

What's the genesis of "Non-Places"? Why were you compelled to see this project through?

I had an opportunity to take some pictures inside shopping centre at night – normally it is not possible – for some reasons you can't photograph shopping centres at all. So that's how it started, after I had made this series, I found out what it is about, some images opened my eyes to this topic. The view during the night is so much different – it's an opposition to what we can see there during the day, when there are crowds of people, and the place is full of lights and sounds. Later, I found very interesting information on a status of this kind of space – it has a status of a „non-place” . The concept of a place in the anthropological context implies its relationship with the culture, history and the sense of identity. The place, understood as an area for living, coexistence and formation of relationships, seems to have more important meaning than ever before. In the nineties, a French anthropologist, Marc Augé, while trying to define modernity, introduced the concept of „non-places” - which are in opposition to the aforementioned features, thus defining shopping centers, gas stations, airports, highways or the Internet space. „Non-places" remain anonymous – they are very similar to each other, elude identification and despite almost constant presence of people, remain alien, „unowned” and impersonal. I wanted to enter into a discussion with Augé's theory. My photographs are an attempt of a reflection upon those specific spaces, their character and identity.

When was the first time you became aware of photography? How old were you?

Oh it was such a long time ago! It all started when I was only a few years old.

As a child, I loved opening a big drawer in my family house and looking at all the photographs that my parents kept there. I could spend hours just sitting on the floor and looking at them over and over again. I remember very clearly the time I spent with my great-grandmother – very often she showed me pictures of my family, the oldest are from 1940, and she used to tell me a lot of incredible stories. She lost her husband in Auschwitz, and she had to raise her two little children by herself during the Second World War.

What is the primary reason you became a photographer?

I prefer to describe myself as an multimedia artist – I think that art cannot be easily divided into separate fields. I usually start with a problem, an idea, and the medium I use depends on what I want to express, not the other way round. I try to use many different forms of expression, including those which are difficult to classify as belonging to one particular field of art, but of course photography is one that is very important to me. It has an interesting feature – people tend to think that a photo always represents reality, that what is depicted is true. I really like this attribute.

How did you learn to become a photographer (training, mentors, teachers, photobooks, etc.)?

I'm still learning, it is a process, and every day, every interesting project that I see changes something..

I have a great teacher at the university: professor Agata Pankiewicz. I attended her photography workshop for eight years. For the last three years I have been teaching students myself, and I really enjoy it. Those classes are yet another opportunity to learn something important about the field.

Who's your favourite photographer?

It is really hard to choose one, but I can tell you about an artist whose works impressed me recently - Paweł Szypulski. His last photobook, „Greetings from Auschwitz”, is based on a collection of postcards sent by tourists who visited the former Nazi death camp Auschwitz-Birkenau, the oldest postcard is from 1947 – two years after the liberation of the camp.

What's the best image you've ever taken? What was the scenario, and why do you like it?

When I was working on The Protagonists series (about families) – me and my husband travelled to a little village near Cracow – Pcim (where my friend and his family live) – they have a typical Polish farm. There we made the most characteristic picture from this series, which presents a mother and a daughter with a rooster. I remember this shooting session very well, we had to organize a little photo-studio in a barn (image nr1.) This family is incredible.

What's the best photo you never took?

For me, photography is not about capturing a moment, I'm not a photojournalist. The photos I didn't take are ideas I haven't used yet, not opportunities I missed.

The one photograph you'd save in a nuclear apocalypse - your own, or someone else's?

Not my own picture, for sure. Few days ago I saw photographs of nuclear bombs tests – they were fascinating. Maybe one of them should remain after this kind of tragedy.

What's your message to your younger self, in the moment they decided to be a photographer?

There is something I've been thinking about a lot lately, and it is connected with what Susan Sontag wrote almost three decades ago – she said that 'we become callous' because of images.

It seems to me that nowadays we can speak of callousness towards visual products in a general sense. Images are present at nearly every turn, produced of a massive scale. Perhaps, as a result of this excess, we are losing the 'sensitivity' of our look; we see and understand less.

I would definitely encourage my younger self to think about it too.

My short bio:

Natalia Wiernik (b. 1989) / multimedia artist / based In Cracow (Poland) / graduate of the Cracow's Academy of Fine Arts / a PhD student at the same academy / double scholar of the Ministry of Science an Higher Education for prominent achievements (2013 and 2015) / beneficiary of Young Poland Scholarship for the achievements in the field of visual arts / her works get recognition all over the world, frequently awarded in international festivals: New York Photography Awards, Sony World Photography Awards, PDN Photo Annual, International Photography Awards and many others / winner of the first edition of DEBUTS, which aims to promote the most talented emerging Polish photographers / collaborator of the International Cultural Centre in Cracow.