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# Review

**K**enyan photographer Osborne Macharia makes it his mission to bring stories to life from behind the lens of his camera. “The story is the first thing I think about when I begin a project. How to create the narrative is the problem I initially solve. This takes time,” he says. “It could be a few days or even a few months, but once I fine-tune the story, everything falls into place easily.”

His work, both commercial and personal, is full of animated figures that fill each frame with vibrancy, communicating the story of each shot to its audience.

Macharia, who was first influenced by photographer Joey Lawrence’s Ethiopian series (2010), calls himself an Afrofuturist – “It’s an artistic style that repurposes the post-colonial African narrative by integrating historical elements. I present the culture and the future aspirations of people of colour by using narrative, fantasy and fiction to highlight African identity. It’s a language of rebellion.”

Black Panther

Earlier this year Macharia was commissioned by Marvel to create an exclusive piece of photographic work for the premiere of the film *Black Panther*.

“Working with Marvel for *Black Panther* was one of my favourite experiences as a photographer so far,” he says. “It is one of the most iconic films of our time and touches deeply on issues currently surfacing at home in Kenya, like, for instance, conversations about decolonisation and post-colonialism,” says Macharia, who recently moved to Canada.

Another of his favourite projects, also this year, was working with Oprah Winfrey on her own network’s television drama series, *Queen Sugar*.

“It was thrilling to be hand-picked (all the way from Kenya) by award-winning director Ava DuVernay to work on the cover image for the show,” he says. “The level of production that went into the shoot was something I hadn’t experienced before. When they say Americans go big, they really mean it.”

The photographer also rates his work on Absolut Vodka as some of the best he’s done. “It’s the first time Afrofuturism was properly used to promote a global brand and it feels very contemporary and timeless.”

More recently, Macharia was in Cape Town to shoot a TFG eCommerce campaign for the launch of Foschini’s online store. For the campaign, he was commissioned to create a series of portraits celebrating the power of all women by interpreting three female archetypes: Warrior, Nurturer and Idol.

The Warrior is a woman of truth, justice and protection. She has survived and now flourishes in the world she creates. The Nurturer is love, she is mother, she is fertility and nature. She is the mother of a



I am Warrior

## INSIDE STORIES

Kenyan photographer Osborne Macharia looks for the narrative in every image, writes **Andrea Nagel**

nation. The Idol is the sky and the stars and her beauty transcends all. Her power can trigger the formation of new generations.

“You will find women who display all three,” says the photographer. “It’s a powerful message. You don’t have to fall into a certain stereotype, you can enjoy life yet still be responsible, nurturing, caring and a hardcore working woman.

“It was one of those projects that don’t come along often, when the client gives you complete creative freedom. My idea was to place each character in a distinct environment characterised by vintage decor, monotone furniture, props and accessories.”

Macharia raves about his experience with the South African advertising industry: “South Africa is definitely ahead when it comes to the quality of work that is coming out of the country. This is evident in the



**Favourite photographer?**  
Currently, Marcus Eriksson.

**Which South African creative do you rate?**  
Khuli Chana — we’ve been communicating for a while on a collaborative project.

**Dream photographic job?**  
Creating a series or body of work for Kendrick Lamar or Beyoncé.

**What kind of camera do you use?**  
Hasselblad.

level of production – there are no short cuts taken. The artist is respected (which rarely happens in Kenya).”

Macharia clearly has a very bright future ahead of him, employing his narrative style of photography in a way that’s not only entertaining but also creates a powerful platform to convey important messages on topics like gender abuse, ivory poaching and victims of war.

“My work is always governed by three key principles,” he says. “They are culture, identity and fiction. Whatever project I take on, even my personal work, has to have two, if not all, of these principles as clear defining elements of it. By using these three parameters I find that I can communicate messages that touch on topics like equality, inclusion, gender abuse, dwarfism, albinism and care for the elderly in a way that really makes a difference in the world.” **✎**