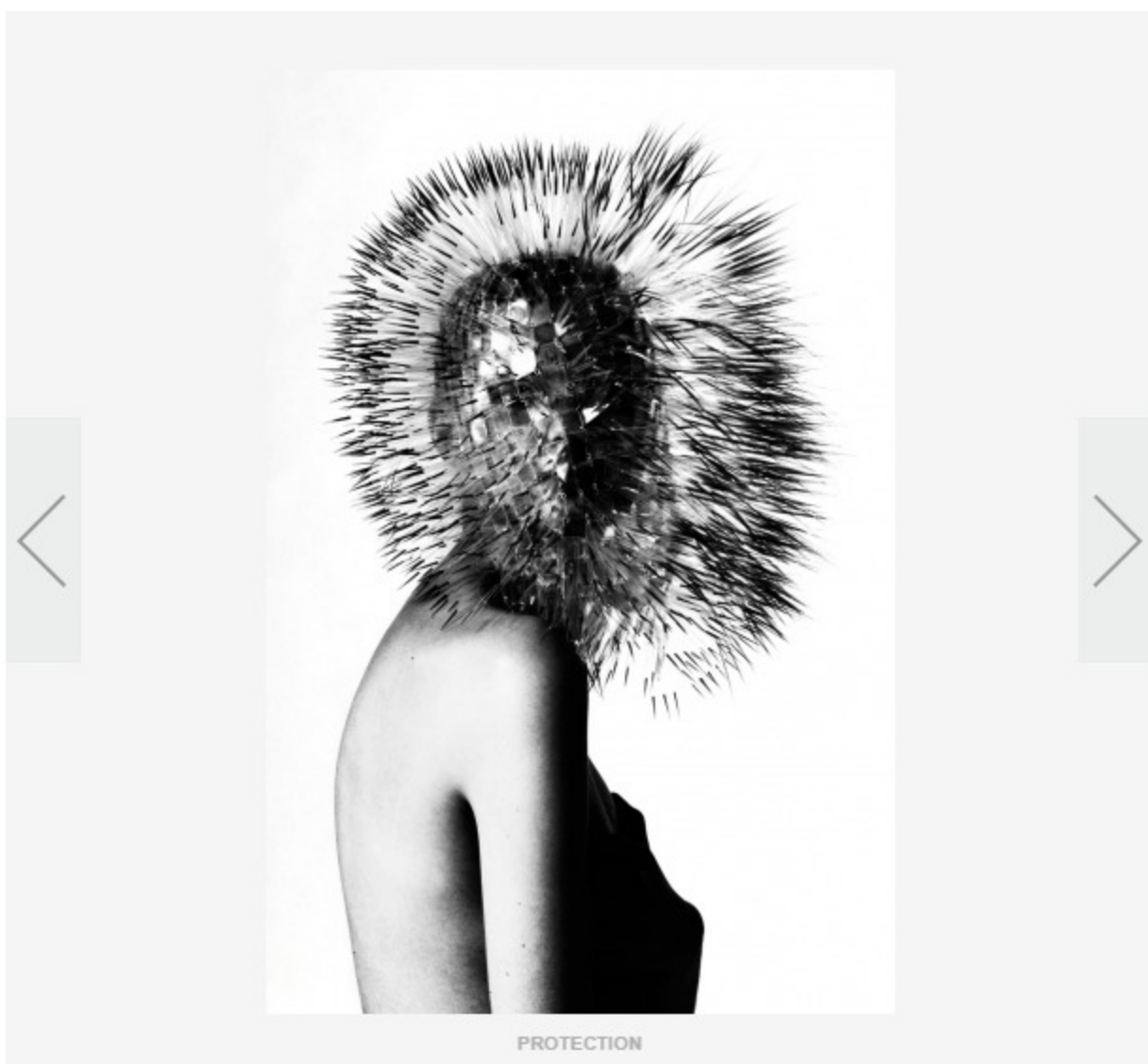


CULTURE » WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT RAM SHERGILL

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WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT RAM SHERGILL

BY SONAM SAVLANI

He was short sighted till the age of seven.

"I grew up in London, and I grew up quite short sighted. I loved cinema but everything I saw was a blur. Everything looked very attractive, it looked a painting. So I created fantasies in my head. When I watched movies at the cinema, like *Sholay*, or television I would sit right up front – all I could remember were the colours and the movement. I got it corrected when I was seven years old."

His brother (unwittingly) got him started.

"I was seven and my brother was nine. He had a Zenith-EM camera, a Russian camera – pretty basic. And he had all these filters that went on the camera. And I was quite jealous that he was doing these magical tricks with it. He used to take pictures of me. Then I started toying with it and using it secretly."

He got a fashion 101 from Isabella Blow.

"I took up photography at Wolverhampton University and I had a project on hats. So I phoned a friend who said she knew a milliner – Philip Treacy. I called him and asked if I could borrow his hats for a shoot and he didn't sound very happy. When I went to meet him, in his house was a lady who was smoking a cigarette, she had a big Hoover hat on, she was wearing Manolo Blahnik shoes, an oriental silk gown and she had lipstick smudged on her face. That was Isabella Blow, and she asked me, 'My dear boy, are you Indian?' 'Yeah,' I said. And she said, 'My family is from Sri Lanka, you must come to my apartment after your shoot.'

I went to her apartment and she offered me a biscuit. I said, 'Thanks, I've just had lunch.' But she insisted. So I ate the biscuit and it was as if it had been sitting on the mantel for at least two weeks! She was wonderfully eccentric. She led me into the world of fashion and she introduced me to Alexander McQueen."

He learned the true meaning of macabre from Alexander McQueen.

"When I met Alexander McQueen, his jeans were just about hanging off his bottom. He saw my work and said this is good but let me show you some *real* pictures. And he showed me works of a photo artist called Joel-Peter Witkin, featuring dead mutilated bodies, decapitated heads, kissing each other. And I thought who are these people?! I didn't know what macabre meant. But the stories they shared with me stayed with me, and influenced my work."

He's kicked about meeting his icon.

"I was in Hyderabad recently when I got a call from Raghu Rai saying he appreciates my work. And growing up as a student, I used to look up to him and admire his work, so it was huge for me. He was asking me about what cameras I like, what I use. So when I meet him in Delhi – I've never met him – I'm going to show him my camera."

He wants to see emotion.

"When I look at a picture – even if it's not my own photograph – I look for emotion, something that will provoke my eye. Even if an image isn't technically perfect. I have this wonderful book by Richard Avedon called *Performance*. It's one of my favourite books. There's just so much emotion in the images."

He's just having fun with his first solo exhibition in India.

"*Kaleidoscope* is the first show that I am doing here, so I wanted all the images to have some relevance to India. It's not my life's work, we've edited it down to about 35 to 40 pieces."

Click through to see exclusive images from his show.

Kaleidoscope is organised by Tasveer in partnership with Vacheron Constantin and is on from August 13 – 25 at StoryLTD, Industry Manor, 3rd Floor, Prabhadevi, Mumbai. Tel: 022-2436 4113

Photographs: Ram Shergill/Tasveer and Vacheron Constantin

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