



Isabeli Fontana, Garrett Neff and Bianca Balti in Karl Lagerfeld's 2011 Pirelli Calendar



## THE PIN-UP CALENDAR

The popularity of the illustrated pin-up can be traced back to the end of the 19th century when they started appearing in the US. The drawings and paintings of beautiful women in provocative poses, sometimes barely clothed, were both a rallying cry against sexual repression and conservative norms. The link with advertising was soon established as advertisers realised the power of the nearly nude model to grab people's attention.

Pirelli was one of the first companies to use photography instead of illustration in its first calendar, conceived by Beatles photographer Robert Freeman and distributed in 1964. It has printed almost every year since, barring a break in the 70s, and immediately distinguished itself from the pin-ups frequently found in garages and locker rooms by only hiring world-renowned and distinguished photographers. This, combined with a limited print run for a select group of clients and celebrities, quickly turned the calendar into an elite status symbol.

Those who celebrate the calendar would probably agree with writer Laura Laurenzi, who writes in a coffee table book: "The calendar is a mirror, albeit a slightly distorted one, of the times in which we live." It is a "status symbol" for its models and photographers.

The calendar is a cultural symbol, says Pirelli, "that for over 40 years not only celebrates female beauty, but also celebrates the complexity of an art that has been able to transform itself over time. With constantly changing styles and authors, this art always manages to express a new aspect of history."

[www.pirellical.com](http://www.pirellical.com)

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Mario Sorrenti, Saskia de Brauw, Kate Moss

He is full of praise for the 37-year-old British model, describing not only his admiration for her "essence and energy" but also her understanding of photography. "She understands the picture and how to become a part of that."

In addition to Moss and actress Milla Jovovich, who has always worked extensively with Sorrenti, the calendar, with a limited print run of 20 000 copies for clients and celebrities, features Italian actress Margareth Madè, Japanese actress Rinko Kikuchi and Dutch model Lara Stone.

Sorrenti says his original focus was to do something sexy and provocative. But within the first two days of shooting, he says, "I made a very conscious choice to do exactly the opposite of that... not to be provocative and sexy but to try and be emotive and evocative".

The 2012 Pirelli Calendar was shot on the Murtoli estate in the south of Corsica. The isolated estate is tucked between the sea and mountains and provided a range of landscapes — and an absence of people — that appealed to Sorrenti. White sand beaches, coves, rock pools, forests and hilltops that extend over a vast untouched brush all featured in his shots.

"I was trying to find a harmony really, in their body language, in the landscape and trying to capture something that felt kind of discrete, but at the same time powerful." Sorrenti titled his set of images *Swoon*.

He resisted the idea of a simple, spiral design for the calendar, instead creating a portfolio of photographs which harks back to his early days as a photographer, when he carried a box of photographs around to show prospective clients. The calendar is heavy and large, a square measuring 57 centimetres in width and height. The photographs are framed by a canvas border and can be removed and shuffled in whatever order the owner desires. A small block displaying the months sits below the frame.

The 25 shots captured in the calendar show nine models and three actresses against a backdrop of natural settings: leaning against a tree, standing on a tall boulder, resting in a pool of sea water, standing in a shallow river in a forest. Moss is pictured basking in the sun next to a stream in one shot, and staring out the window of a rustic farm house in another.

The intention of putting the models in these settings was to give the appearance of nature harbouring them "as if they were its extension", explained Sorrenti in a note accompanying the calendar's launch.

"My inspiration was to try and capture natural beauty in nature — do something that is sensual but not over the top," said Sorrenti in a behind-the-scenes video of the week-long shoot. This inspiration "probably comes back from my early years of taking photographs and loving quite pure things".

While Sorrenti is a darling of the fashion and art industries, he has not been completely immune to criticism regarding the calendar, with negative remarks emanating from those who believe the calendar is a borderline pornographic exploitation of the female form, to those in the blogosphere who have described the pictures as underwhelming, washed out, with repetitive backgrounds

of magazines in which his work has appeared, amongst them *Vanity Fair*, Italian *Vogue*, *W magazine* and *Harper's Bazaar*.

Aside from commercial work for fashion and fragrance houses, Sorrenti has also exhibited his work at galleries and museums such as the Victoria and Albert Museum in London and the Today Art Museum in Beijing. He has published several books showcasing his work as an artist and fashion photographer, documenting people and topics that have featured prominently in his career.

A bulk of Sorrenti's fame has come from his use of nudity both in his commercial and artistic work, and is something he has been comfortable with his entire life. In a release for the launch of the calendar, Sorrenti said nudity is "one of the most beautiful expressions of nature and the purest way for us to reveal our humanity in the face of art".

Charlotte Cotton, a curator who introduced Sorrenti at the calendar launch, described his photographs as displaying an "exceptional sense of real emotion and the connection he creates with his subjects". Put simply, "he adores women", says Moss in a behind-the-scenes video of the shoot. "He really loves the female form and everything about it."

Moss and Sorrenti's close professional relationship over the last 20 years evolved from their early days as a young couple. For this reason, as well as the fact that she has posed for the calendar before, she was a natural choice for Sorrenti to appear in the calendar.

Sorrenti felt expectations on this shoot were higher because of the nature of the project. "I wanted to try and make a photograph of her that could be powerful," he says.

that fail to impress. The pictures certainly stand in stark contrast to the highly stylised images of models as Greek and Roman gods shot by Karl Lagerfeld for the 2011 calendar and are far less controversial than previous editions, such as Peter Beard's 2009 shoot in Botswana, which saw models pose in a series of positions with wild animals.

But it seems that for Sorrenti, this stripped down and bare look was intentional. He says he was inspired by his long-term influences, particularly American photographers such as Edward Weston and Ansel Adams, who were famed in the first half of the 20th century for their striking black-and-white landscape photography.

While keeping one foot in the world of art photography, Sorrenti continues to produce photography for some of the US and Europe's most influential fashion and lifestyle magazines. Some of his recent projects include capturing actress Scarlett Johansson in couture for *Vanity Fair* and producing a series of portraits for *W magazine* of the best movie performances of 2011. He is also working on a book of Polaroid snapshots of his family and work that he has collected over the last 15 years.

For Sorrenti, the calendar is a natural extension of his work and career thus far. Discussing the process of editing the pictures down from the many thousands taken, Sorrenti smiled at what seemed like an arduous task. "Sometimes it's really painful [to edit], sometimes it's really easy. This was easy because it was a pleasure."

Mario Sorrenti, [www.mariosorrenti.com](http://www.mariosorrenti.com)