

Lina Bessonova

Film photography can be both a full-time job and a tool of self-discovery, like it is for Lina Bessonova. The blue-haired photographer and printer based between Florence and Azure Coast is feeling like her whole life path was leading to this analog-centered life, even though her first twenty-two years bore no sign of this unusual future. "I had no idea analog still existed and never treated photography seriously. It started with being forced into a film photography class when I came to a university in Switzerland to study radio production," recalls Lina, "I still don't exactly know how, but analog stole my heart and turned my life upside down". Maybe it was the fixer smell that got the Russian student addicted, but fast forward eight years and the addiction had become serious. With a Masters in Fine Arts in Photography degree and her own analog photo lab, it is now rare that a day goes by in Lina's life without chemistry. "If I could live in the darkroom, I would," she smiles. "At some point I actually did, printing up to twelve hours a day while working on my book, *At Home*, and it's been the happiest time."



The series of forty-five medium format darkroom prints were the first non-documentary personal project Lina developed in the course of a year, dealing with a profound sense of homelessness. "I was born in Russia, grew up in Switzerland, went to universities both in Moscow and Geneva, moved to Florence and was planning on moving to Azure Coast," Lina sighs. "My life was a mess of trains and planes and car rides. All the people and places dear to me were spread across the continent, and I didn't feel like I truly belonged anywhere." Amid the constant haste of travels, this project became an exercise in slowing down and looking at the most mundane scenes and objects which had no place, time or identity. Those context-less images, chosen for their emotional resonance and sense of familiarity, created a visual home outside of one physical space. "The series is one big metaphor consisting of smaller metaphors, there is a story behind every image. It's largely influenced by the Jungian theory of the unconscious. Nothing is staged, but nothing is random."

Regardless of careful subject choice, to Lina it's not just the image content that counts. "A negative is pure data," she states firmly. "Until it's printed, it's not an expressed idea, just a vague concept of what can possibly be said." To her, the darkroom interpretation is equally, if not even more, important than the image itself: "Just by changing contrast, paper texture or toner you can convey opposite feelings and ideas. They say photographs don't lie, or at least analog ones don't, because there is no Photoshop involved. Well, it's a much subtler lie... an illusion of truth. There is no objectivity in photography, there never has been." Lina's subjective vision seems to be quite calm and melancholic. "For this project, certainly!" she laughs, "It's all about emotional states expressed through light and textures. Once I got the feelings out of me, wrote them with light on photo paper, I suddenly discovered my home has always been there, so close to me. Being at home is a state, not a presence at a location." However, responding to the question where she feels most at home, without hesitation Lina answers, "In the darkroom."

Lina Bessonova will be a regular contributor in the coming issues. As a popular personality on YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter, she is an important ambassador for analog photography. With her combination of fresh, young presence and real knowledge and skill-base, she reaches over 20,000 subscribers.

