

# Bubbling

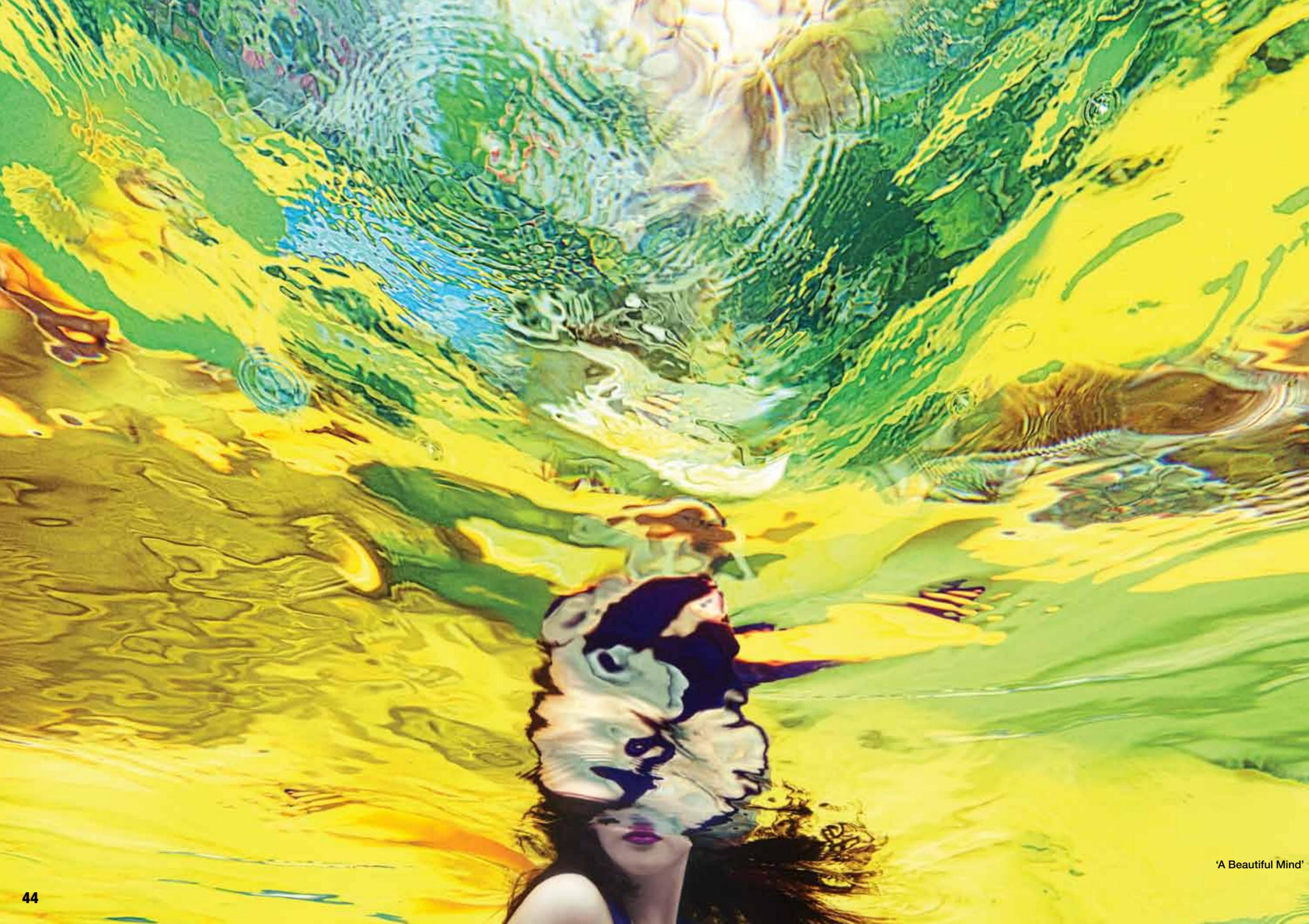
# Up

OLAF MUELLER, THE MULTI-TALENTED PHOTOGRAPHER OF ART, FASHION AND CELEBRITIES HAS OUTDONE HIMSELF YET AGAIN BY TEAMING UP WITH THE WORLD'S TOP CHAMPAGNE BRAND VEUVE CLICQUOT TO CREATE A UTOPIAN FANTASY OF THE GOLDEN BUBBLY VARIETY. THINK OF A SEA OF CHAMPAGNE NYMPHS BURSTING FORTH FROM YOUR GLASS OF VEUVE CLICQUOT! THE BREATHTAKING UNDERWATER IMAGES SWALLOW US DEEP INTO THE HONG KONG-BASED PHOTOGRAPHER'S SURREAL WORLD, AND THE BEST PART OF ALL IS THAT IT'S IN AID OF THE CHARITY OPERATION SMILE.

• WORDS: ANDRE COORAY IMAGES: OLAF MUELLER



'Equalizer'



'A Beautiful Mind'



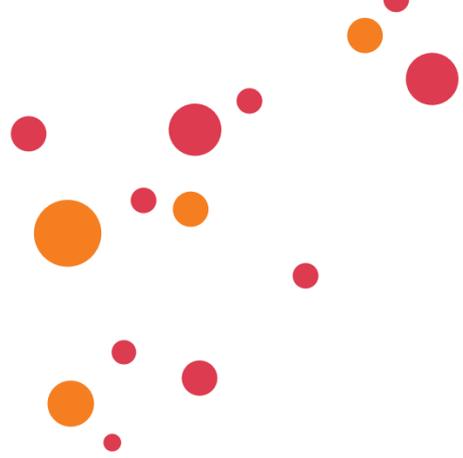
Inspired by Veuve Clicquot, Olaf Mueller's latest series of photographs are intoxicating to say the least. "For every art shoot and portrait that I do, I always come up with something new and challenging for myself. So this time I thought I'd shoot underwater and play with the element of bubbles because that's what champagne is all about. I also knew shooting underwater would create a very divine, timeless and calm image which I think represents the Veuve Clicquot brand," says the highly imaginative artist whose entire oeuvre comprises luxurious, romantic and beautiful images.

Speaking of beautiful, Hawaiian model Jocelyn Luko is the sexy deep water creature captured on camera by Mueller. In fact, he constructed a four foot wide acrylic plate that was made to float underwater atop a bubble machine to simulate Luko floating in a champagne glass. "Originally she was wearing a black dress but it kept slipping down and her legs were caught up in the fabric. So after going through a couple of dresses we found one that just worked perfectly. It's blue and because underwater everything becomes bluish it turned into this even deeper blue hue that gave it a more dreamy effect," he reveals.

