

NORMAN CAVAZZANA

# *Creative Renaissance*

BY KATE STANWORTH



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fashion magazine that I didn't care that much for," explained Norman. "So we decided to go crazy and use the shoot to try something totally different." He sketched out some images for their idea, inspired by Czech photographer Jan Saudek's fetish imagery.

Norman shot an unusual-looking model dressed in black-and-white corsets and ornate headdresses, between red velvet curtains. Later, Cavazzana added an assortment of surreal props in postproduction, including gold violins, horses, clocks and classical sculptures. The result was a set of enigmatic, dark and theatrical images in which ornate gold frames, mirrors and symbols encircled the exotic figure.

Both Cavazzana and Norman were excited that their collective creativity had given birth to something entirely new. "Together we were more than the sum of our parts," says Norman.

It wasn't just the artists themselves who loved the results. "We showed the pictures to Swedish fashion publication *Man Magazine* and got two jobs off of it," recounts Norman. "Also Ma & Ma agency in Paris were interested in representing us, and this was even without a portfolio."

Building on their newly found creative rapport, they began to dream up more luscious universes all their own, drawing from a rich variety of influences. In a shoot called "14th Century New York City," for an editorial magazine in New York, they drew from the style of Baroque and Renaissance

When creative director Marco Cavazzana and photographer Morgan Norman met in Stockholm, Sweden in March 2007 they began playfully exchanging photographic ideas. Little did they know that their creative chemistry might lead them to very quickly become self-styled rock stars of the photography world—sharing their studio with superstar angels, dwarves and classical goddesses.

Since they started working together, Norman Cavazzana, as the duo dubbed themselves, have delighted in pushing photographic boundaries with their fashion-centric work. How many photographers would produce fashion images where the model is not even wearing the clothes, or would hire live geese as extras in a shoot?

Letting their imaginations run wild has been key to their tremendous success, which, within two years, has seen

**"Together we were more than the sum of our parts."**

them establish a successful second office in New York. "It seems that people really want something fresh and different," says Cavazzana. "We've had an amazing response from people who love our style."

Italian-born Cavazzana, who had been working as a creative director in Stockholm for eight years, originally spotted Norman's striking fashion images when making his website. "I was inspired, and felt I had to work with him!" he recalls. Norman was more cautious about working together, but soon warmed to the opportunity. "Initially I wasn't sure about the website he'd made me, so it wasn't a perfect start, but we hit it off and began brainstorming. Then we decided to do a shoot together."

"At the time I was working for a Danish

painting. The pair positioned their models against the symmetrical arches of Renaissance and classical architecture and put a great emphasis on creating incredible skin tone and texture. The symbolism of an apple tree also brings to mind the fantastical religious imagery of early Dutch painter Hieronymus Bosch.

Another shoot for Swedish designer Barbara i Gongini sees their model standing naked as the clothes float in the air before her. The effect was achieved through fishing wire against a green screen and waving the garments about on sticks, and later combining the images with those of the model. Despite their clean and stark contemporary style, the images hark back to historical artworks, with the folds of



material recalling the luscious cloth textures of Bernini sculptures.

“We have so many different sources of inspiration,” says Cavazzana. “My background is from Venice, and although I moved to Australia when I was young, I still have relatives in Italy. I was inspired by the Renaissance art there. So that’s the feel we try to recreate, but with a modern twist.”

“Music is also very important to us and we often try to create something which has the feel of music we like,” explains Norman. “We love Muse, Placebo and the Smashing Pumpkins, and are also inspired by music videos and musical films such as *City of Lost Children*.”

“Inspiration can just be as simple as putting on music and going for a walk, or meeting in a bar and discussing ideas,” he continues. “Basically we’re trying to have fun. We’re a bit like a rock band on tour.”

In their first shoot Cavazzana had convinced Norman to shoot on a green screen, something he wasn’t usually so keen on. But it has since become a staple of their style. “I wasn’t sure about it since I hate it when photos look like computer graphics,” recalls Norman. “But it worked.”

A key component of creating their look is using real objects, and never 3D elements. “We have created a stock library of over 3000 images, many of which are from a Swedish TV station’s huge props store,” explains Cavazzana. “Everything we use is real.”

“Chroma key is a real art,” he continues. “Dealing with hair, for example, is really difficult, especially for us, since it is im-



portant to our fashion-based images, but we have gotten good at it and learned the tricks. Now the possibilities are endless.”

A shoot on an island in Stockholm’s archipelago (see “What’s Inside” on pg. 66) marked the duo’s first half-location, half-chroma-key shoot. Inspired by 60s and 70s sci-fi, the results show the model on the rocky calcium cliffs against a fantastical background of rockets, jets and woolly mammoths.

“A problem we have in shoots like this is that the skin reflects the green screen, so we often flash a red light to counteract it,” explains Norman. “Another way to deal with it is to paint the skin. In some shoots we do this straight onto the actual skin of the models, but you usually end up doing it afterwards in Photoshop too.”

The duo do all their own post-production work and believe this not only gives them more control, but makes them more attractive to work with. “People prefer just dealing with one set of professionals,” says Cavazzana.

