



Joe Kesrouani
dabbles in a
surreal world of
art and magic

Born in Lebanon in 1968, Kesrouani studied architecture and learned painting and photography on his own. The world created by his photographs and paintings is a world entirely of his own imagination, bursting with pleasure and danger, where anything goes. Delve into his mind here, then turn to page 104 to see his surreal work.

Why did you move back to Lebanon?

I left Beirut for Paris at 21. I worked closely with renowned architects including, Jean Pierre Gannier and Bernard Khoury; it was a fantastic experience. I came back to Beirut after the Gulf War because I needed a challenge and Lebanon was a virgin in the construction field. Everything had to be planned and built again from scratch.

Define art.

It's a parallel reality where nothing is as it seems...

You have many talents; where do you see yourself the most?

In my three passions: photographer, architect and painter. I don't think too much about things, I just continue doing what I like. It's not work for me, it's all pleasure.

What do you express through your artwork?

My paintings and photographs represent two levels of lived experience: the dramatic, high-contrast black-and-white photographs are charged with confident sexuality, and the subjects of the portraits loom large on my prints. My paintings, on the other hand, blend abstraction and figuration to convey more introverted, emotionally probing narratives. There are stories buried into the layers of paint in each of my canvases.

Is fashion photography more of a job related thing, rather than creative?

Fashion photography for magazines is totally different from my personal photography. To create a good or innovative fashion photographs depends on many things: a good model, an excellent art director with a twisted styling touch. This is why I'm always limited and less creative.

How do you view fashion today?

Still very innovative and inspiring but it's becoming more and more individualised. It's like a remix of multiple fashions.

What style did you follow when you designed the interior for the 961 Bar?

We wanted to keep a certain connection with the brewery so we gave the bar an industrial and minimal atmosphere. Everything is apparent and easily accessible to fix or replace. A floor-to-ceiling grey fence helps minimize acoustic distortion and echoes. The lower level lounge area basically features low tables, couches and chairs. The bar upper level is a few steps higher. The whole "parking lot atmosphere" is accentuated by an epoxy treatment of red and warm light-grey colours. Almost all the materials used are metal and glass, with a little of plywood for the bar top and stairs.

I see you're DJ-ing as well...

I still select music on Wednesdays at Centrale and Fridays at 961 Bar. I do it for fun, for the pleasure of listening to good music.

What inspires you?

Women in specific; everything else in general.

What would you do if you had spare time?

Discover the world...

In the mad world we live in today, what do you despise and what do you admire?

I'll always admire passionate and honest people and will always despise injustice.

What are you working on now?

I'm working right now on a painting exhibition in Dubai for the end of April 2008 at the Artspace gallery.

