

METAMORPHIC BUBBLES

Having garnered much attention for his visually potent *Dragon Garden* series last year featuring singer Kay Tse, photographer **Olaf Mueller** is poised to dazzle the art world again with the surreal *All Under Heaven*.
Christie Lee reports.



Divine Intervention by Olaf Mueller



Olaf Mueller combines a keen photographic eye and an acute sensitivity to the environment

Who? Hong Kong-based German-Korean Olaf Mueller had a promising career in banking and finance before making the unexpected U-turn of becoming a fashion photographer. Since founding OM Studio in 2007, Mueller has snapped the likes of Sharon Stone, Macy Gray, Douglas Kirkland and a host of local celebrities. Despite accruing 22 honourable mentions at the International Photography Awards, he remains far from satisfied. Always on the lookout for new challenges, Mueller has expanded his artistic repertoire and now considers himself part-fashion photographer and part-image creator. While the former continues to satisfy his impassioned hunger for fashion, the latter provides him with a freer platform to channel his creative – and often surreal – endeavours.

What? Titled *All Under Heaven*, Mueller's first solo exhibition at the Cat Street Gallery features 12 works of grandiose scale, both in terms of physical attributes – the largest image is two-and-a-half metres wide – and bearing. Shot in the mountainous region

of Guangxi, China, the photographs are heavy on the local colour, with the Longsheng rice terraces, local fishermen and women from the ethnic Yao minority all given prominence. As with past works, Mueller finds using water as a medium of art fascinating. "Water is so fluid and so versatile - I want to experiment with the different forms it can take," he notes.

Inspirations Taking his cue from Spanish surrealist painter Salvador Dali (*The Persistence of Time*) and American portrait photographer Annie Leibovitz, Mueller has established a name within the art community for his imagination and use of cinematic effects. His juxtaposition of conventional photographic methods with modern digital technologies pushes artistic boundaries. Conceived with a 12-man production team and months of pre- and post-production work, *All Under Heaven* is less a coincidental splash of colours than a combination of Mueller's keen photographic eye and acute sensitivity to the natural environment.

Hallucinatory hues The bubbles were as much meticulous experimentation as accidental occurrence. Shooting in a pitch-dark studio, it took Mueller two months and some 15 flashlights to create what he dubs the "perfect giant bubble". Taking centre stage in all of the images, the soap bubbles exude a hallucinatory vibrance that is at once hypnotic and haunting. Not only are we being transported to a world where nature seems to freeze, but also where structural links are being broken. Of the latter, *Heart of Zest* and *Chain Reaction* are perfect illustrations. The seeming symmetrical harmony, as exhibited by the soap bubbles in both images, is quickly undermined by subtle differences upon closer inspection. Amid a chain of sublime explosions, *All Under Heaven* ultimately questions the boundaries – or lack thereof – of art and nature.

Where & when? June 9 – July 9.
Cat Street Gallery, 222 Hollywood Road, Central, tel: 2291 0006, website: www.thecatstreetgallery.com



Oscillation



Chain Reaction



Heart of Zest