





# TEAM WORKS

For most photographers, taking pictures is a solo pursuit. But for the duos on these pages, partnership is the key to success. Their professional collaborations began with a personal bond, whether filial, friendly, or romantic. What makes these photographic partnerships last? A shared passion for the images. **BY LORI FREDRICKSON**

## CHRIS AND TOM GORMAN

Growing up in rural neighborhoods where kids were scarce, the Gorman brothers became creative collaborators early on. Their first professional partnerships were musical, culminating with Chris as a drummer and Tom as guitarist in the '90s alternative band Belly. Chris worked on visual projects for the band's merchandising and videos, and as an avid still-life photographer, he built connections that helped him open a studio in New York in 1999, three years after Belly split up. It was easy to convince Tom to join. "We have a shared language and creative aesthetic, and it doesn't take much for us to express or explain ideas," Tom says. On set, the brothers' rapport helps them get the shot without much fuss. Their level of trust allows them to focus on results rather than competition. And unlike with their stage performances, they're able to trade instruments. Deciding who mans the computer or camera, Chris says, comes down to "which of us shows up first and where he sits."



Left: A shot for *FHM UK* encourages injecting humor into a relationship. Opposite: The bottomless baby bottle was inspired by Chris's infant children.





## WILLIAMS AND HIRAKAWA

Los Angeles-based spouses Mark Williams and Sara Hirakawa met through a photo assignment as students at Rochester Institute of Technology. "We spent many late nights at Kinko's," Hirakawa notes. "That's where Mark made his move." After graduation, they worried that teaming up would damage their relationship, so each built a separate business, Hirakawa in fashion and Williams with music and portraits. Still, their similar aesthetics and concern that they might end up competing against each other remained, so shortly after they got married, they opened a studio together. One of the main benefits: their ability to balance one another's strengths and weaknesses. "I like to conceptualize, and Mark likes to light. He's great at leading a crew, where I have a good handle on styling," Hirakawa explains. Now that they have a son, they balance family life with assignments. And knowing what each has been through during the day makes it easier for one to step up when the other needs a break.



Clockwise from top left: A fashion story for *C* magazine shot on the *Queen Mary*, a beauty image of Laine Rogova, and a shoe story for *Lucky* show off Williams and Hirakawa's shared aesthetic.









## GIESENLEENDERS

As Ilse Leenders explains, compromising is a “Dutch tradition”—what makes her friendship and partnership with Maurits Giesen work is their ability to argue. “We don’t make an image until we agree, and that helps us select the best ideas,” she says. The photographers met while studying at the Royal Academy of Art in The Hague. Over a dinner one night post-graduation, they discovered a shared love for Hitchcock, noir films, and staging fictional scenarios. It inspired them to create their first project, *Suspicious Movements* (including the black-and-white photos, opposite), in which they captured themselves as a mysterious pair fleeing the scene of an ambiguous crime. Their shared enthusiasm for creating, as they both put it, “nonexistent worlds” has kept them working together ever since, imagining elaborate and strange universes in conceptual images that have been exhibited throughout Europe. A similar eye for detail and obsessive perfectionism make it easier for them to spend hours together hammering out ideas. Constant dialogue about their shared work as well as sideline careers (Giesen with portraiture, Leenders with art-inspired photos) keep them energized. “We challenge each other,” Leenders says. And when an image works out, “it’s a joy to share the mutual happiness.”





Clockwise from opposite: Two images from the duo's series *Mimicry* and two from the *Suspicious Movements* project.







## CONVENTION CENTER

**ACKERMAN AND GRUBER**

When Minneapolis-based Jenn Ackerman and Tim Gruber began dating during their second semester of the master's program at Ohio University's School of Visual Communication, they fell into a rhythm of working together on photo projects. Near graduation, the couple were often advised not to team up professionally. Gruber recalls, "Our response was, 'Well, it's working for us.' And it has." They have built a successful career as a duo with editorial and reporting assignments for the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, and others. On some early assignments, approaching clients as a couple led to confusion: "They'd ask which one was the photographer," Gruber says. But it also proved an asset, particularly with portraiture, where they find subjects warm up easily to their intimate dynamic. Their ability to juggle tasks makes them twice as efficient on shoots. And, unexpectedly, working together keeps the romance alive. "I see my husband doing what he does best every day," Ackerman adds. "It reminds me why I married him." **AP**

Opposite and above:  
The husband-and-wife team  
Ackerman and Gruber  
capture Americana at the  
Minnesota State Fair and  
the Miss Universe  
competition.