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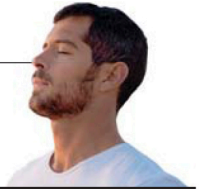
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FISH OUT OF WATER

Famous and ordinary people are photographed while immersed in a swimming pool in Bilancini's ground-breaking project more than three years in the making.

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COVERSTORY



Fish Out of Water with a message

By Raynald C Rivera
The Peninsula

Italian lensman Carlo Rocchi Bilancini has made a mark in the world of photography capturing his subjects in an environment beyond their comfort zone to reveal their real self.

Famous and ordinary people — dressed up and carrying the tools of their trade — are photographed while immersed in a swimming pool in Bilancini's groundbreaking project more than three years in the making.

"It is a surrealistic project in which I asked people — famous or not — to get into a swimming pool in their normal clothes," Bilancini told *Doha Today* at the opening of *Pesci fuor d'acqua* ("Fish Out of Water") exhibition in Katara, his first foray in Qatar and in the region. Being photographed in a completely different environment, in this case in the water, could be quite uncomfortable for the person, hence he becomes a 'fish out of water,' so the artist makes an effort to make the subject relaxed.

"I try to make them comfortable in an uncomfortable environment. I want them to remove their masks, to become real and show what's inside them," he

explained, stressing the whole process as building a relationship.

"I just want my subject and me during the photo shoot. The person has to trust me, it's a relationship."

The project involved more than 50 people, some of whom are famous personalities in the art and entertainment world, among them Italian writer and fashion designer Marina Ripa di Meana, actor and writer Pino Strabioli, Italian soprano Laura Toppetti and English mime artist Lindsay Kemp.

It was Kemp's first performance in the water and the longest for Bilancini to shoot for the project.

"It was not difficult to capture good shots of him because he is very expres-

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sive as a mime artist but he was nervous in the water so I put a chair to serve as an anchor, then he became more confident."

While photo sessions with renowned people were memorable to him, one of his favourites was photographing a young student on a bicycle.

"I like the photo of the man with the bicycle. Unfortunately, he died six months ago."

While some of his subjects are his friends, others he randomly hailed on the street to be part of the project based on their features.

"In general people liked to be part of the project while some thought I was crazy. Others who said no now regret it as the project has become pretty famous."

"Pesci fuor d'acqua" had gained world attention when it was exhibited at the XIII Architectural Biennale in 2012 in Venice.

It was well received by critics, but Bilancini said he was particularly pleased with the positive response from children because of their simplicity and honesty.

Water is a main element in Bilancini's oeuvre. Water, for him, is a powerful element he has personal penchant for its nature and colour and how it interacts with light.

His latest project is "Migration" which he started in summer and in which he takes photos of clothes floating on the water.

"Migration means loss of friendship. It

is about family and relatives who die. Also, it may refer to people moving to another country of residence. It's about losing friendship, loved ones and country and the clothes floating are just a nostalgic reminder."

While it may awaken a sombre mood on the viewer, his upcoming project conveys a very positive message, he says.

"You may have lost something but you don't lose everything. You lose the body, but the spirit is just around. Sometimes it becomes part of the water from where it started."

With the rising popularity of smartphones, photography has become commonplace that anyone can take photos and turn them into stunning images using modern technology.

"Everybody can easily take very good photos but it is very difficult to have an original idea. I think it is important for an artist to have a unique idea and send a personal message through the photos."

Coming to Qatar for his first exhibition in the region has sparked new ideas for a possible venture in the future.

"I'm very happy to be here because it's my first time and I find it very interesting. I hope to come back here and learn more about the country. I'd like to spend more time here because I think it can give me a lot more inspiration for my project."

Visitors can enjoy Bilancini's unique exhibition at Katara Building 19, Gallery 2 until January 14.

