

# RUVEN AFANADOR

CREATING VISUAL POETRY



Valentino I, 2000, archival pigment print



Valentino (Heidi Klum), Valzuat Ranch, California, 2012, archival pigment print

Colombian-born Ruven Afanador (Bucaramanga 1959) is one of the most sought-after fashion and celebrity photographers worldwide. His iconic portraits, fashion editorials, and advertising campaigns have appeared in the world's most important fashion, celebrity, and portrait magazines such as *Vanity Fair*, *The New York Times Magazine*, *Vogue*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *Elle*, and *Yo Dona*. No less impressive is his list of clients for advertising campaigns: Yves Saint Laurent, Moschino, Hugo Boss, Guerlain, Victoria's Secret, and Bergdorf Goodman, to name just a few.

Afanador's fashion photographs show fashion as an art form and, as such, as a barometer for the spirit of the times. When photographing fashion features, he is not interested in capturing the characteristics of the fabric or the cut, but much more in creating visual poetry in an eccentric, erotic, and colorful manner without sacrificing clarity.

A look at his childhood and early professional career provides a better understanding of Afanador's visual language and his incredible creative drive. Afanador spent his childhood in the sixteenth-century "city of parks," Bucaramanga, surrounded by the high mountains of the Andes, which he remembers as a magical place of mystery and wonder. From there he inherited a strong sense of color, texture, and fabric while watching costume parades with their elaborate Colombian masks, and from pageantry festivals and religious rituals. At the age of fourteen, Afanador moved to the United States, to the Midwest, where he later studied art and discovered his passion for photography. With that passion he would translate simple reality into captivating magnificence. In the mid eighties, Afanador started a career in fashion and portrait photography in Washington County, Maryland. Moving to Milan in 1987 and lacking a studio, his work shifted toward outdoor photography where he used alleys, streets, churches, *palazzi*, and sand castles as props and backdrops for his shootings. At that time he also discovered his love for a specific type of model: elongated torsos, sculpted necks, and long limbs. In 1990, he moved to New York with an immense portfolio of work in his hands, and was immediately embraced by fashion magazines and designers.

The Nicola Erni Collection is showcasing eleven colorful and opulent photographs dating from 2000 through 2012. Each is a fine example

of Afanador's signature-style: bold emotion, refined elegance, and lush classicism, mixed with a sense of drama and passion. Many of his photographs are imbued with a visual lyricism which breathes the rhythm of his Latin American heritage. His gift for storytelling is analogous to the Colombian writer García Márquez, who popularized "Magic Realism," a style which integrated magical elements into real situations. Shoots such as Bimba Bosé for *Yo Dona Espana*, 2010, dressed in Elie Saab, allude to the forbidden parties or meetings of secret societies, held behind mysterious, ancient walls or in castles.

Two pictures featuring the German model Heidi Klum, dressed in magnificent, colorful dresses by Ungaro and Dior, recall a feast scene, a "couture banquet." Props such as stuffed birds, a suckling pig on a dish, fruit, carafes of wine, and bouquets of flowers, symbolize a ritual ceremony, and amidst this intoxication of color is the alluring model Heidi Klum portraying different archetypes of femininity: the seductive vamp and the modern witch (Emanuel Ungaro, 2003, Christian Dior, 2003, both shot for *Vogue Spain*). Together with his series *Mil Besos* (A Thousand Kisses)—an extraordinary collection of images of female Flamenco dancers—Afanador gives us his vision of womanhood: fearless and remorseless.

Whatever Ruven Afanador photographs his images are a lavish visual feast, nurtured by a powerful imagination. Capturing the elegant, the timeless, and the profoundly sensual, he is a true master of photographic lyricism.

Ira Stehmann



Christian Lacroix, *Made in Paradise*,  
*Vogue Germany*, 2001, archival pigment print



Christian Dior (Heidi Klum), *Vogue Spain*, 2003,  
archival pigment print



Emanuel Ungaro (Heidi Klum),  
*Vogue Spain*, 2003, archival pigment print



Yves Saint Laurent, 2006, archival pigment print



Valentino II, dress from 1969 summer collection,  
2008, archival pigment print



Jean Paul Gaultier (Jenny Sweeney), *Paris*, 2007, archival pigment print



Elie Saab (Bimba Bosé), *Yo Dona Espana, Paris*, 2010, archival pigment print



Valentino and Custo Barcelona (Vanessa Lorenzo and John Pedrola),  
*Yo Dona Espana, France*, 2010, archival pigment print



Jean Paul Gaultier II (Bimba Bosé),  
*Yo Dona Espana*, 2010, archival pigment print