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Photographing You, Photography Me: Interviews on Portraiture

By Katherine Oktober Matthews, March 8, 2017



Since the dawn of photography, much has been brought to light on the nature of portraiture, in terms of the dynamics between the one who is photographing and the one who is being photographed. It's a curious collaboration, fraught with complex power dynamics and hard questions concerning authenticity and identity. Here, we speak with two photographers who approach the art of taking portraits from opposite perspectives. Norwegian photographer Anja Niemi

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(b. 1976) places herself in front of her camera, yet insists that her photos are not self-portraits. British photographer Christopher Bucklow (b. 1957) meanwhile creates imagery of others, describing the result as a reflection of himself.

Anja Niemi
The Woman Who Never Existed

You said were inspired to make your new series by a quote from the Italian actress Eleonora Duse, who said: “Away from the stage I do not exist”. What is it about these words that so inspired you?

I could see everything right away, a story of an actress who started to disappear when no one was looking. Even though the quote is almost a century old, it’s so current. Sadly, I think many people can relate to that in our time.

Your work in general is quite performative. To what extent do you also see your work as a way of asserting your own existence?

I often think about what it would be like to photograph someone else. I have always been a little uncomfortable with the exposure, and photographing myself is not even that practical! Like when my character is on roller skates or floating face-down in a pool. Also, very ironically, I actually hate having my picture taken, but when I’m alone and in costume it feels different. I am photographing a character, not me. I have always worked this way because I am more comfortable by myself. I love making pictures and I don’t want my nervousness or insecurities to stop me.