



Throughout my career, I have now fully illustrated with my photography, no less than 14 books. Subjects vary between coffee-table tourist books, to archaeology, antiques, restaurant guides and other specialised titles, which, although not always my cup of tea, have helped supplement my earnings as well as give me invaluable experience in different genres of photography. In fact, all my books have been commissioned, except *Reflections on Life*, which was a collection of my favourite images, and which I financed myself. I had tried to get sponsors on this publication, but needless to say, the rules they imposed on the content of the book eventually caused me to just do it under my own steam. Needless to say, it took me about four years to recoup my costs, as this was an 'artistic photography' book which took its time to sell. Still, it was well worth it as it provided me with a very glorified printed portfolio to showcase my photography.

Last year, a top wine expert and friend, Georges Meekers, (a Belgian married to a Maltese girl), met me over a glass of wine (naturally) to discuss an idea for another publication, this time on a quite an offbeat subject. I had already collaborated with Georges on another successful book, *Wines of Malta*, so I was receptive to his ideas and proposals. This time, the main idea was to produce a book aimed at wine connoisseurs which would contain mostly 'tongue in cheek', but still very technical, expert information on the subject of wine. Georges was all for illustrating this book, in some manner, with classical and artistic nude photography. Naturally, I was enthusiastic as wine, women and, of course, photography are quite dear to my heart. So I jumped at the idea.

It was not an easy task. Malta being what it is, small, insular, catholic and religious (anyway, that is what the statistics say), it was going to be hard to find the right models, willing to pose in the nude. It is a fact that everyone knows everyone else in Malta, so girls are very apprehensive to pose nude, and one does not blame them, as the tendency is to look down at girls who are posing in such a manner. The distinction between artistic, classical nude and pornography is not always understood by most of the islanders, particularly the older generations.

Anyway, I pushed ahead. Those who know me are aware of my hard headedness when I want to achieve something. I started by looking carefully at Georges' text and after a couple more long meetings, (I am not complaining, these were always accompanied by copious amounts of good wine to inspire creative thought!), we mapped out the various props and images we would be taking to interpret the text and to also come out with an attractive, classical and artistic set of photographs which would enhance the book as well as be its main focus.

I am one who does not like to be restricted when shooting, so I did not want to have to hide the models' identities. I feel most nude images suffer, (particularly from composition), when the photographer has to crop out the model's face, so that it is not recognisable. So, for this reason, I wanted to source models who would not mind being recognisable. The few local girls I initially approached confirmed my fears as they were all reluctant to take on the work due to the factors mentioned before.

Wracking my brains, I decided to talk to a friend of mine who owns a 'gentleman's club' on the island, (actually a lot of these have sprouted up during these last years – the success of these also points towards a changing scene on the island – but few of the 'patrons' will admit to going there at all – particularly with their girlfriends and wives!)

Armed with a portfolio of my work and various examples of the type of photographs I wanted, saved on my iPhone, I started haunting these clubs for the sake of art! To be honest, it was quite an exciting time and I got quite friendly with some of the owners and girls at the clubs. The strategy worked. In no time at all I managed to source enough models to start off the project. It was still not easy, as, at times, I was looked upon with suspicion by some of the girls I tentatively approached, but my year's of experience in handling people paid off, and I managed to convince most of those I wanted to model for me. Naturally, some payment helped as well as giving the girls a set of images for their portfolios.

Georges managed to get me all the 'wine' related props I needed and I set off to shoot the photographs. Actually, it took me less time to do the images than to find the models! I really enjoyed the challenge and after about a month, the job was concluded. I took all the images in my studio so that I had total control over lighting and the girls did not have to face the onlookers and hangers on if I were to shoot on location. Malta being so small and populated, it is not easy to do this type of work outdoors.

WINE, WOMEN

& ... Photography

a book project by Kevin Casha

WINE, WOMEN

& ...Photography

I also permitted the models to bring a friend to the studio so that they did not feel alone with a 'stranger' while taking the pictures. This added to their comfort zone. I kept it in mind that most of these models were posing nude in a studio for the first time, so I made sure I made them feel safe and at ease. Nothing will ensure failure more than a nervous model.

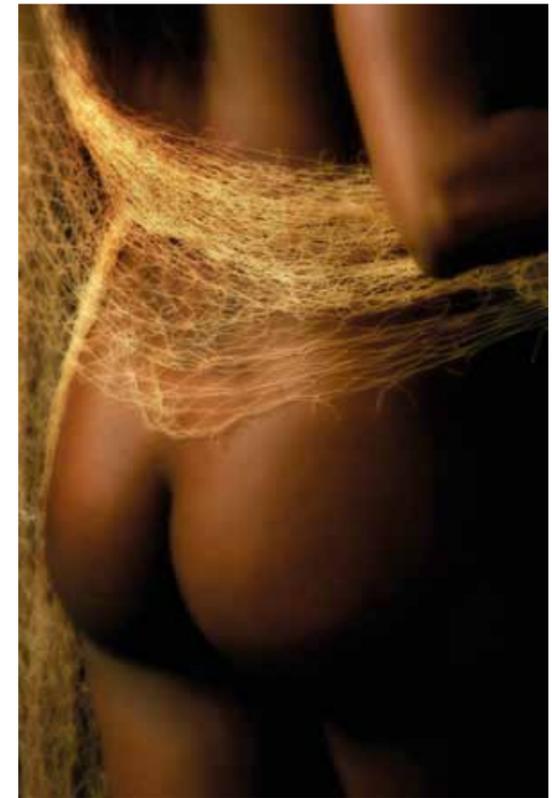
When the photography was finally concluded, Georges and I got together with the designers, Daniel and Reuben, of Kuluri Limited, to discuss the layout, fonts and details of the final publication.

Georges also used the new 'publish by order' online system. In this way, we did not have to finance and offset print a number of copies of the book, not knowing if it will sell or not. The book was put up on various 'print on demand' websites and clients can order their book online, and this is printed and dispatched to them. We will not make a lot of money, but we were all overjoyed to see the fruition of this project. The fact that our initial embryonic idea had blossomed into a final publication, titled *Cleanskin*, gave us all the fantastic satisfaction that we had surmounted our obstacles and went through with meeting the challenge.

I think the final product was successful mainly due to a concerted and planned team effort from all those who participated in the project. Finally, I sincerely dedicate the book to the models.

What next Georges??

Kevin Casha Master FSWPP, FMIPP, AMPA AMPS



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