

Rankin

by Silvia Bombardini



Dear Shaded Viewers and Diane,

You wouldn't guess it by thumbing through, but a couple of decades already have gone by, in countless flashes and clicks, since the first issue ever of Dazed & Confused was gifted to a London on fire with the promise of the 90s, of UK garage and Cool Britannia. Luckily though, we can trust the British appetite for their Bright Young Things not to have faded once since the 1920s, and as long as we'll have Rankin to pick them up from the crowd and frame them for us, we'll be alright. Now in its 6th issue, his youngest Hunger is true to its name: uncompromised and indulgent, it keeps feeding us talent and footlights. Photographer and publisher extraordinaire, Rankin told me a bit about his roots, about film and confidence and printed matters, and the latest book he's now working on, "Fuck You Rankin".

Silvia Bombardini: Currently on shelf across the country, Hunger issue 6 celebrates the pride and joy in being British, nowadays almost as much of an attitude as it is inherent. A traditional kind of restlessness and flair, a Lost Boys' sort of perpetual youth. Being Scottish yourself, and from Glasgow no less, how do you reckon your roots to have influenced your personality, your views and your success?

Rankin: Yeah being Scottish is of course a massive influence, it's those formative years that are really important. When I was younger, we actually moved around quite a bit with my Dad's job, so although I was born and spent the first 10 years of my life in Glasgow, we later relocated to North Yorkshire then finally onto St. Albans in Hertfordshire. We were lower-middle class and so my only connection with art or culture at that time was through watching film. My dad would often take me to the cinema and I found myself really seduced by the imagery, I think this had a massive impact on how I viewed the world. I remember driving around with my parents when I was little and looking out of the window and being very aware that it was the shape of a film screen when you went to the cinema. This was how I first saw the world, framed through a car window. My Dad also taught me that the English upper class are sent to school to be taught to be confident, whereas in Glasgow you're born confident. I've always thought that pretty much summed me up. Born confident.

S.B.: A precious piece of advice you sometimes give to newbie photographers is in fact "to be 51% your own greatest admirer, and 49% your greatest critic". One that would best be followed by any hopeful and bright creative soul, not last those 20 young stars on your constellation of Mighty Blighty covers. Do you recall the last time you applied such mantra yourself, to your own work?

R.: This morning, every day! You have to believe in what you're doing otherwise what's the point? But equally, it's also important to be honest enough about your work, and the areas in which you can improve. I'm still learning every day and I'm still Hungry to create more and better work, hence the name.

S.B.: Talking about those covers, do you have perhaps a personal favourite? I am particularly fond of James McAvoy's myself. And which one instead has been the most fun to shoot?

R.: Ah, am glad you approve! I really like that one too and it is one of my favs'. Actually there is point in case- as it wasn't supposed to be a cover but the art director Calum choose it and we all loved it – I had to listen to what he was saying and be prepared to be critical of my opinion.

In terms of other favs I feel too loyal towards everyone I worked with to be able to single out a particular one as more special, they're all so unique. For fun Jamie Campbell Bower is always excellent to shoot – he's such a laugh and I have known him for years. He'll go very far I think. Then probably Ella Eyre excites me as raw talent that will explode.

S.B.: In 1992, together with Jefferson Hack, you launched the beloved mother hen of independent publishing that today is *Dazed & Confused*. In a recent interview with *The Guardian*, you recalled: "that was always the difference at *Dazed*. I watched a lot of TV; Jefferson read a lot of books". How has or hasn't your taste changed over the past two decades, and what part does this so-called low culture still play in your youngest *Hunger*?

R.: Ha! That's a good quote. What has changed? I guess not that much really! Of course there's been advancement and change over the past two decades, culturally, economically and of course digitally but essentially we're still doing what we've always done because it still feels right. I'm not really sure if I'm a fan of the term "low culture" (though I probably said it), it suggests somehow that one medium is better or has more value than the other - whether that's watching a popular TV program, reading a novel, going to

the opera or listening to music - at the heart of each of these things is the medium of storytelling and it's the effect that has on the individual that's important. With *Hunger*, we're not afraid to embrace pop culture and we're certainly not trying to be elitist or make value judgements on people in the public eye. If anything, it's more about presenting people unexpectedly, a different way to how they'd normally be referenced and framed. On a personal level, I guess I've changed in the sense that I try to view the world empirically. Maybe I'm a little less gobby than I was 20 years ago and also a little wiser! But saying that...

S.B.: Indeed, your incredible body of work has brought you to publish yourself about 30 books to date, and even *Hunger*, with its 512 pages and highly anticipated biannual release, could almost be read as one. Could you tell me the story of how *Hunger* was born, what did you miss about publishing before, and what about it you now love the most?

R.: *Hunger* was born out of a genuine realisation that I missed the publishing process, the team spirit, the debates, the discussion. Magazines are really about the people who contribute to them. And if you surround yourself with talented people and you give them the freedom to achieve, then the work will never fail. With *Hunger*, it was about getting my vision seen more widely. I haven't published a magazine this hands-on for over ten years. I felt that my hunger was still a massive part of me and it's challenging and rewarding being able to realise that.

S.B.: In a time when the industry is torn between some rueful nostalgia for the golden age of print and the thrilling, but not yet fully grasped potential of the virtual world, *Hunger* pairs the glossy paper of its printed pages with the breezy films and behind-the-scenes clips on the HUNGERTV website. Something close to our heart here at ASVOFF, in which ways do you believe your fashion films compliment your photographs, and in which ways they are instead totally different platforms?

R.: I think the relationship between print and film is more symbiotic, it's more about evolving and complimenting your existing content. The two are very much interconnected. The constant shifts in publishing mean that in order to survive we need to be able to embrace and adapt to these changes. Yeah, our fashion films have become an integral part of what we all do, but we still have to do the same things as we did before. As a director I've been shooting for 18 years and I try to bring that experience into the day to day way we shoot and record our content. That is what's evolving, the way these things all intermingle in the audience's experience. To me it's about fine tuning that content we make so that people want to watch it.

S.B.: Now that the issue is out, something tells me that you won't be bored. If you can disclose it, what are you currently working on these days at the studio? Do you already have any clue, as to what the theme of *Hunger* #7 will be?

R.: Ha! I'm never bored. We never stop working at the studio, we're always pushing forward and I wouldn't have it any other way. Whether that's under the umbrella of our in-house creative agency The Full Service, shooting campaigns for clients such as French Connection or music videos for emerging and established artists. I'm also working on a book of work called "Fuck You Rankin", but you'll have to watch this space on

that one! And as for *Hunger #7*, let's just say we're certainly not resting on our laurels. As for the theme, I'm thinking about the colour blue a lot for some reason.

Later,

Silvia

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BY SILVIA BOMBARDINI