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Miles Aldridge: The Photographer With an Undying Love for Women

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In the introduction to the fashion photographer's first monograph, *Miles Aldridge: I Only Want You to Love Me* (Rizzoli), Glenn O'Brien writes, "Planet Aldridge is a luxury world where surreality

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reigns. All is perfect, yet something is amiss. Life is fashion, after a fashion, but this is hardcore fashion, the end of the luxury road."

Though a bit cryptic, O'Brien's words — typed out in a shade of hot pink, no less — serve as the perfect entry into Aldridge's carefully concocted world. The book's 280 pages are filled with 270 photographs of an alterna-adult twist on Willy Wonka. It's a surreal "candy-colored" realm pumped with clashing, oversaturated pop-art colors, with its only inhabitants — immaculately dressed women — staring off into some unknown with dead, vacant eyes. Externally, they are well-groomed, sensual specimens of perfection; yet internally, they appear to be lacking something human.

Every photograph in the book was formerly published in high-fashion glossies like *Vogue Italia*, *Paradis*, *Vogue U.S.*, *Numéro*, *Wallpaper*, *Ponystep*, and *V* magazine. Also included are Aldridge's hand-sketched storyboards. The book, slated to be released in early May, will accompany a show at the Steven Kasher Gallery beginning May 8. The Cut spoke to Aldridge over the phone about his unconventional breakthrough into fashion photography, his musings on the human need for love, and his parents, both of whom he says molded him into the color-adoring artist he is today.

Click through the slideshow for a first look at *I Only Want You to Love Me*, including one shot of cats with ukuleles strapped onto their backs.

You started off as an illustrator. How did you end up in fashion photography?

I went to art school to become an illustrator because I wanted to be like my dad. He [Alan Aldridge] was a very famous illustrator in the sixties and seventies and I thought he had the best job. I went to art school, came out, was an illustrator, and found it *really* boring. Here I was doing watercolors of trees with pound signs on them to explain financial growth. I don't think *anyone* in their mid-twenties should be doing watercolors. It's not sexy enough. [*Laughs.*] So I decided I would either be a film director or a photographer.

And you ended up doing both.

I started making little super-8 art films, things like flowers, close-ups, dogs running across the ground [*Laughs*]. Not very good again, but they were slightly romantic. I ended up becoming a video director, directing pop videos for the Charlatans and the Jesus and Mary Chain. My girlfriend at the time, who was in all these films, was like a dying rose, sickly, but beautiful. When Kate Moss became a model, everyone said, "Your girlfriend looks a bit like Kate Moss, why don't you get her to be a model?" So I took some pictures of her on a stills camera and these pictures ended up going in her portfolio. The portfolio was taken to British *Vogue*, and British *Vogue* said, "Hey, you took these pictures, they're really cool." Then I was called in and the rest is history. I want to be really clear about it, I was not a photographer. I was a sort of mediocre London video

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director.

So you started off as this rookie photographer with close to zero experience, how did your style come into place?

I was not interested at all with anything that had to do with technique. I didn't even know what the camera in my hand was called most times because we would rent them. I was just so interested in the girls. *Fascinated*. In love, in a way. In a stupid way. I still am. But it's kind of like in the way that only someone who doesn't meet enough girls is fascinated by girls, you know? [Laughs.] I'll always remember just having Linda Evangelista in front of me. And looking through the lens, seeing her face there, and pulling it into focus. And I remember asking, "Could you open your mouth?" because I thought that it would make it more beautiful. I took the picture and it was like such an erotic, sexy. You know, it's like with the camera between the man and a woman, you could get away with murder. I'm not, like, gregarious around women.

You used to shoot a lot of covers on white backgrounds. Was color the natural step against doing white backgrounds?

Yeah. It was a reaction to that. It's very hard to change when people book you for one thing. But Franca Sozzani from Italian *Vogue* has been the one who's supported my desire to change and given me the space to. I was [in Japan] for a project and having seen all this black and white Peter Lindbergh work at an exhibition, I remember thinking to myself, "I just have to do color." So then color became a thing.

Do you retouch your images at all?

Interestingly, not as much as you'd think. I shoot on film because — you know, I'm aware of digital, and I shoot a lot of my commercial projects on digital because that's just the way of the world now. Film has a kind of signature to it already from a color point of view. It has a color bias, and a color balance. What I've loved through the history of color photography is that it films an inability to capture truly the real world. To me, it's a no-brainer to continue shooting on film and that's how the colors really are that vivid. If you work digitally, you take a picture and look at the picture. That is completely different. And that, unfortunately, satisfies the eye too quickly.

Since you don't retouch much, do you play around with lighting?

Typically, there's lots of light hanging off of weird contraptions in my studio, but what they tend to do is they tend to trap the person in the picture, like they remove any kind of freedom they might think they have in the picture. And there's an element of photography that is about uncomfortableness historically that I quite like.

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Right, that's completely evident in your work. It's full of these women who look trapped, perfect, but vacant.

You know, unsettling is what I'm interested in. I look at fashion magazines and they tell me that the world is filled with beautiful women. I read the newspapers, and they tell me the world is such horribleness, sadness, and strangeness, and mostly bad things, right? So my work is really a discussion of the two contrary premises. I want to set a sort of unsettling message. But my trick is to sugarcoat it in these bright colors. It satisfies my need to talk about my world and reach an audience through pages of *Vogue Italia* as well as the clothes — but *really* talk about things that I think are part of being a human being right now.

Is this a comment on the fashion world?

No, I don't have the fashion world as my target at all. It's more, this is my experience of my life and the people I know and what I read about in the newspapers and what I see and what I imagine.

You mentioned your dad earlier, but this book is dedicated to your mother. Is there any particular reason as to why?

My father is often equated as being an obvious influence on my work. The truth of the matter is that I hadn't really thought that my mother was an influence. When asked, I'd usually just say, "No, she was just my mum." But actually, the women in my book are quite closely associated with my mother. My mother was really, she was a victim of the divorce, and it was quite unpleasant, and she was left alone after that. And she never really picked herself up, unfortunately. And she died, that was probably twenty years after the divorce. She was really an image for me of someone who was asking these bloody questions, asking "How the fuck did I get here?" I think she'd be happy to know that what she went through is also remembered and it's part of the human experience. And I wanted to share that in my work — people respond to it. They don't need to know the background, but people respond to the elements of melancholy and unease.