

Meier, Raymond

photographer
text by Emmanuel Hermange

*As a child,
Raymond
Meier
wanted
to be an
astronaut.*

Born in Switzerland in 1957, he studied at the Zurich Art School and eventually decided to become a photographer. Following his studies, he opened his first studio in Zurich in 1977. Although he initially focused on corporate and industrial photography, he later evolved to include portraiture, advertising and fashion. Following his move to New York in 1986, he specialized in still life and fashion photography, and has since become one of the most prominent photographers in his field. He regularly contributes to a number of the leading American magazines in the field, such as *The New York Times T Magazine*, *Flair*, and *Harper's Bazaar*, as well as campaign images for designer and beauty brands like Calvin Klein, Giorgio Armani, Burberry, Prescriptives, and Clinique.

Since his work has recently developed to explore architecture, he has contributed to the equally prestigious *Condé Nast Traveller*. His interest in architecture grew when he met architect Armando Ruinelli in 2000, who he hired to create a house and a studio in the canton of Grisons, in Soglio, a patrimonial village perched in the Swiss Alps. The project was completed in 2003 and received the Häuser Award in 2005. The structure's sober, clean finish, its form and function so closely entwined, as well as the careful attention that was given to the environment and the quality of the materials puts it in touch with some of the essential principles of modernist design. Meier's first monograph,

released in 2004 (Editions Dino Simonett), is thus reminiscent of this initial architectural project that he commissioned. The book focuses entirely on the Sher-e-Banglanagar complex, in Dhaka, which the Bangladesh government commissioned Louis Kahn to design in 1962. In architecture, Kahn is considered the person whose work "marked the end of modernism." "He was a genius who stimulated my creativity," Meier affirms, and is convinced that architecture and photography share a common basis: light. His photographs in the book clearly show how, particularly in Kahn's work, light and space are mutually produced through subtle variations in materials. Generally, when Meier shoots contemporary architecture, he often uses light to interpret a building, to the point where he completely breaks with the descriptive transparency that one traditionally expects from architectural photography. This was the case, for instance, with the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao. Meier took a wide-angle shot at a slightly low angle under a cloudy sky, which he accentuated for dramatic effect thanks to the contrasts of light. Such processing emphasizes the zoomorphic aspect of the Frank O. Gehry building, turning it into a disturbing creature hidden in the shadow of chthonian forces. Displaying a different approach, he translated the nostalgic futurism of the Niterói Contemporary Art Museum in Rio de Janeiro—built in 1996 by Oscar Niemeyer, who drew inspiration from the shape of a flying saucer—by tinting the sky green and the ground orange and yellow.

Raymond Meier's work in recent years, ranging from fashion to architecture, has clearly drawn inspiration from the Modernist movement. This is evident, for instance, in the first project he created for Louis Vuitton in 1999. For the *Epi* Z line of bags, he shot a model dressed in a black leotard that exactly matched the black color of the bag, with the saturated blue sky of the Mojave Desert as a backdrop. Everything in this series of images seems to originate from a uniform line: the pure line of the horizon. However, the unique quality of Meier's approach is the subtle manner in which he consistently clashes with and shifts the boundaries of Modernism. By making use of acid colors and baroque forms—the design of the broken line *par excellence*—that he often includes in his work, he deliberately maintains a connection with modernism instead of considering it as a period long-past. A more recent campaign for Louis Vuitton (*Cruise Line*, 2005) demonstrates how he is able, for example, to capture a few traits from Post-modernism by creating a universe of images quite similar to that of Richard Prince. The work of Raymond Meier is best defined by a comment he made to Armando Ruinelli that explains the secret of architecture, "Imperfection is the key. Breaking through perfection at the surface is what stimulates curiosity."

