

Arts & entertainment



Keeping the mystery simple

by *Elena Kirillova* at 17/09/2012 20:11

Wendy Paton: ‘Visages de Nuit’

Sept. 5-Oct. 7 at The Lumiere Brothers Center for Photography, 3 Bolotnaya Nab., bldg. 1, m. Kropotkinskaya, lumiere.ru Open Tue.-Fri. noon-9 pm, Sat.-Sun. 11 am-9 pm, closed Mon.



© RIA Novosti. / Valeriy Melnikov
Paton at the opening of her exhibition in Moscow

Wendy Paton’s “Visages de Nuit” photos are monochrome and often blurry. They usually focus on some detail and look like the point of view of a slightly drunk party animal. Paton says she never parties herself, though, she only observes.

The life of this New York photographer is full of parties in big cities, and she enjoys it, but prefers to print her

photos in the peace of her home studio in a small town, Lambertville, New Jersey. To fully concentrate on photography, she had to quit a successful 18-year career training standardbred race horses.

“My dad was always very supportive,” she told *The Moscow News* at the opening of her exhibition. “It was unheard-of at the time for a woman to go into the horse-racing business, but he said that I should go for it if I want it. It’s important to have emotional support.”

Paton said she has been photographing all her life, in her mind or with a camera, noticing things that usually go unnoticed. “To wrap my life, I’ve been [always] concentrating on details.”

In 1981 she got her first “real” camera, a Canon 81, and loved it. For 10 years she played and experimented with it. “And when I realized I wanted to do something with photography, I wasn’t sure I wanted to be a photographer,” she said. “But I loved it as much as horses.”



© Wendy Paton
‘Finger Food’

In 1987 she retired from horses, and worked in publishing as an advertising director for a short period of time. It was a weekly theater magazine in New York. “I loved it, it was very exciting and fast-paced. It’s a big job. But all the while I understood that I need to do something creative, so it was for me building a foundation to feel the freedom to just do it.”

One of the main reasons she decided “to take the big step” was commuting. It took Paton 5 1/2 hours a day to get to her job and back. After a year and a half, she realized it was “too much and taking everything out” of her. “I think you realize at some point in life there are things you must do. And this was a must.”

When she was contemplating what interested her as a photography subject the most, she found it was the city, “urban areas where I had so many more subjects. It didn’t matter to me whether it was Paris, London, New York, or a Russian Orthodox wedding, which I was welcomed into.”

Creatures of the night



© Wendy Paton
‘Unmasked’

During her studies at the International Center for Photography, she realized she was most interested in night photography, so she took a special class. It was a workshop by the renowned British photographer Michael Kenna, with fewer than 10 students. Kenna is a landscape photographer who doesn't photograph people, and from him Paton learned the foundations of night photography. "He even printed some of my photographs in the darkroom, to show me how it's done, and I was fascinated. At first I was using the same camera as he uses, the Hasselblad, the tripods... But everybody would notice you like that."

Now she uses a Leica M7. "I wanted to use the best 35-millimeter camera that I could get. And I only use the short 50-millimeter lens, because I want to get close without being noticed. Which took time. Of course at first it was a little scary. I didn't know what to expect if somebody saw me."

The "Visages de Nuit" series was shot over six years, starting in 2006. Speaking of her choice of topic, she said that she started the series out of curiosity for the mystery of the night.

"People at night are different; they drop their guard and have freedom to be who they want to be. Whether they change their dress and become someone else, or they strip down and be themselves. Night is a time of magic and freedom. The same place looks totally different in daytime than at night."

She said she becomes an observer and part of the nightlife in such a way that she can disappear.

"This series is all candid," Paton said. "No one noticed me. Sometimes they noticed me just after I took the photograph. If they do, I smile and keep going."

The woman in the teaser image of the show, "Look at Me," which was shot at an Albanian gala, is so far the only one of Paton's subjects who found herself in the pictures and got in touch.

Speaking about the great number of photographers nowadays and how therefore very few become recognized, Paton said she feels very fortunate and humbled, but she wouldn't quit if she wasn't successful. "If none of it happened, I would still be in my darkroom, and still be photographing."

Simplicity



© Wendy Paton
'Clignancourt Madame'

"As children in the U.S., we all had these little cameras called brownie cameras," she said. "Very simple to use. Recently I bought one. I like to get back to the basics. I don't like a lot of technical, fancy things on a camera." She doesn't take composition or light too seriously. "It's the emotion that I'm feeling and the emotion in the

photograph that's important to me. If the emotion is strong, the composition and the light will work out from there."

Paton works only with manual film cameras. She said the use of film provides luminosity, a tactile nature with the paper she uses, and the best results. "The Leica M7 gives me the freedom to control what I'm doing and not have the camera control me."

The "Visages des Nuit" book containing all the images of the series is on sale at Lumiere Brothers. It's Paton's first book.

"To sequence a book is so different from sequencing an exhibition on the wall," she said. "You need to have an exciting flow in the book, to keep people turning page after page."

Paton likes to quote French art photographer Edouard Boubat: "Don't try to explain the photograph; let it keep its mystery."

"It's not about me, it's about a photograph," she said.

"So why should I decide for someone else what they should feel? The story could be more interesting from your point of view."

<http://themoscownews.com/exhibitions/20120917/190238601.html>