

Carla Kogelman, is an Amersfoort (NL), based photographer who won a unanimous decision and the gold prize at SO 2013. The charming grittiness of her personality is mirrored in the softness and elegance of her photography.



Interview

by:
Denson Pierre
photography:
Dik Nicolai

Carla Kogelman

Gold

Q. Are you an artist or a photographer?

CK. I am a photographer.

Q. Why do you not incorporate being an artist into your answer? What for you is the big separation?

CK. For me a photographer works on daily life issues... Artists... This is maybe a difficult question... Art implies and implements and should be available for anybody. Most of the time art is only available for a certain group and sometimes sounds 'high-brow' while photography is more back to basics.

For me art is more from a distance and photography is closer, and I try to make things close. I am not a set photographer. I like to see what is going on and work with that. I am not a director and I do not direct.

Q. Are you interested in movement for instance?

CK. I am interested in movement but more so in content and emotion. I am more interested in the authenticity of the people (models) instead of it being that I am trying to 'make' them or seeking out what they can give to me under instruction.

Q. Do you like being photographed?

CK. If I had a choice I would prefer to photograph other people and that is usually the case most of the time. But, I actually do not mind if people want to photograph me and I let them, as I appreciate that it is part of the exchange. That said, I do not like being in the spotlight.

Q. Do you have a good appreciation of how you came to be the overall winner at SO 2013?

CK. Sure, I am very happy with it! I think it is due to the combination of the way I chose to present my work of the last year with this particular jury voting for it. If it had been another jury I could have easily been overlooked actually. It is always a communication between the aim of a jury and myself as a photographer.

Q. Are you saying then that the format and the way PANL organised the competition suits you and other competitions of a different format do not?

CK. No, no. There are a lot of photography competitions going on where you can catch the eye, like in the X-Factor or Idols, and create your personal support by receiving public votes which are almost more important than the votes of the professional jury. What I mean is that there always has to be a match between a jury and the content people submit. If other people were sat on that jury they could have voted in a very different way.

Q. Do you consider your work to be of the 'now'?

CK. Actually, I consider my work to be timeless. I am though very happy that people say it is of the now and that the jury agreed. I even had some comments on Facebook by some well-known photographers who were glad to learn that documentary photography was under the gaze of the jury again. I think my work could have been seen 20-30 years ago, this is what makes it timeless.

Q. It must have been tremendously emotional to receive the recognition for something you have been busy with for at least ten years?

CK. Well, actually I only started at the photography academy in 2008 and graduated in 2011

Q. But, you did not just suddenly in 2008 decide that you wanted to be a photographer and that was that?

CK. Photography has been in my blood for a while. For longer than ten years I think.

I have been running a theatre agency for the past 25 years and have been busy with visual theatre companies, puppet companies, object companies, companies or pieces where images were more important than words. When I ended the relationship with my business partner, I reconsidered my life and decided that I wanted to take another direction. I had met someone who suggested that I educate myself and use the resource of the many people out there who were able to help and teach a lot about photography. I started at the academy as I wished to do something professionally with what I could learn there.

It helped that I am a tough person by nature, a fighter, so if I am going for something then I am really going for it. I am more the type who is determined. I am passionate.

Q. Were there any particular challenges for you with SO 2013?

CK. Well, the selection I made was for SO 2013 (new format). For me the challenge was to make a series that would reflect how I had worked over the past year. It was not just one series but in fact a compilation of three different series.

Q. How close or far are you from being commercial with what you do?

CK. I am a photographer seven days a week. I still work as the business manager of one theatre company and as their agent. I make a living with this and being a photographer. Currently I am working on an 80-day project for which there is no payment at the beginning but it offers me travel expenses, good food and a lot of contacts. It will pay off though, as I am learning a lot and I can sell some of the products and I will also make a book of it. Part of the submitted series was made in Austria where I was working a lot with theatre. There was this international children's festival who asked me to make a documentary about their region. So, that is how I started the project and ended up living with this family in a small herb growing village. I stayed on their farm being well looked after by the grandmother.

The project is now finished and ran at an exhibition during last September.

Q. What we now know to be professional photography, will it even exist in a few years time?

CK. Well, flashy equipment does not make a good photographer as it is all about your content and the story you want to tell; that should make the difference. I myself have just started out and do not have the attitude that I am a stand-out and many projects will be offered to me.

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I think of it the other way round as well, I approach my audience, my models and the people I follow but also the people who provide me with projects.

People will always need images. Currently we have Facebook which is more interesting for publishing images. With people who work with sound for instance, such as engineers etc., to access their work you will always need an extra click. Facebook is here and more than adequate for professionals.

The challenge is to keep on improving and producing interesting stories. You should also keep trying to find collaborators in your work and the right platform.

Q. What is your vision about the role of a photographer such as yourself, in the face of technology?

CK. The techniques, as far as I am concerned, should work for me. They should support me. Just three weeks before I won this prize I had bought myself a new camera, two new lenses, spent a lot of money, so now I can use these high-end prizes but I also want to get used to the camera I just bought (haha)! I am more the type of woman who, when she is at ease with something, is then easily happy with it. I am actually not a technologically driven photographer.

I could even try making a good photo with a disposable camera to again show that it is about the story you want to tell and not about the money you have spent on equipment. The story is about editing as well, as that is very important. I could have sent in another series of 12 pictures but that would not have properly reflected me as a photographer and my story of the past year.

Who is in the jury and can there be a match?

Q. Are there not just other 'open' competitions around?

CK. It still depends on the jury. If there is no jury or a public jury then it is of course different. You can also enter things like Magnum or World Press and face those judges, but then you should select another edit because every panel needs a different edit. You don't want to eat fish all week long... Maybe the same breakfast but you do not want to have the same dinner five days a week.

Q. Do you see something like SO 2023 having any significant comparison to SO 2013?

CK. It is always difficult to look into the future but it would be nice if they could improve and if they could match the needs and desires of the wider photography world.

Maybe... because maybe, there should be room for multi-media. SO 2023, well, Magnum and World Press are already inclusive of multi-media and there needs to be an audience, not only a professional audience, but an audience interested in what is being produced. And maybe there is an altogether new audience popping up over the next few years...

I hope SO 2023 looks very different to SO 2013. This is why I like being part of documentary making such as in my Austrian project, as it is not only about 'this is photography', 'this is performing art', 'this is design' etc. - you should look to and learn from your neighbours in creativity.

What I have been doing with my own edits is of course making my own and not their stories out of it. It is about my childhood, past or memories. So it is actually not theirs anymore but simply my story. Have you seen my photographs?