

Photographer and Filmmaker, Aleksander Nakic

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[Claudia Marks]: How has growing up in Serbia influenced your work, has it affected your work in any way?

[Aleksander Nakic]: I'm really glad you asked me that question, especially now during the crisis we are all facing. Everything that we are seeing and feeling now - empty store shelves, uncertainty and fear, my generation already experienced growing up in Serbia. We were born just a couple of years before the '90's when our country went into war, economic depression, total anarchy, dictatorship and generally one really bad decade. During those uncertain times, we all stayed together, and we went back to basics. I remember that my favorite of the bad stuff were the electric blackouts because we would all cuddle up and play the guessing games or just talk. Real talk. When there was no food and basic supplies in stores, we went back to nature and turned to the countryside. I remember spending some of the best days in my life on my grandma's farm, where running around the green fields would change the gloomy reality of the Serbian situation. I think I'm trying to find those sweet little moments in everything now in my life and work... And yes, the whole experience of growing up in Serbia during those times affected me more than I'd like to admit it. Actually, I think that most of us here, try not to think about it. I mean, we were all sitting in our basements with bombs falling around us, just 20 years ago. We accepted all of it with humor and not because we tried to suppress it, but because we accepted it as something that had to be, so now that it's over we can do anything, we can conquer the world. We already went through the worst. That's why I always feel that we should focus on the positive and that's the image I'd like to send out by making imagery. Of course, I know that life isn't all smiles and vibrant colors, but it really doesn't have to be gray. There's good to come out of any situation. We already see many beautiful examples happening now, during the pandemic, to prove it.

[CM]: You shoot a lot of travel imagery, what was your most memorable trip?

[AN]: I know it's not something people like to say these days, but I try not to travel too much because when I do, I want to be able to soak in the experience, so every trip can stay memorable. There has been a couple of those life-changing trips, though, and if I have to choose those would have to be two different trips I took to the US. The first one while I was still in college, I worked as a lifeguard and used the chance to explore the lifestyle of different types of communities in the Washington, DC area. That's also when I decided I want to do photography full time, so I bought my first DSLR camera. A couple of years later I came back as a photographer, exploring the NYC area and having a really fun Big Sur road trip. I came back home totally broke with lots of cool pictures.

[CM]: Why should people visit Serbia?

[AN]: Because it's one of the last spots in Europe that hasn't been over explored and changed by tourism. There's a sense of unpredictability that can be exciting to some people.

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[CM]: When did you start taking pictures and when did you decide that creating imagery was something you wanted to do full time?

[AN]: For as long as I can remember, I carried along a camera with me, although my first love was making short films about my family and everyday stuff. I switched to taking pictures later on and once I discovered stock photography, I realized that I can do it full time.

[CM]: What is your favorite subject to shoot?

[AN]: I love to shoot different things and it's interesting to explore the variety of human experience, although if I have to choose it would be real people doing real things. If I can approach a shoot like a photojournalist, I'm happy.

[CM]: Why didn't you go into photojournalism? How did you learn to be more intentional with your imagery?

[AN]: I never went into photojournalism, although I was always politically and socially really engaged, and it would have made sense. I wanted to tell more intimate and personal stories about my family and friends doing incredible things, so I chose to create imagery that told those narratives. It all started pretty spontaneously, and for the first couple of years, we did it on the run. In time though, once I started shooting for iStock, my production got more serious, because I wanted to explore themes that are not as easily accessible to me and I hope that the emotions are still real, and the stories connect with other people.

[CM]: How do you usually decide what to shoot next? / What do you plan to shoot next (either personal or for us)

[AN]: I am always working on multiple shoots at one time and the decision on which one to shoot next depends on all sorts of unpredictable factors. Some shoots need a longer period of time before all the elements come into place (like the ballet school shoot) and during that time I have other shoot ideas stored in my head. Some will go from idea to realization in a day or two. But it's usually a mostly spontaneous process for me because people are unpredictable. I plan to shoot some business concepts next, it's something I'm not really good at and I'd like to explore the subject.

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[CM]: I know you jumped at the idea of doing a youth ballet shoot when I mentioned it, how did our conversations evolve your approach?

[AN]: It's one of those shoots I wanted to do for a long time, but I had to wait for everything to come into place. I first met Jovana, the owner of a ballet school, during our hiking trip in Nepal four years ago. We spoke numerous times about doing a shoot with kids having their class as they usually do, as real as possible. Once you mentioned it as something that needed coverage, I remembered Jovana I decided it's time to make it happen.

[CM]: I remember that you wanted to shoot this in your photo studio and I pushed you to do it in a real ballet space, I think it really made the shoot feel more real and also more beautiful, what do you think?

[AN]: Yep, and I'm so glad that you did. I thought that I'd have more control over the whole scenery and the light in my own studio and there were a few things that I didn't like about the actual space. But I'll admit it – it forced me to work outside of my comfort zone and I really needed that push from you. In the end, those kids took over the scene and gave light to the whole space.

[CM]: Where did you find your cast for this shoot?

[AN]: The cast is a real dancing crew with the addition of my son who was really interested in taking a ballet class.

[CM]: Did you know anything about Ballet before shooting this?

[AN]: I once saw a really bad production of modern ballet and that really pushed me away from the whole thing. Before the shoot, I did some research by watching a couple of ballet documentaries, with the best one being [Ballet 422](#) from 2014.

[CM]: Who is your favorite photographer or artist?

[AN]: The first book about photography I ever owned was of [Helmut Newton's work](#). It made me appreciate thinking totally outside of the box during the shoot and trying spontaneous things that others usually wouldn't. I also enjoy the work of [Ryan McGinley](#) and his 'epic annual road trips' were something that inspired me to try the same with my family and friends (minus the nudes).

[CM]: What's music is currently on heavy rotation for you?

[AN]: The latest album by The Lumineers.

[CM]: What TV show or Movie do you think everyone should see?

[AN]: It's really hard to pick one. I really like shows about stand-up comedians (Master of None, Curb Your Enthusiasm, Crashing). I'm also a sucker for Comedians in Cars Getting Coffee. If you want to see a great movie, just watch any documentary about the great Muhammad Ali, there's a lot of them and I always feel inspired afterwards (start off with ['The Rumble in the Jungle'](#)).