“In all my work I do a hardcore retouch,” says Norman. “The legs are the element that takes the longest. I just use the clone filter for blemishes since it only really works on small images. Then I spend a lot of time painting on skin tones. We are very particular about the details!”

Their strict attention to detail really pays off when their work is printed on a large scale, something the duo take every possible opportunity to do. “I studied traditional and digital photography so I know how to make a print,” says Norman.



“I shoot them on a Canon EOS-1Ds Mark III, which has 21 megapixels, so they are already quite heavy, but I sometimes interpolate the images too, and I really know exactly how much you can stretch them.”

The largest they have printed is 59x71-inch publicity shots of Björn Gustafsson, a famous Swedish comedian, in which he appears with a painted-on six-pack, dressed as an angel, surrounded by live animals, babies and a dwarf (see pg. 38).

“This was the craziest shoot I’ve ever done,” recalls Norman. “There was a grumpy model, two kids crying, a goose sitting on the green screen and some eager animal handlers shouting at us to hurry up!” The job became a grand publicity stunt for all involved, and the huge canvas



prints were exhibited in ornate gold frames at a theatre in Stockholm during Christmas 2008.

Norman and Cavazzana, unlike most photographers, actively seek the limelight, recently appearing on TV in Finland’s *Top Model*. “We’re not just the usual photographers that are content to blend into the background,” Norman explains. “We have become a brand, in the style of rock stars. We always appear at events wearing black.”

With a whirlwind of success behind the pair in just over two years, where will they go from here? “We’re still developing our style,” Cavazzana explains. “We’re aiming to do cleaner, more high fashion work.”

The pair wants to be free to pursue their ideas wherever they might lead them,

even if it takes them beyond the bounds of conventional photography.

“We’re also developing our own line of jewelry,” says Norman, “and making films. NC Vision is a side project we’re developing, which combines still images and clips. When we do an editorial shoot, we will now also do a film. Fashion films are a trend that’s evolving.”

“It’s all about the concept,” proclaims Cavazzana. “We don’t want to be classified. We’re simply a creative duo.”

To see Norman Cavazzana’s work, visit [www.normancavazzana.com](http://www.normancavazzana.com). CC

*Kate Stanworth is a British-born writer and photographer based in Buenos Aires, Argentina. She currently works as an editorial photo editor and writes on diverse aspects of art and culture in Argentina.*

# what's inside?

## Norman Cavazzana's "Sci-Fi"

By Kate Stanworth

### LOCATION

This shoot took place on Oaxen Island in Stockholm's archipelago. The duo thought it was the perfect moon-like environment for shooting a "Sci-fi" theme and they spent a few hours moving stones around to create a more vibrant scene.

### LIGHTING

A combination of daylight and flash:  
> one main flash with a steel green gel filter to highlight the model  
> a beauty dish positioned above her at a 45-degree angle  
> a backlight with a red gel filter to get a red sci-fi tone

### CLOTHES

Norman Cavazzana originally thought of using 60s-inspired jumpsuits, but opted for clothes by Chloé and Tiger of Sweden, so as not to lose the shoot's fashion angle. Black is their shade of choice and a key part of their brand.

### SKY BACKGROUND

The background is comprised of five different sky images taken from the jetty in Norman's backyard. Cavazzana took the best parts of each image and seamlessly blended them together using different transparent layer masks.

### PRINTING

The duo prefer to print in Sweden at Pro Center ([www.procenter.se](http://www.procenter.se)). They printed this image at 11 x 14 inches for their portfolio and at 39 x 59 inches for exhibition.

### GREEN SCREEN

A green screen was set up behind the model so Norman Cavazzana could later extract the background and create their own. The rental company from whom they got the green screen forgot to give them the right stands so assistant Andreas Smitz rigged up a temporary solution with a lot of tape to combat the wind outside.



### SHOOTING

The image was taken by Norman with a Canon EOS-1Ds Mark III. He didn't use a tripod because he didn't want the pictures to be static. Norman shot in RAW mode, at ISO 100 using a Canon 85mm f/1.2 lens. He took the image at a shutter speed of 1/250 and an aperture of f/11 in order to get it sharp all the way from the model to the green screen.

### MAKEUP

Established Stockholm makeup artist Sophia Eriksen evened out Lisa's skin using foundation, which meant that Norman Cavazzana didn't have to retouch the skin in postproduction, especially on the legs. The face was intentionally left simple and stylish.

### PROPS

Norman Cavazzana rented props from a Swedish television props warehouse and shot them all on a green/blue screen in a small studio. The rockets are actually laser pistols.

### POST PROCESSING

The processing was all done in Adobe Lightroom and kept as plain as possible as the duo wanted to retain details to work with in the shadows and highlights.

Cavazzana received the RAW files after the pair had selected the images and used Primatte Chromakey and After Effects Keylight to remove the chroma key. He then used both Adobe Photoshop and Bridge to sort and key the props individually, placing them all in the main composition. Once he was satisfied with the results, Norman took over and worked on making the model and artwork seamless. He then did the beauty retouch, and finally the duo added the overall tone to the image.

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