

Ula Wiznerowicz interviewed by Kysha Buffong in The Common Room Newspaper

Tell us a little about yourself, including how you came to study at Middlesex University...

I was born and raised in the small village of Palmowo in the Greater Poland region and brought up in the countryside. From a very early age I was exposed to the difficulties of life and these experiences inspired me later to document them in my art projects. After finishing a photography course at North West London College I was completely seized by a passion for that subject and from the age of nineteen my determination to become a photographer led me to complete a BA Photography degree at Middlesex University in London.

Do you remember the first photo you took and that defining moment when you realised that this (photography) was going to be your 'thing'?

I can't say I remember the first photo I ever took, but I do remember the first time I used an analogue camera. It was a B&W portrait of a small girl sat in front of me on a bus. My photography journey began at The College of North West London, where I did a painting and photography course because it was there I discovered one of my most magical hiding places - the DARKROOM. I still remember the smell of chemicals, the texture of the paper and the feeling of excitement while watching a print slowly materialising in the developing tray. At this point I knew I wanted photography to be part of my life.

Since your graduation in 2010 your career has had a great take off, take us through your journey from graduation to being featured at the D&AD Exhibition, then as a finalist for the Channel 4 and Saatchi Gallery.

The year after my graduation was very exciting. Everything started right after being awarded the photography prize at the 'D&AD New Blood 2010'. My work was noticed by an Italian art lover and gallery owner, who then organised a solo exhibition of my works in the picturesque Italian town of San Candido. In the meantime I received great news saying that I have been chosen as a finalist of Channel 4 and Saatchi Gallery: 'New Sensations 2010 Prize', which commissioned a new project, exhibited later at The House of the Nobleman in London. All of these things happened within a very short period of time and just I thought things were slowing down a little an article about my work was published in the 2010 November Issue of British Journal of Photography Magazine.

As a photographer, someone who's always capturing life from behind the camera, what was it like for you to be 'in front' of the lens to film your short documentary for the Saatchi Gallery?

I never liked being photographed, probably that is why I always hide away behind the lens looking at people through the viewfinder. I must say that being watched and followed by a filmmaker for a few hours was a very stressful experience, especially when he was holding the camera very close to my face while interviewing me at the same time. Despite this it was very exciting actually to be able to see myself on a television screen later on.

Please tell us about the inspiration for your work entitled 'Behind the Curtain'

The Series 'Behind the Curtain' was a one-year process of photographing in and around the Polish village I grew up in as well as researching the medical aspects of alcoholism. I also interviewed alcoholics, their families and specialist doctors. I was inspired to start this project by one of my parents' neighbours, who as a recovering alcoholic for the past 6 years has proved that there is a path to a sober life. Having grown up in this area this narrative is all too common and is something I wanted to explore.

Your timeline and photos show what great skill and talent you have, what type of character do you have to be to stand out in such a demanding and competitive industry?

In order to be successful at photography, or anything else for that matter, you need a healthy dose of determination and passion for your craft. I've also found that people enjoy working with you if you're honest, personable and easy to get on with. When times are slow you've got to be a bit dog minded and trust that the next break or great idea is just around the corner.

As mentioned before, you've had a great jumpstart with your career since graduating, what's next for you?

I'm really excited about my next solo exhibition, which will take place at the POSK Gallery (Polish Social & Cultural Association) in Hammersmith in November.

Favourite photo you've ever taken?

It is difficult to choose one picture, especially because I'm very indecisive. Sometimes I like one set of pictures and sometimes the other. Everything depends on the mood.

Who or what would be your dream thing to shoot and why?

I can't really say I think in terms of 'dream projects' as I'm always intensely focused and engaged in whatever I'm working on at any given moment. That being said, I have always wanted to return to Brasil to focus on the life of the Favela, as I was beset by technical problems on my last visit.

What's your favourite thing(s) to shoot and why?

I'm very interested in social documentary and portraiture. Through my photography I seek to document my own personal experiences. I try to capture in an image the vision of reality I feel at the moment I trip the camera's shutter. I try to explore the visual poetry of the commonplace and capture the ordinary things through my own gaze upon the world. I have chosen art as a powerful tool to express myself emotionally. I've always like the adage 'a picture is worth a thousand words'

If you weren't into photography, what field would you have been likely to end up in?

From an early age I remember that I was always drawing or painting on whatever material I had and in every occasion I had, so I guess that would be my direction if I wouldn't choose photography.

What advice would you give to photographers who are just starting out, maybe those who have just picked up a camera for the first time?

I would advise them to try traditional techniques, such as shooting on film, to get a feel of working in a darkroom as it is an unbelievable experience. I'd recommend reading all sorts of books on photography theory, viewing work of other photographers and going to different shows and exhibition but mainly: shoot all the time, experiment, follow your feelings and don't forget to have fun in the process.