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## LOUISE FAGO- RUSKIN- INTERVIEW

Par Laetitia Allal

Who are you Louise Fago Ruskin ? Tell us a little about you ? What is your background ? When, how and why did you decide to become a photographer... ?

I have been living and working as a photographic practitioner in the UK for the last 6 years. I was first drawn to photography as a medium after my two daughters reached school age. My father had been a photographer and his father a master in the darkroom. Though I did not grow up with my father who sadly passed away a few years ago, his influence was and remains important to me and I think the desire to take pictures had lain dormant for longer than I had realised.

I joined an evening class in black and white traditional processes and began to feel that this was the avenue I wanted to pursue. Studying for my BA in Plymouth was pivotal to my development. My tutors were a highly dedicated team who were able to encourage my growing practice and equally my MA in

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Brighton further confirmed direction and motivations.

For me the camera allowed me to speak without censure. I had been a quiet child ; keen to please. This habit of silence was broken when I used the camera as a tool for expression and even dissent .



Are you inspired by contemporary photographers?

I am inspired by a range of practitioners working in a range of mediums. I have become very interested in the work of Jonny Briggs. His practice seems willing to cross accepted boundaries of representation and has an instinctive quality that I appreciate. He encourages me to guard against self-censure. I have always been interested in Louise Bourgeois and constantly revisit her work. The ways in which she retells her early childhood narratives seem so full of truth and transparency and and her ability to convey these unsettling moments draw me in every time . Paula Rego has also been a constant source of inspiration. She tackles those areas we normally tuck away with a bravery and gusto that I greatly admire. In this respect, Anna Gaskell's early figurative work was an intriguing find. Her ability to elicit the mysterious and macabre and the sheer luxury of her image-making made her an early inspiration

You try to catch the unconscious through your pictures ?  
Can you explain that ? And why this interest ?

My interest in accessing and communicating the unconscious has remained fundamental in my work. Early on I began to explore the writings of Jung and this was new and exciting for me. His work gave me permission to allow the 'shadow' side of our human natures to show itself without censure or defence. The shame inherent in hiding one's darker side lost power as I made pictures in such a deliberate manner. It became important to me to be able to access previously locked internal spaces and my studio became, in effect, my confessional box and confidante. There is a strange paradox in that work

made fluidly and privately is then placed in the public realm but I am still able to maintain the sense of safety that the camera gives me to tackle uncomfortable subject matter.



Solemnly, faith seems very important in your work, Why ?

This is always a hard question for me to talk about ! You are right, the subject of faith and its complexities does run through my work. There are times I have tried to escape it but I cannot seem to. My personal history includes close involvement with and sudden exit from a particular faith environment. As time passes my memories and responses to this area of my life shifts its shape continuously. The work does attempt on some level to express the felt paradoxes surrounding this : both the safety experienced and ensuing suffocation. I have tried to show both sides and express both my longing for lost comfort and my frustration at containment. It seems to become less clear-cut as my work evolves and I guess it will never go away.



Can you explain your creative process?

For me, making work is a mixture of careful décision-making and the création of a space that allows for fluidity and freedom. A little like the surrealist's automatic writing. If I do not use myself in my imagery, I am constantly on the lookout for models who I can work with. This began with using my children but it became important to ask adults to sit for me as the subject matter became more uncomfortable and I needed to know my models were comfortable and undisturbed by the procèss.

It is important to me to create spaces that écho my current chosen thème in the hope that the resulting imagery has particular résonance. When working with a model it can get pretty frenetic ! I like to respond to immédiate impulses and though I direct the shoots I always try to be open to those unexpected moments when I recognise something from an interior perspective. The procèss is quite a rapid one and I am never quite sure what the result will be as I shoot on film. What I am hoping for is an image that speaks from more than one perspective and créâtes enough intrigue for the viewer to be willing to sit with it a little and wonder. From a purely personal point of view I also aim for the picture-making procèss to aid change. The shifting of a certain memory or reconstruction of a painful moment that with its release brings relief.

Even your work seems focused more on a psychological things, interior way, we have the feeling that details work is very important for you. The ceremonial clothes seems not to be a detail but belong to the picture. Can you tell us more about this approach ? How and why did you do this?

Yes, the idea of ceremony and ritual is important for me. The use of particular items such as a dress, a certain book or tool is carefully considered so that its impact can be sensed during the picture-making and when shown. They become a kind of talisman for me to negotiate my way through. Some days I take myself off object hunting in junk shops and recycling centres. I wait for things to jump out at me, not asking why in particular , but trusting the procèss. Occasionally my objects are personal belongings and clothing is a key part of my work. I choose clothes that écho a certain sensory feeling on the body. They might be over-constraining or speak of comfort. Objects such as pins, rope and plastic piping are chosen for similiar reasons ; to evoke certain interior émotions and thought.



As a photographer which are your favorite subjects ?

It is hard for me work without a body. I feel the need to 'use' another body to communicate those aspects that I sense within my own body. My models allow me to translate certain aspects of the self with a transparency I find difficult through speech. In many ways, they become me by proxy and help me speak.

How and where do you find your inspiration ?

This comes through a variety of avenues. I love wandering in our local muséum, this was something I did as a child and always feels like a magical space for me that provides me with much to respond to and think about. Reading is also important to me. I have just finished reading a book on Trauma Theory and I have found it has enabled me to approach my work from a richer perspective. I also like to draw as it allows a certain freedom for me to think about the body in a more outlandish way that the camera sometimes does not. And of course galléries and shows are very important - the latest Louise Bourgeois exhibition at the Freud museum is my next treat !

How do you usually like to shoot (digital...)?

I currently shoot on film simply because I enjoy the more surprising élément of receiving négatives. I find this method enables me to slow down my procès, to sit with my images for longer and to really think about what I want to communicate. I am also extremely good at discarding images at an early stage that later prove to be the better choice. Using film helps keeps them safe.



What's your dream project?

There are a number of unconsecrated burial sites in Ireland called 'Cillini'. They house individuals who were, for a variety of reasons, barred from burial within the consecrated ground of the Church. These individuals could be unchristened babies, prostitutes, 'criminals' and those who abandoned their faith. I have always been interested in the ritualistic élément of picture-making and would like to explore these sites with a possible view to creating an intervention, some kind of ceremony, that honours those perceived as being on the outskirts of authentic



belief.



What's next for you?

I am currently working on a piéce of work entitled 'Locus Amoenus '. The term translates as 'pleasant place' and

has connotations of comfort and safety. I am examining trauma theory alongside the search for a kind of lost Eden. It is quite an interesting time of year to be making this work as Spring always feels hopeful to me ! The work seeks to navigate spaces of healing and recovery and continues to rely on eliciting the unconscious in picture-making.

*All photos©Louise Fago- Ruskin, Series:The Catchers*

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