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rising star

📷 NIKKA LORAK ✍️ TERRY HOPE

Fashion is one of the most difficult genres to break into but Belgian-born Nikka Lorak, who started out as a film-maker, is putting together an impressive portfolio and winning some big name clients



PREVIOUS SPREAD: This sequence was shot by Nikka for an apron campaign that reflected an Italian feel

LEFT: Russian celebrity designer Masha Tsikal. "I was delighted to capture her rock 'n' roll sensual spirit"

ABOVE: "Grunge meets high fashion" is how Nikka describes these dynamic portraits of Hollywood actor and model Ekaterina Zalitko

These days we're well used to seeing still photographers move across to the world of moviemaking, but it's not so common for someone to be coming the other way. However, Belgian-born, London-based Nikka Lorak is an exception to the rule and, after graduating from the University of Westminster in 2012 with an MA in film and TV directing, she began making fashion videos and from there made the hop across into fashion still photography. It's been an interesting journey to date and she's taken many of her directing and filming skills across with her.

"Film-making is still an important part of my life and it's had a big impact on my photography work," she says. "Just as I would if I were shooting film I try to bring an element of storytelling and an emotional journey to my still images. Additionally, film-making was a great training ground for both my technical and organisational skills: after managing a film set and organising pre- and post-production of possibly hours of footage, short photography projects feel like a walk in a park!"

Some of the major benefits that come attached to a background in film include the ability to work cohesively in a team, to value the input of others and to understand how to communicate ideas to those in front of the camera.

"A strong image must convey a message, tell a story and resonate emotionally in the soul of a viewer," declares Nikka. "The best models will project the personality of the character they're playing, and they can either elevate a project with their performance or completely kill it. They are as important to a fashion shoot as an actor is to a film."

"But it's not just about the model: I love the whole process of collaborating with other creatives. I constantly hear about self-obsessed photographers who neglect the opinions of their crew on set and I think these individuals miss out on the opportunity to enrich their projects."

Looking for inspiration

One of the crucial things any photographer moving into a fresh area should do is to look around at the work of others who are already successful in



ABOVE: Nikka's latest campaign, created for Sean Panella's 2016 campaign, which has a NYC vibe

ABOVE RIGHT: This was shot as part of a project Nikka created to fuse tribal heritage and modern fashion.

FACING: A Storm Model Agency beauty editorial feature.



“WHILE IT’S IMPORTANT TO BE ON THE SAME PAGE AS THE CREW I LIKE TO GIVE THEM CREATIVE FREEDOM”

as possible,” she says, “and he stresses the importance of using hard light. I love working with hard light and hard shadows; I use a beauty dish to create deep shadows and my latest passions are filters and gels.”

Nikka works with Profoto kit, both studio heads and with the B1 portable lights, which come into their own when she’s on location and electricity supplies might not be available. Lens wise her EF 24–70mm and 70–200mm lenses are the ones she uses the most: “The 24–100mm is an excellent overall fashion lens, suitable for both wide and narrow spaces, while I use the 70–200mm as a portrait lens, and it’s sharp and light. I also work with a 50mm lens, especially if I’m after a raw, 80s look.”

Any fashion photographer has to have a good supply of models, and Nikka finds many of hers through the model agencies she works with. In the UK, along with Elite and Storm, she deals with smaller boutique agencies, such as AMCK, Profile and Leni’s.

“I may also ask a stranger in the street who has an interesting face whether they

might be willing to shoot a test,” she says. In terms of clothing and accessories I completely trust the stylists I’m working with. While it’s important as a photographer to be on the same page as the crew I like to give creative freedom to those who are working with me because a fusion of different creative visions enriches a project.”

Looking to the future Nikka is quick to identify what her ultimate dream assignment would be. “It would have to be a challenge on creative, personal and technical levels,” she explains. “I would be honoured to create, develop and shoot a campaign for an established fashion brand such as YSL, Chanel or Gucci, with a new, edgy, daring approach to it.

“What excites me most is the chance to visualise a brand’s philosophy through images and to push the conventional boundaries, be it through unusual choice of models, experimental light techniques or controversial storytelling. Collaboration with top industry professionals is my ultimate career objective, and I’m hoping I’ll be able to reach that point at some stage.” **A**



Formerly a film-maker, Nikka Lorak has successfully moved over into fashion photography and is now making her mark in this highly competitive arena.

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