

**Night Style Magazine
October 2012**

Wendy Paton – Special Luminosity

On the way to the interview at the Lumiere Brothers Center for Photography, to interview American Photographer Wendy Paton, I did not have the usual apprehension that I normally do when meeting the subject of my interview for the first time.



Though I never met her I knew her work, and it's like coming from the canvases of the impressionist's paintings. Beautiful... this is fine art that creates exceptional positive emotions. And what is most important is a constant enigma...

In September, Wendy showed in Moscow; the series of work "Visages de Nuit" in which by her own words she tries to show that particularly at night people feel liberated to be whoever they want to be and reveal themselves. So she is now in front of me answering my questions, certainly how I imagined her to be, soft-spoken and friendly.

Expressions of the face are not that important, what is important should be truthful.

Q: The first page of your website opens with the Edouard Boubat quote, "Don't try to explain the photograph, let it keep it's mystery." I understand it is your credo, why this expression and how does it reflect your relationship with your photography?

A: I don't like to reveal everything about my images. I don't want to explain the meaning of my photographs to others. You can ask me what I meant when I took the picture and I can't answer for you because I don't know what this picture means to you and what your individual interpretation is. I only know what it meant to me when I created it. I am talking not only about the meaning of photography, but also about the emotional feeling you have when you look at the picture. Because the feeling which I had when I took the picture may not necessarily match the feeling which you have when you look at the same picture. I cannot explain to others what they should expect to think or feel from experiencing my art.

I am most happy to share what I know about the technical aspects of photography, and my process. When I am asked by young photographers about my equipment and printing process, of course I share this information because I have nothing to hide.

Q: Today we often look at the work of many photographers and the work is depressing, violent sometimes, and you don't want to look at them. With you it's a different story. Your work attracts the attention of the viewer in a positive way.

A: Thank you

Q: You are different from other photographers; you don't want to emphasize an attention on social and political problems, to show misfortune and poverty. Your work is esthetically pleasing to the eye. So if you don't demonstrate or emphasize the problems, as is common today, what is your goal and meaning of your creativity in your pictures?

A: My work is not reportage, my work is a visual art. There are a lot of problems and tragedies in the world, we all know about that. To tell you the truth I am not trying to emphasize or take pictures of tragedies. As an artist, what I attempt to communicate in my work, especially in this series of pictures dedicated to the night – is how people seem to feel the freedom to transform themselves at night, to become whoever or however they choose to be, or simply to strip away any facade and to be their true selves. I observe how some people love the cacophony of city life at night and others like to be alone in the noisy and un-orderly metropolis. It is all interesting for me. It is the subject I enjoy the most to photograph.

Q: You began to work on the series of pictures as early as 2006. Already then, did you understand that it would be a big project or this subject of the night came to you later?

A: No I didn't realize it at that time in 2006, though I knew then that I was preparing a series of night portraits. In art you cannot think in advance how your work will develop because although the process of creation should evolve around something specific, at the same time it should be organic. Never the less, often you start from one perspective and it ends up absolutely different. Because of that my work is not connected with advanced planning. I take the picture and watch how my thinking evolves from one picture to another.

Q: I understand that you are not self-taught to the craft of photography. You came consciously – attended ICP in New York, you studied with Michael Kenna, (the Master of Contemporary Night Photography) and Chuck Kelton, (Master Printer). Have your teachers helped you to develop your talent to find new unorthodox solutions to create your special identity as a photographer.

A: With Michael Kenna I worked only a short 9 days, but since then we continue to stay in touch. The opportunity to study the technique of Night Photography with Michael, became an invaluable foundation for me to take pictures at night. On this foundation I added my own artistic ideas. My desire is for my photographs to have their own artistic voice. When I learned the details of Night Photography the next item was learning the technique of hand printing my own silver gelatin prints. I didn't want to transfer the process of printing my pictures to someone else's hands. I think an artist should create pictures with their own hands from beginning to end. And here is where Chuck Kelton's (Master Printer) influence in my career began. We have collaborated together for almost ten years and he has taught me almost everything I know about printing the fine art photograph.

Q: What you are saying sounds like music, you're saying that mostly you like to take pictures of people and their faces. What kind of expression on your subjects do you like most? Uncertainty, fear, surprise, happiness?

A: The actual expression of the face is not that important, but it is important to the integrity of the work that it should always be honest, and truthful. I don't pose my subjects. I am not looking for special expressions on the faces of the people, smiles or sadness or something else. I take the picture when something inside me, on an emotional level, tells me to take the picture; when you have experience as a photographer you pick up the right moment instinctively. The finding of every frame becomes something special.

Q: Wendy sorry for the straight question, but can you swear; that you never arrange your pictures?

A: I can tell you this that sometimes my pictures are arranged (posed) but whatever you see in this series, Visages de Nuit, are all candid – not posed.

Q: Do you take pictures of members of your family and friends? Can you show them in the galleries for all to see?

A: Oh No! Of course I take their pictures but I never show them.

Q: Why? Are you superstitious?

A: It's outside of my creation – it's not my subject.

Q: Today most of the contemporary art, shows the shocking things and it's difficult to comprehend. In May I interviewed Andre Fomin, who is a well known Moscow Actor and promoter and I asked him how he comprehends modern art? He answered "strictly intellectual." To me personally, modern photography is often scary. I don't understand what they are trying to do. To shock people or perhaps it's easier to sell shock. Why did you take the different path? Is it because it's "strictly intellectual"?

A: Because I am not like them. I am a little bit different.

Q: I like very much your project "Keep it Moving."

A: Thank you. Yes it was a very special project. In this project we used beautiful steps, which are located in one small city of France and the Ferris Wheel on Place de la Concord in Paris. I wanted to show my interpretation of motion from different points of view. I'm inspired by Brassai and his Paris. Paris at night is always mysteriously beautiful.

Q: Once I asked a photographer why he works in Black and White. He explained to me that he is afraid of colors. How do you explain that you only work in black and white?

A: In reality I see color in black and white pictures. My photographs are purposely full of contrast, which gives them a special luminosity which can relate to color, white whites and the blackest of blacks. From a technical point of view, I like black and white photography because I know how to do it by myself.

Q: Do you know that your fans in Russia say that you expose human emotions?

A: It's a fine compliment – Thank you. This is exactly what I am trying to achieve. Through my pictures I am trying to bring an idea not to be afraid of your feelings and if people in Russia see this in my work it means I have achieved my goal.

Q: Tell me what do you like in Art? What talent do you appreciate in painting and photography? What do you adore and look up to?

A: Adore is too strong a word. I like Brassai, Cartier Bresson and many others. I get my inspiration from Lillian Bassman, and of course Michael Kenna, whose mastery of peaceful night imagery is inspiring. Speaking of painters, I like so many it is difficult to pick any one in particular. I enjoy the French Impressionists. I can find inspiration in a painting or photograph of an unknown artist. I can look at the work and see that there is something special about it. It is not necessary to be famous to inspire somebody.