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New York-based Singaporean Photographer John Clang's (Con)Front Exhibition

June 11, 2010

by *Taina Teravainen*

He was born Ang Choon Leng, but adopted the moniker that he was given during National Service – John Clang – in order to break into fashion photography. The 37-year-old has been living in New York for more than a decade, and has shot for brands like Godiva, Hermes and Nike, but still sees himself as a Singaporean, and an artist.

[herworld.com](#) sat down with John at 2909 Gallery at Mount Sophia, where his newest exhibition will be held, and he shared with us his views on art, beauty and life.

(Con)Front by John Clang runs from 11 June – 3 July.
Hours : Tuesday – Saturday: 11am – 8pm. Sunday, 1 – 6pm.

Visit [John's website](#) to view more of his work.



The artist, John Clang

What made you drop out of LaSalle at just 17 and later move to the States at 25?

At that moment, LaSalle wasn't as established as it is today. I decided that I could learn much faster being an apprentice, specifically for photographer Chua Soo Bin. I called him up myself and then everything started from there.

Does living in New York inspire you in different ways from the time you spend in Singapore?

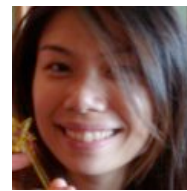
Living in New York allows me to look at Singapore from the outside. It gives me the time and distance to contemplate my self-identity, which a lot of my work revolves around.

Do you think the ability to take good photographs or create art is something a person is born with, or can it be learnt?

It comes from life experience. You can be born with passion and interest, but you need to also develop an acute sense of observation for things going on around you, or else all the photographs you take won't have depth, just surface matter.

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I don't keep in touch with any of those friends whom I made the bands for anymore...

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From John Clang's Self-reflection series

How do you decide what to shoot? Do you view every photograph you shoot as art?

I don't bring my camera with me when I go out. I write down notes of what I see, what inspires me, what thoughts they provoke. When I decide to create an image, it's always with a purpose: to record those moments, like sort of a mental diary. I can go back to an image from years ago and feel the exact same sentiments. All my photographs aren't snapped at random, they're actually re-creations.

In 2002, in a somewhat controversial spread for Nu You magazine, you paired your friend Beon, a cobbler whom you described as having an inferiority complex, with model Jessie Leong, as her boyfriend, and made him look desirable and wanted by someone, which is uncommon based on media standards today. What exactly is beauty to you?

It all boils down to the confidence a person has. Of course we are all attracted to physical beauty, but beyond that, a person needs to be confident and have a willingness to be seductive. I've known Beon for years, and he's always thought of himself as ugly and short. The point of the shoot was to show him what he could be, if only he had the confidence in himself. If you look in the mirror and tell yourself that you're ugly, your day is just going to be awful. Reach beyond that - focus on your personality, your character, your strengths, and the way you do things. Those aspects of a person matter more to me, because they last forever.



From John Clang's Guilt series

We'll get to see a video installation at (Con) Front. What made you progress in this direction?

This particular series I'm doing involves portraits of my family while they're in Singapore and I'm in New York. It shows how a family reunion is possible through technology, but the distance and the longing as well. This is probably going to be the only video of my parents that I'll do, because eventually they'll pass on, and this video will be monumental then. I won't reveal too much, you'll just have to see it for yourself.

In regards to your Guilt series, if there was one thing you could change about the way you've lived your life, what would it be?

I guess I would have studied hard to become a surgeon. It's purposeful, and I could have stayed in Singapore. Looking back though, I probably would have still done the exact same thing. I don't live with regrets, but with the conscious knowledge of the decision that I've made. It was a selfish decision to leave my parents, hence the guilt.

What would you like casual photographers to remember when they next pick up a camera?

See with your eyes, not the camera. Don't rush to take a shot, because you'll lose the opportunity to absorb and experience the moment. Frame your shots with your eyes.

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Marry a man, marry his family?
Littlewoman: After hearing so much "stories" from all of you, I am really glad not to be put into such ...

Husband having relationship with other wife
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Sex without Kissing or Foreplay?
Littlewoman: Guys does not reach orgasm right from the start too, isn't it? Unless they are high on alcohol or a...

What does it take to keep a man faithful?
Littlewoman: To be fair, I think both parties, either the women or the men have the tendencies to straying from ...

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Would you change your outfit just because your man doesn't approve of it or doesn't like it?

- Yes, I'd feel self-conscious knowing that he doesn't like what I have on.
- No. I'd wear whatever I feel like wearing, even if he thinks it's ugly!

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