The image selected to be auctioned for charity at the Veuve Clicquot event in conjunction with The Cat Street Gallery and The Antithesis, entitled 'In High Spirits' (and indeed the masterpiece of the collection), features Luko in numerous underwater poses in the shape of a giant champagne glass, personifying the experience of enjoying the sparkling liquid gold. All the images included in Mueller's latest series create a sense of power and confidence that is synonymous with the champagne brand. In another superbly choreographed image, Luko is in an Olympic gymnast type pose with a string of lights woven around her body. "I call it 'Neutral Buoyancy' because she floats in the image so perfectly," adds Mueller. He continues to explain that the title is borrowed from a diving term used to describe the right amount of air you need to float.

In the thought-provoking piece 'A Beautiful Mind', the model is pictured half above and half below the water. "It was at this split moment when I got this amazing reflection and the top of her face looks like a mask – it's impossible to replicate that ever again. So it was really that one moment that made it golden," he confesses. The shape of the 'mask' can be likened, albeit rather loosely, to a colourful Rorschach ink block test and therefore construed as hiding the windows to her beguiling soul. The image is also set against a captivating watery backdrop combining a regal yellow with splashes of purple and green.





Mueller combines warm red and yellow hues, and morphs Luko and her surroundings into something even more abstract in 'Intoxification.' "For that shot I actually placed a tree underwater and shot bubbles up from underneath. Then I used a colour inversion technique to make it red. So some of this footage I had already created the day before the shoot with Jocelyn so that I could focus all my attention on her," he recalls. Mueller enjoys mixing fantasy with reality to the point where the two merge and no one can tell exactly which is which. This comes from his ability to seamlessly combine his expert camera and lighting techniques with his flawless digital post-production skills.

