

# Break into fashion photography

Holly McGlynn has shot for brands from Levi's to Louis Vuitton. She shares some tips for success

## WHAT TO DO

### SPEAK TO PEOPLE

The fashion industry is actually very small, so networking is important. A lot of the work I get is through recommendations and reputation, and you've got to grab opportunities when they appear. It can be hard if you're introverted, but work on your elevator pitch – mine is that my work is feminist and feminine, bold colourful photos that tell a story.

### SAY YES

Early on in my career I think fear held me back from taking on a lot of opportunities, but once I started saying yes I found that one opportunity would lead to another, and I was soon working all of the time. For a couple of years I said yes to every single job – events, photojournalism, corporate headshots ... It built my confidence, built my network and built my skill set. Eventually I built up enough work and reputation that I could just do fashion work.

### EMBRACE FAILURE

Don't be afraid of making mistakes because you always learn from them – if I go on a shoot and the lighting isn't what I wanted I'll go home and watch 10 YouTube videos on what I wanted to achieve, and study it until I've perfected it.

### STAY ON BRAND

Some advice I got when I was starting out was that in places such as London and New York there are so many people who are specialised in particular fields that no one wants to work with a jack of all trades – they'd rather hire a specialist. So I never presented myself as anything other than a fashion photographer, even when I was doing lots of other work.

### COLLABORATE WITH PEOPLE WHO SHARE YOUR VISION

Build up a good creative team with the same vision and values. Find people who are nice, give everyone time to do their job and communicate clearly about that. Always break for lunch, or people will start fainting on you.

### NEVER GIVE UP

I emailed *Company* magazine for two years before anyone got back to me, then one day they responded in two minutes saying they were looking for another photographer and asking if I could start that week. Being seen as a nuisance is a legitimate concern, but my advice is to always stay polite and maybe email every three to six months with a super-light touch. At a talk years ago, an agent said: 'Do you think Rankin ever gave a damn about being a nuisance?'. That stuck with me.

**'EARLY ON IN MY CAREER FEAR HELD ME BACK FROM TAKING ON A LOT OF OPPORTUNITIES'**

## 5 WAYS TO GET NOTICED

Shot without commission, this photo was published in *Sukeban* magazine – so testing and submitting on spec can really pay off



## CREATE YOUR OWN OPPORTUNITIES

! If you're not getting the work you want to be shooting, keep testing and creating. Put together your own

shoots that reflect the kind of work you want, pitch them to magazines, and eventually you'll be commissioned for that.

## FOCUS ON YOUR OWN WORK

**2** At the start of my career I was constantly comparing myself to other photographers who were five or 10 years ahead of me in terms of experience. It was so damaging. There was a huge shift in my career and the quality of my work once I started

focusing on me. Don't compare yourself to others based on their social media output – it's easy to manipulate how things look so it seems like someone is out on commissions all the time, but they might just be doing a lot of testing.



McGlynn's mentor told her 'the photographer's job is to interpret ideas in a novel way'

Show the right portfolio work to potential clients, advises McGlynn. Edgy clients won't be interested in commercial shoots



## TREAT YOUR WORK LIKE A BUSINESS

**3** I've worked out over the past few years that I spend around 10 per cent of my time taking photos – the rest of the time is about marketing, pitching, accounting and sales ...

### MARKETING

I use a monthly newsletter as a light way of keeping in touch with people in the industry, and try to schedule three Instagram posts every day. It keeps you 'top of mind' with people and I've had a lot of old clients come out of the woodwork or new clients get in touch. Sometimes I've gone into a meeting and found out that the person has been following me on social media for a year.

### PITCHING

I spend a lot of time putting together mood boards and pitching these to magazines and other clients, emailing to ask if

we can meet to go through my ideas in more detail. It's important to know your customer and tailor things accordingly – people don't like to have to use their imagination to see the end product they're going to get. Even if a client doesn't go with an idea I've pitched it's a good way to get a conversation started.

### ACCOUNTING AND SALES

I have an accountant now, but at the start of my career I spent a lot of time doing it myself – it's important to stay on top. When you're just emerging you'll probably spend more than you're bringing in, but the balance will tip. Negotiating contracts is something you learn the longer you are into your career. Things like what fee to ask for, what usage terms to ask for or expect – you pick these things up.

Shot with a two-headed strobe kit

My assistant is wearing the jumper. We pulled the funnel neck over his head and the sleeves down over his hands to make it look like the jumper was animated

I used a yellow gel on one head and a blue gel on the other head to emphasise the colours in the jumper

I cloned out my assistant's legs in post-production, again to emphasise the jumper was self-animated without a wearer

Jumper shot for menswear magazine *WattsWhat*

## FIND YOUR LIGHTING STYLE

**4** Lighting is utterly personal and the only way to master it and get what you want is to test as much as possible. You can hire equipment cheaply and try lots of different styles.



### AUTHOR PROFILE

**HOLLY McGLYNN**  
London-based, Dublin-born fashion photographer McGlynn has shot for brands and magazines including Levi's, Louis Vuitton and *Glamour*

## TREAT YOUR MODELS AS PART OF THE CREATIVE TEAM

**5** Every model I've worked with has had their own ideas. I like to run through the mood board with them as they're getting their hair and make-up done so everyone's on the same page. Models have told me about photographers

who speak about them as if they're not even in the room, making comments on their body, or blaming them for not getting the results they want. It's important to treat everyone with respect, collaborate effectively and take responsibility.

**SCARLET WOMAN:** A shot for *55 Magazine*

