

Finding Freedom at Night

An elderly woman bundled up in winter clothes sits among antiques in a shop outside Paris, her eyes closed and her feet propped up on a tiny footstool. She is so still that a passer-by mistakes her for a stuffed doll.



Intrigued by the sight, photographer Wendy Paton snaps a few pictures.

“On the second frame, she opened one eye,” Paton said years later. “And in that one amazing instant, I had captured a wonderful portrait. Sometimes a sprinkling of luck happens.”

In her series “Visages de Nuit,” Paton documents the unexpected scenes she comes across after dark. Wandering the streets of cities around the world, she finds comfort in unfamiliar settings, she says.

“There is more of a mystery and feeling of surprise right around the corner.”

Determined to photograph the people she observes during her travels at night, Paton started the ongoing project in 2006. It has led to a string of exhibitions and her first book, which will be released in Europe this month by Kehrer Verlag.

Through her candid night portraits, Paton has been able to explore the intricacies of human behavior, she says.

“It is about our individual personalities. How people feel the freedom at night to be as they wish, take on a persona of anyone they want to be or simply strip it down to the bare bones and be themselves.”

Looking back, Paton says she feels that same freedom when she’s out with her camera at the end of a long day.

Her interest in photography emerged in 1981. She was two decades into a horse racing career when she purchased her first “real camera.”

“A new world opened up to me,” Paton said. “And the more I photographed, the happier I was.”

She went on to study at the International Center of Photographer in New York before training in the dark room with master printer Chick Kelton and learning night photography from Micahel Kenna.

Her father worked for 40 years as a radio broadcaster in New York and Paton says he was so passionate about his career, he would often say, “I never worked a day in my life.”

“I hope that I will be 85 and still working and creating and printing my gelatin silver photographs in my darkroom,” she says. “That would be my version of ‘I never worked a day in my life.’ “ -*Brett Roegiers, CNN*

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