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INDUSTRIA'S REVOLUTION

Take a photographer from LA and a Dutch illustrator/window dresser, shake vigorously and you get Indüstria, a graphics combo whose surreal collages are pepping up a jaded style press and starting to make elegant forays into advertising. Tim Kirby reports

Brad Branson and Fritz Kok are experts in the art of collage. Their first joint venture, an underground art club called Power Tools, had all the ingredients for a kind of living collage: take a random selection of celebrities — Annie Lennox, Nina Hagen, Rupert Everett, the inevitable Warhol — and juxtapose them with a backdrop provided by an unsalubrious Los Angeles suburb where the favourite local pastime is torching parked cars.

Since then, Branson and Kok have continued their collagist collaboration through the medium of photography and illustration, working under the name Indüstria. Branson's tungsten-lit sepia and selenium prints have something of the glamour of studio portraiture from the Golden Age of Hollywood, while Kok's backdrops and collage work are heavily influenced by the work of Bauhausers Moholy-Nagy and Oskar Schlemmer. An unlikely combination, but that's the essence of collage.

They are themselves a bit of an unlikely combination. Kok, 28, was born in the Netherlands and studied fashion design and illustration at the Rietveld Academy in Amsterdam. In 1984, he decided to go to Los Angeles "to see what it was like". He stayed for three and half years, working as an illustrator, clothes designer and window dresser before teaming up with Branson.

Branson, 25, is a native Los Angelean who, at the age of 17, walked into LA's premier photographic lab, Photo Impact, and demanded a job. "I realised one day that I was spending all of my money on photographic supplies, so it seemed like a good move," he says. With photographers like Herb Ritts ▷

Kok: 'As the name Indüstria suggests, we approach what we do as a kind of mechanical process. Every job is split into pre-production, production and post-production. For the shoot and the printing, Brad usually works alone, but the collage is much more democratic and experimental'



Indüstria collage: Half playful



Woodhouse ad: Press work



Boy George: Provided his own props

◁ coming through the door every week, it was also the perfect place for contacts. It wasn't long before Branson was shooting portraits for *Interview*, *Rolling Stone* and *Vanity Fair*.

These two mis-matched CVs collided thanks to mutual friends and, following the success of Power Tools, they started toying with the idea of combining their creative talents. Their first commission as Indüstria came in early 1987 from outsize style mag *Manipulator*.

The picture, an illustration for an article on "fashionism", contains all the elements of their current style: a Branson photograph shot against one of Kok's painted backdrops, the final print embellished with a collage made of the obscure newsprint that Kok collects. Kok also provided the back.

"As the name Indüstria suggests, we approach what we do as a kind of mechanical process," explains Kok. "Every job is split into three phases of pre-production, production and post-production. In pre-production we'll work together researching and planning concepts, doing a storyboard, finding the right models and getting the material together. For the shoot and the printing Brad usually works alone, but the collage bit is more democratic and experimental, half pre-planned and half playful."

Having decided to concentrate on "fashion portraits", the pair left LA for Europe at the beginning of this year. These days they flit between Amsterdam and London with the occasional detour via Munich.

Their first real break over here came from *Blitz* fashion editor Kim Bowen, who provided three key commissions. Since then they've done more fashion work for *Manner Vogue* and *Interview* and made their first foray into advertising, with a poster campaign for Top Shop and a press ad for men's fashion chain Woodhouse.

But their greatest triumph, purely in terms of personal satisfaction, was seeing one of their *Blitz* pictures at the Victoria and Albert's "Fashion and Surrealism" exhibition, hanging nonchalantly between a Man Ray and a Dali. "That", says Kok, "is the kind of company we like to be in." □

THE MANIPULATOR



Manipulator cover: Embellished with collage made out of the obscure newsprint which Kok collects