For one of his previous projects, Mueller photographed actor Simon Yam and set a car on fire for the shoot. The picture depicts the local actor walking away from a burning car and according to the lens master, everyone thought it was crazy to burn a whole car for the sake of one image and therefore automatically assume that it's not real, but it most certainly is. Adding to people's disbelief are the sharp vibrant flames which do give it an unreal quality. "Basically, whatever I create, it's all about the detail. It's all about manifesting a very crisp image. We don't see that stuff with our own eyes. So in that way I create a fantasy picture that carries people away. I always try to produce images that take you into your own world, but in a good and positive way."

The young German photographer lets his imagination run wild and is building a reputation for his elaborate sets, cutting-edge concepts and ability to stitch it all seamlessly together in post production. "I've found a hybrid and that's exactly what people find refreshing about my work because I combine the digital element, fashion and 'real life' on location photography as well as art," says Mueller. His previous series entitled 'Dragon Garden' for The Cat Street Gallery which sold out on opening night, involved sweeping theatrical sets, and models that were suspended in the air with wires. Again, like his current images, they were visually stunning, vibrant and like nothing else Hong Kong has seen before.



'Intoxification'

Mueller, who is half German and half Korean, started his career in front of the camera as a model in Singapore at the tender age of 16. However, he soon felt that he could do a better job than the photographers that were shooting him, and decided to cross over. Equipped with his father's camera, he began photographing his model friends and school mates, and was even mentored by a close fashion photographer friend. Despite his interest and innate talent, he thought of it as a hobby and never dreamed that it would be his career. Thus, he temporarily ignored his calling and obtained a BBA at the prestigious European Business School.

Upon arriving in Hong Kong to take an MA at Hong Kong University, Mueller met his future wife Jessica and decided to nest in Hong Kong. At first he did a range of jobs from a successful stint in real estate to being a dealer of Siberian mammoth tusks. It was only when his wife opened her wedding planning business that he seriously picked up the camera again to do wedding photography. Fast forward to the present, and it's clear that photography is something Mueller, with his aesthetic for beauty and eye for fashion, was born to do.

In 2007, Mueller opened his own company OM Studio, and has since photographed a host of local and international celebrities including Sharon Stone, Macy Gray and Kay Tse, not to mention his work that has been featured in countless high-end magazines. His latest offering for Veuve Clicquot in aid of Operation Smile marks his second major charitable endeavour, the first being in support of AIDS Concern last year.

And as the editor of this magazine would say, "You've come a long way baby!"

'In High Spirits'



## Art Smile

A diverse range of local and international artists have been commissioned to create an artwork inspired by the world renowned Veuve Clicquot champagne. The works will be exhibited for sale at Hong Kong's premier Private Member's Club, KEE with proceeds going to The Cat Street Gallery's principal charity, Operation Smile.

Artists include: one of London's most important young talents, the post-pop artist Stuart Semple; Hugo Dalton of the Fine Arts Society, London who is famed for his innovative line drawings and murals; Hong Kong's premier celebrity photographer and a Korean-German artistic phenomenon in his own right, Olaf Mueller; the contemporary British print maker Sara J Beazley and her vintage inspired work; American sculptor and ceramicist Elise von Stolk; British artist Richard Winkworth and his timeless encaustic paintings; and introducing Gina Soden, an emerging UK photographic talent from the underground 'urbexing' scene.

Local artists contributing artworks to the event include illustrators Jonathan Jay Lee and Gabrielle Tuscher and photographer Lakshmi Harilela.

The event will take the format of an exhibition reception from 6 to 8pm on 29th September 2010. At this time all artworks will be available to buy, with proceeds going to Operation Smile. Upon invitation VIPs will be offered the opportunity to participate in an exclusive champagne tasting dinner in the KEE Dining Room from 8:30pm on the same day. 100% of the dinner ticket price will go to Operation Smile. The exhibition highlights, a painting by the highly sought after British artist Stuart Semple and a photographic image by Olaf Mueller, will be auctioned at the dinner.