



ULA WIZNEROWICZ
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"Forgotten and useless things covered in dust; emaciated cats running around searching for leftovers; rooms taken over by spider webs; the strong odour of alcohol – this is just part of the chaos I found photographing over a period of one year in my village and the surrounding area of Wielkopolska."

Originally from Poland, Ula Wiznerowicz has lived in Britain for the past five years, recently completing a photography degree at the University of Middlesex with her project *Behind the Curtain*. Focusing on the effects of alcoholism on small, rural communities such as Palmowo, the village of 150 people where she grew up in western Poland, she knew many of the people she photographed but, even so, it was a difficult subject to tackle.

"Of course I told them I was shooting a project on alcoholism and I didn't expect them to say, 'Yes, yes, I drink.' But what surprised me was that all of them said, 'Well I do drink, but it's like everyone from time to time.' They don't realise they have a problem or if they do, they don't want to admit it. But I saw many of them really, really drunk every day when I was growing up. In fact, when I grew up, it was normal to see drunk people all the time. It was only when I got older that I realised there was a problem."

Fascinated with portraiture, Wiznerowicz shot many of the drinkers at home on a square-format Bronica using natural light. But she also shot their friends and relatives, who she says are equally, if not more, affected by the problem – after all, they are fully conscious of what's going on, unlike the alcoholics. She also photographed the surrounding landscapes and her subjects' meagre home interiors to show the poverty in which this problem thrives in Poland. For example, one image shows a living room with a huge hole in the floor, while in another, a table is laden with frozen food. "The room didn't have any heating and it was so cold, but the guy was saying, 'It's great, I don't need a fridge.' It was mad."

She worked on the project for the whole of her final year, going to Poland six times, as well as researching addiction and the causes of alcohol dependency. The sensitive but shocking work won her a D&AD New Blood Award this summer, and now she's thinking about studying for an MA. But, like any other young graduate, she's first focusing on picking up part-time work and trying to get established in the industry. And, perhaps, a similar project shot in the English countryside beckons. *BJP*



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