

10

QUESTIONS

Rohit Chawla



The photographer on his calendar art tribute to Frida Kahlo and literary greats

1 You recreated Frida Kahlo's paintings for the Free Da! Birdgroup calendar 2012. Recreated, literally, because every prop and backdrop had to be made. There was no Photoshop magic. I reinterpreted Frida with an Indian sensibility. Sabyasachi redid all the costumes; he is the only artist among designers.

2 How did you choose your 'Fridas'? I needed people who could convey Frida's spirit. Sonal Mansingh, like Frida, had an accident that broke her spine. Anjolie Ela Menon used to paint exposed hearts, as did Frida. Mithu Sen is an artist of this generation.

3 Frida is the third artist you have used? I started the artist series with Raja Ravi Varma, Gustav Klimt. Today's banal contemporary art milieu needs to look to the masters.

4 Who's up next? Paul Gauguin. We might shoot in Bora Bora.

5 You did author portraits for a Jaipur Litfest calendar this year. Great minds intimidate me. But in those 30 minutes spent photographing writers like Orhan Pamuk, Wole Soyinka, Vikram Seth, I could bully them into doing what I want!

6 How do your calendars help art? It's a great medium to democratise art. Calendars reach thousands of art lovers, rather than a solitary collector buying my work.

7 Is this fine art or pop art? Call it fine art photography or pop art. Pop art is not a bad word, Andy Warhol made it respectable 50 years ago.

8 Your advertising experience comes in handy? It gave me technical finesse and discipline. Today, there's more honesty in advertising than in art.

9 India still doesn't think photography is art? To an extent, yes. People would rather buy a bad oil painting than a good photograph.

10 What's your next project? A book to document 20 years of my Polaroid shots.

Arpita Basu