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THE STORY BEHIND TIME'S GAME OF THRONES COVER SHOOT

By Alexandra Genova, June 29, 2017



The photography of Miles Aldridge has more in common with Game of Thrones than you might think. His work deftly conjures up fantasy worlds within a cynical, pop-color reality; whole universes with spinning axis of drama and metaphor. Meanwhile, the world of Game of Thrones is so vivid, one feels dragons and white walkers must exist here on earth.

For TIME's Game of Thrones cover shoot, Aldridge artfully blended the two. He wanted to portray the actors as themselves but with a masterful nod to the series' mythical vision. The result is a starkly imagined homage to old Hollywood woven into a heavy tapestry of Medievalism.

His own visual reference points drew on the work of northern Renaissance painters, Albrecht Dürer and Lucas Cranach. Both artists worked within a "bizarre super reality of detail" with top notes of "Protestant Lutheran purity". "These sort of images were fascinating because of their insane attention to detail," Aldridge tells TIME.

This detail is realized through ornate ruffs, thickly embroidered dresses and iconographic props such as flowers and fruit. Sophie Turner holds a half bitten apple, the forbidden fruit in contrast to her angelic halo of hair. Lena Headey,

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meanwhile, stands in front of a table of swollen pomegranates - the symbol of life, rebirth and marriage – suggestive of her character’s fierce maternal instinct.

But, as Aldridge points out, he is a photographer not a painter. “I’m dealing with lights and film and so I don’t like the idea of trying to ape or create paintings, because that seems silly,” he says. “But I like the idea of aping a rather bizarre director’s vision of painting.” His is a culture clash of brash cinema and fine art; and he refuses to treat the latter with any reverential preference.

That meant contemporary suits for the creators D.B. Weiss and David Benioff layered with the motivational psychology of an awkward Renaissance tableau. “What I love about those paintings is the uncomfortableness of them,” says Aldridge. “So my direction to [Weiss and Benioff] was try and feel as uncomfortable as you can...as if you’re really not enjoying this process.”

For the cover photo-composite, Aldridge had to grapple with artfully positioning five people into one frame. For this, he looked to stripped back interpretations of The Last Supper for composition and Cy Twombly for color. Getting five high-profile actors into the same studio was also a challenge and Emilia Clarke – who plays Daenerys Targaryen – had to be photographed two days later and Photoshopped into the final image.

And then there’s the dog. “Whether it’s The Circumcision of Christ or Christ on the Cross, there’s always a dog sniffing around for something,” says Aldridge, by way of explanation. Sid-the-dog only gave him two frames but played the part of “regal hound” convincingly. It’s delicious details like this that lift Aldridge’s work beyond the studio, into a new, fantastical realm.