

Jouk Oosterhof, Amsterdam (NL), has packaged herself into being one of the more sought after for impactful and stunning photography best used in advertising. Her mastery of this language saw her take the bronze prize at SO 2013.

## Interview

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# Jouk Oosterhof

## Bronze

Q. Good afternoon Jouk, you are one of the winners of SO 2013. What role do you see for yourself therefore as an educator?

JO. I wouldn't call myself an educator. I don't see myself as a role model. But I do try to teach my interns to search for their own style. To look for their interests, their personal taste, their life, their occupations... whatever. It helps to find that style. At the Academy you can adopt a lot of different styles, I find it important to find your own. Of course you are influenced by others, so am I. I often work with other people, and they inspire me, sometimes influence me, but a picture is best when I also managed to maintain my individuality in the process. Making a good photo for me is only partly due to good technical skills, but maybe even more to listening to my intuition. Sometimes I don't really know at the moment why I choose one detail over another, but then looking at it again, I suddenly understand why I did. For me, that has something to do with giving room to the unconscious. Which is a difficult thing to teach.

Q. How and why would the jury have chosen you?

JO. What a difficult question! But I'll try to answer it.... The new form of the competition makes it possible to show the continuity of my work. People often say they recognise my

pictures. My work has a certain subtlety. If you would see only one picture, you could miss out on the fact, that this subtlety isn't a coincidence, but a vital part of my signature. In a series or portfolio I was able to show this personal style. The jury described it very well I think. When their comments were read out loud I thought: This could be me.

Q. Are you convinced that your current work is of the 'now'?

JO. Yes, my work is of the now, as it is made in the now. I don't follow trends, at least not consciously, because you are always influenced to a certain extent, by things that seem to roam around in the air. What I try to do is stick to myself, to invigorate what belongs to me. And that, I think, is important, it makes my images timeless. Timelessness, I think, is of all times, more than a very trendy image.

Q. What is your own idea and vision as to the role of a photographer in the face of the encroachment of technology?

JO. Technology has always been important in photography, so that's not really new. The latest developments will make it seem easier to make a good picture, but technique is not and has never been the main ingredient

to make an outstanding picture. There's more to it, than an expensive camera and Photoshop. Personal input will become even more important. Of course there are more photographers nowadays, because it is easier to make a picture that looks quite professional. So to see the difference between a good picture by an amateur and a really professional picture is something you would want a client to be able to. And that appears to be difficult sometimes. What I like about PANL's new format is that it demands to show the person handling the camera. That might help to make the standards high again.

Q. Is there room left for art?

JO. In general, I would say: why not? The way I see it, artists don't work mainly technically, but more conceptually. Photographers that have an artist status, are the ones who work in that way. But what is art? I wouldn't call myself an artist, but a photographer, because. I always work within the boundaries of the assignment. I try to stage the image I have in my head. That's my starting point. I allow the circumstances to influence this process, so sometimes it turns out differently than I expected, and that's okay. Even more so it gives something you cannot think of in advance. It's in the moment.

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Q. With so many more hobbyist and high-powered digital toys is there a future for photography, as we know it, as a profession?

JO. It's true there's more competition than ten years ago, because it has become easier to make a picture that looks good. But I think, the real problem is money. Because of the crisis, money is more often an issue. That will change again hopefully, so there will be more elbow room for photographers in general. On the other hand, clients have changed as well. There were always hobbyists, but they were valued differently, taken less seriously.

Q. Do you think there will be something like SO 2023?

JO. I wouldn't see why not. As long as they remain critical. There is always room for improvement. Last year a lot of effort was made. It shows. The competition could become more interesting each year and the book will gain importance if PANL keep looking at what could be improved. It is a very important association for applied photography in the Netherlands. If they don't try competing too much with documentary contests or conceptual photography prizes that is. They would be missed if they wouldn't exist.

Q. How important could it be?

JO. As the level of selection increases and the book and expo will keep growing, the competition could become more important abroad, just like the AOP in the UK is. It would be good, if the competition should be used as a tool to find Dutch applied photography.

Q. What next for Jouk?

JO. Keep on working keep on making nice things. I like to take things as they come. And there is always room for exploration. For example, I would like to work abroad more than I have done till now. A member of the jury encouraged me to look further than just the Netherlands, and that is a good incentive to take action.