCOLI

An interview with Jerry Stafford.

**How do you define the term art director?**

In the advertising and publishing business there are several kinds of art director but in general it is someone who conceives campaigns or creates the look of a magazine. It's a combination of several disciplines, both visual and graphic. He or she is a concept maker whose aim is to obtain results through a mix of different peoples' talents.

**How does your own approach conform to or differ from this definition?**

Personally I have had a great deal of luck with this job. It all happened in a very organic way. I fell into art direction. I am an autodidact. I didn't study at art school, or follow any particular course.

**And has this contributed to your success?**

Yes, because consequently there are no limitations. At the start of my career I very quickly became responsible for the image of some pretty important people such as Yohji Yamamoto. There was no time to adapt! I was thrown right in at the deep end with people who were looking for new points of view.

**When did you meet Martine?**

I met Martine when I was very young. She helped me get a foot in the door. At the time I had no preconceived ideas, a quality I still uphold. Martine liked my openness. I loved images in quite a naive way, magazine images, and photography in general, and she encouraged me and focused my interests. One of the first birthday presents she gave me was a book of Avedon's work.

**What was Martine doing at this time?**

She was freelancing in Italy, the States, India and I was in Paris where I had started to work with Yohji, and magazines like *Le i* and *Per Lui*. As I had met Martine at the very beginning of my career she had already seen in me certain capacities and competences. As I started to work with other people, I naturally came back to her, and I pushed her to design her own collections. Becoming her art director was a

natural progression. I really understood her taste, and as I lived with her, it was really quite simple. We are a couple, we are soulmates. I have a totally privileged relationship with Martine; it's fresh, unique, and sensitive.

**How did your professional relationship evolve?**

I have quite a particular way of approaching my work. I am quite technical. Even if I am very imaginative and open, I do have certain ways in which I concentrate on and approach my subject. When I first began to work with Martine as art director on her visual campaigns and on her shows, I was very concerned with the idea of one 'auteur' working with another. I am interested in interpretation, and how one talent can compliment another.

**How does this manifest itself on a daily basis?**

I am a projection of her desires. Working with her on a daily basis is a real luxury. We both trust each other implicitly, even if we often disagree. We are not exactly the same! I am perhaps more disciplined, she is perhaps more free-spirited.

**How do you balance the professional and the personal?**

I have always been very lucky in my work because I have never really considered the people with whom I work as clients. Of course, at some point, you have to write an invoice and you have to get paid but I don't have the impression that I'm providing a service.

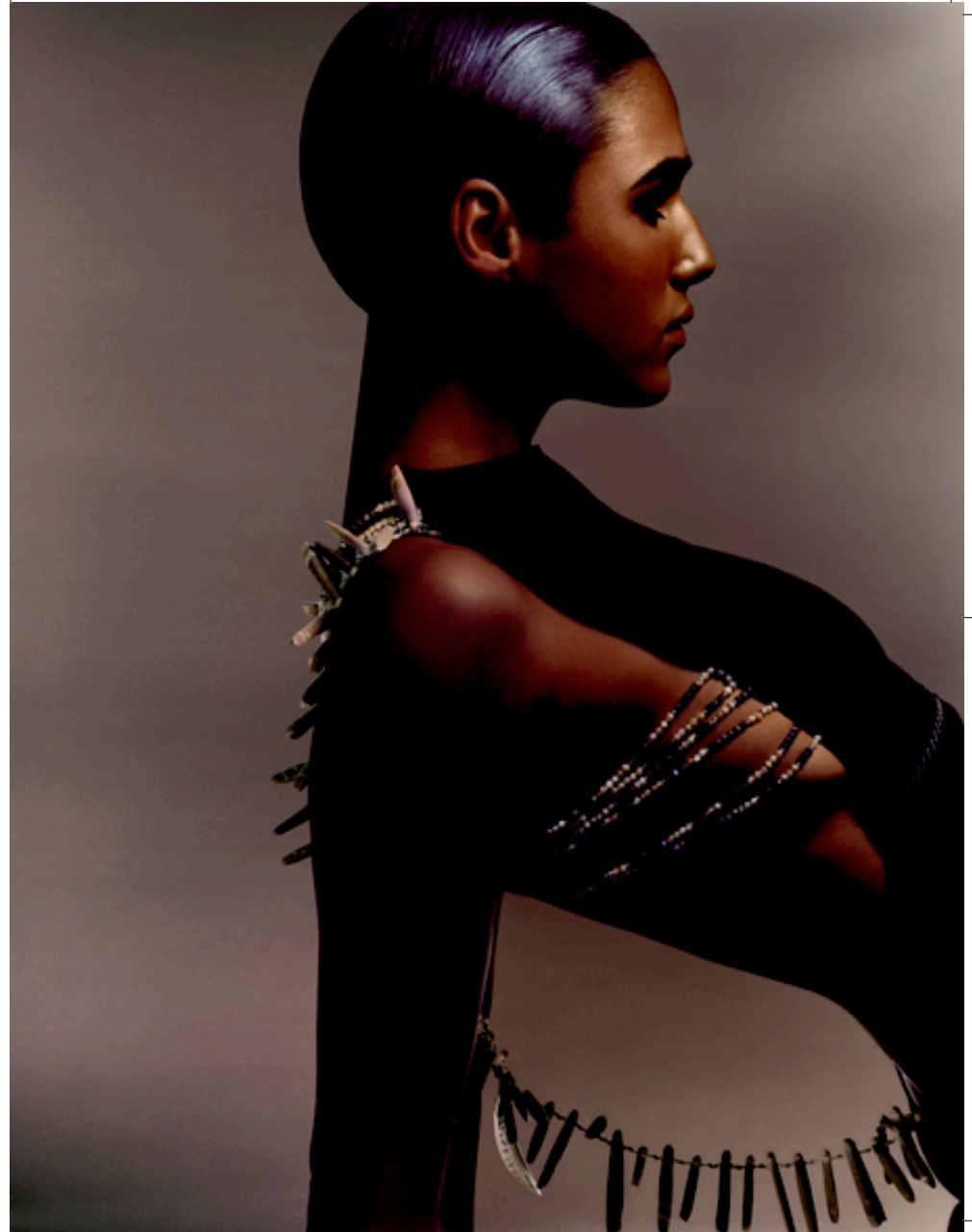
**You surely have to have a certain pragmatism?**

