

Photographer, Juan Veloz

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[Christina Nwabugo]: Community is important, especially in the photography space. When did you discover your photography community and how did it feel knowing you were all on the same visual mission?

[Juan Veloz]: I'd say I recently got in touch with many Latino Photographers once I did a Nike campaign featuring a few amazing Dominican Photographers. It was beautiful to see how much love for one another there was from strangers all with one goal: to create nonstop while telling a raw, authentic story.

[CN]: Speaking of stories, what did you love about the dancers' photo essay you submitted?

[JV]: Unity was the main objective of the dancers' photo essay. I grew up loving the art of dance and it was only right to include dancers in the Nosotros series.

[CN]: Who is your favorite Latin photographer and filmmaker?

[JV]: I have a long list of different Latin Photographers/Filmmakers. From Olmo Cavlo Alberto Vargas, Renell Medrano, Cheril Sanchez - the list goes on! One thing these photographers have in common is that they shoot raw work; you can tell by looking at their work that it's just honest.

[CN]: Do you feel as though your identity is questioned because you identify as both Black and Latino?

[JV]: Growing up it was more so. I feel like now if you're questioning my identity that's more of your problem and your lack of knowledge. People need to get it through their heads that it is very much possible and powerful to be Black and Latino.

[CN]: What memories do you have growing up both Black and Latino?

[JV]: I felt different. My sister and I were always questioned by our peers growing up and we just never knew what to say. Growing up Dominican, it's rare you will hear someone say we're Black. I always identified as being Dominican and nothing else until I started doing my own research and looking in the mirror. Till this day people double-take when I speak Spanish.

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[CN]: Within the Latin region - where do you want to travel next?

[JV]: I'd love to go to Nicaragua. My best friend Preshous is Afro Latina and her mother's side is from there. I'd love to experience her family and hopefully create a project which fits perfectly into my body of work. Possibly photograph her family just being themselves and capturing real authentic moments!

[CN]: Creating positive commercial imagery within your community starts from a knowledge of how people view themselves within social structures in culture. What is your main ethos?

[JV]: Highlighting the older generation of our community. We forget a lot of our upbringing, and I want to keep the youth refreshed about our traditions. Learning positive traditions and documenting them leaves a legacy made by us for us.

[CN]: What advice would you give to rising artists who want to tell stories about their heritage?

[JV]: Create for yourself. Never forget your "why" when you're creating. It's so easy to get derailed with the new social media wave of consuming photography, but as long as you stay in your lane and carve out what success means to you, you will be fine. For myself, I had to do a lot of self-work. A lot of praying, writing down my goals, re-reading them, having my family in NYC pray for me. It's so easy to get caught up and forget that we need to take deep breaths and take everything in. Then proceed!

Understanding social media inducing trends, I also felt it was important to ask about taking the initiative to document the meaning of family.

[CN]: What is your earliest memory of wanting to keep the documentation of your family going?

[JV]: I'd have to say a portrait I took of my family in the countryside of Santiago, Dominican Republic. The photo was just filled with so many generations and love.

[CN]: What inspires you to shoot and what drives you now?

[JV]: I feel like in these past few years I found my purpose. I feel right with what I'm doing - I found my happiness. The women in my life for sure influence and inspire me daily. I approach every single project with love and honesty, something the women who raised me engraved in my heart.

[CN]: It wouldn't be a complete Getty Images interview without asking, what is your camera of choice?

[JV]: My Canon 5D Mark III and Mamiya RZ67 hold me down.

[CN]: What's your landscape of choice?

[JV]: A Field. Something about an open field with a natural light box (sun) brings me so much joy.

[CN]: Memories are important. What is your favorite endearing phrase in your language?

[JV]: My grandmother (Monica Soriano) always says "Con fe todo es posible" - with faith anything is possible

[CN]: What do you think about the Nosotros collection?

[JV]: Nosotros is needed! Much needed, especially in a climate where there are so many Latinos in the art space thriving and evolving at a good rate.

[CN]: While speaking with Juan, we came to a conclusion that in this important era of researching identity through community, briefed projects like Nosotros transform how people depict

Latinx/Hispanic culture in commercial imagery. This leads into my closing question about online platforms and authenticity. What are the key steps to representation in the commercial and storytelling space?

[JV]: Hiring artists from the community and conducting research with notable characters within the community is a key step. Companies today tend to share a slight problem where they think they're doing something right by telling the story rather than allowing execution from locals. What matters most is who is behind the lens.