You need to be strong to work in fashion. There are extraordinary highs and terrible comedowns. There are moments when you are forced to stop completely, which is what happened to Martine and I, when you have to find the energy to start again and work towards another type of success. So you do need some kind of discipline, some kind of method to obtain results.

**PHOTOGRAPHY**  
Nick Knight

**MODEL**  
Amanda Cazalet

for Martine Sibon, 1990



**As an art director you also need to be a bit of a chameleon?**

Absolutely. I can adapt. I accept many things. I am above all impressed by the quality of the people with whom I work. I understand people easily. Of course I have my own aesthetic, my own vision, and I am continually feeding myself, but when I am collaborating with a photographer, or a designer like Martine, I strive to align my imagination with theirs, to understand their desires and formulate them.

**The impact of fashion has evolved radically over the last twenty years.**

**How do you equate art with commerce?**

I was very lucky to have started working at the beginning of the 80s, which was a very creative period. I think people that start out now are less fortunate. There was a real separation then between artistic and commercial presentations. Yohji Yamamoto for example was famous for saying that he made clothes for people who didn't exist! My imagination was given free range. I didn't have any constraints, and there were no boxes that had to be ticked. Of course afterwards I worked for other labels including Jill Sander, Chloé and Hugo Boss, all of whose work was much more adapted to 'reality', and this of course brought me towards another way of seeing and possibly a more business orientated approach.

**And how has this been relevant to your approach to the new project with Martine, the label *Rue du Mail*?**

Today we are living in a time of fashion connoisseurs and style gourmets! At the beginning of the 80s, people put fashion on a pedestal. They looked at the shows, the models, the hair and make-up artists from a distance. It was a highly inaccessible, sophisticated world. Mugler, Montana, Jean Paul Gaultier, Yohji all contributed to this very theatrical side of fashion. Now with all these magazines, boutiques, TV shows, websites, information is diffused very quickly. I have known both of these periods and I don't think there is any comparison to be made between the two. Whether it is on the street, on TV, at an exhibition, in a film, or at a concert, fashion is now a mixture of feelings and energies, and you want these to be real. You don't want it to be inaccessible anymore, untouchable and far away. Today we want to share directly in the experience. The vision of the 80s, and the 90s is over, we can't go back.

**What is *Rue du Mail* proposing as an alternative vision?**

It is still early days. In the last year we have set up a new space, and we have shown our first collection. At our address in the Rue de Mail we have created a stage, a platform, where the atelier, the studio, and eventually the boutique will all be at the disposal of the press, the buyers and the clients. Everything happens there. And once more my job as art director has evolved. Now it starts in the studio and reaches as far as the sales. Everything should be complimentary these days. We can no longer pigeonhole things or farm them out, it's old fashioned. The designer shouldn't be put on a pedestal any more, hidden behind a system, pampered by assistants, appearing at the collection and then disappearing, it's no longer relevant. These days what's modern and contemporary is a direct relationship. With this new project I have tried to facilitate a way of breaking down the old system. I no longer believe in big productions, whether it is for a show or for an image. I don't believe in these extraordinary designer shops. I think at the end of the day you want to have a very beautiful jacket, a very beautiful coat, a very beautiful dress.

**How did this new way of thinking evolve?**

The fact that we stopped a machine that had been rolling for nearly twenty years, literally stopped showing and closed the shop, meant that we started up again with a very constructive, new energy. We were able to clean up the past and look at everything again very closely. We decided to take up where we had left off but without all the things, which were unpleasant about the business. We have tried to distance ourselves from the things that dragged us down in the past. We cleaned out our minds. There is a moment when you're carried by an unknown energy and everything just flows. But of course I'm a bit twisted so I'm never satisfied!

**How would you describe *Rue du Mail*?**

*Rue du Mail* is not a mass-market product. It is the product of an independent fashion designer, the mixture of a rock and couture aesthetic, with a sense of quality and contemporaneity.

**How do you envisage eventually complimenting these new criteria visually?**

Today if I was to do pictures with Martine for *Rue du Mail*, I think it would have to be something very sensitive. I don't like many of the ad campaigns you see at the moment. They have no soul, it's all about hard sell. I would still need to find an 'auteur', someone delicate, who could bring his own interpretation to the subject. Not necessarily a photographer, and not necessarily for a magazine. We'll see. I would avoid the obvious. You can't continue to treat people like idiots. You can't just show them the bag and the shoes. That's just treating the consumer like a robot. Image is of course always a form of seduction but today I am interested in a completely different kind of seduction.

**Do you have a motto?**

Martine and I always say that we have our feet on the ground and our heads in the clouds!