

On becoming yourself through your work



Photographer Eylül Aslan discusses connecting to her inner child, repetition in her subject matter, finding balance between art and life, and being egotistical in her work.

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As told to Grashina Gabelmann, 1035 words.

Tags: [Photography](#), [Art](#), [Inspiration](#), [Independence](#), [Identity](#).

I came across a quote of yours where you say you started taking photos because you wanted to get rid of an inner darkness.

Yeah, I guess this inner darkness partly came from growing up in Turkey. This feeling of inner darkness was much stronger when I was still living there. I didn't feel sexually very free. In Turkish society you can't really make moves as a woman and you can't wear whatever you want to wear. There is no law, but if you wear certain things it means you automatically accept being harassed, being followed home or whatever. I wanted to wear things like mini skirts but I didn't feel comfortable doing so. As a result two personas developed within me: I wore baggy clothes to cover myself up in public and in the privacy of my home I would take photos of myself wearing underwear and sexy clothes. That's how I started taking photos. I had a need to exist in a world that was forbidden to me. The "sexy" persona only existed online in my photos, otherwise people saw a good girl until I moved to Berlin at the age of 22.

So, that was the darkness I was talking about: not being allowed to be yourself. I think this is something a lot of people experience. In suppressed cultures this notion is much stronger. It makes you feel crazy. Like, who am I? Am I becoming the person I am pretending to be? Am I suppressing the other part in me so much that it's already died? That's not a nice feeling and photography helped me balance those two inner lives.



It's interesting to speak about inner darkness in the context of your photography because there's such a playful, childlike innocence in your work.

Maybe my photography is a bit of a rebellion against growing up in a society that wants to suppress women and sexuality. My work proves that I am a sexual being and that this cannot or should not be suppressed. I'm just thinking about this now, I never thought about it before, but my work might have some sort of connection to learning that sex is something bad, something to hide. Maybe that's how my work connects to my inner child who feels quite alive.

Do you use yourself less as a subject these days?

Yes. I had to put myself in front of the camera to tackle certain topics, but I feel like I have those figured out. I no longer feel like I have to prove something to the world. I can be whoever I want to be. I have this sass going on. I am, I mean, it sounds horrible, but I'm in a place where I am so in love with myself. I love the life I've built for myself because I wasn't given this life. I did so much on my own terms and gained independence. It's been hard but I can finally say that this is where I always imagined I would be. I don't need to prove to anyone, including myself, that I am this free person. So, I feel a bit past photographing myself as I once did.

The urgency is gone?

Yeah.





You once said that your photography is egotistical. Do you still believe that?

Yeah. And I think it's the case more than ever. You know how many women have this pleasing side in them? Avoiding conflict in order to feel safe. I used to please people, I did things a certain way to get more likes or more attention. Now I don't care what other people think. I do photography because it makes me happy. I do it to satisfy my own needs and desires. Of course I still struggle with the pressures of Instagram that uses a currency of likes. Do I post a certain type of photo and repeat myself because I know people like it? I can reflect this and just don't care anymore. I just do what I want.

That's an interesting idea of repeating oneself. You have a very strong aesthetic. Do you think there is a trap of repeating oneself because people expect a certain type of image from you?

Yeah, I think there can be a vicious cycle. For example, I love legs and I love photographing them. It's like kind of my signature thing. Every time I take a photo of legs it feels like a new thing to me. It's different every time. But essentially it's a photo of legs but then again portraits are just always photos of people's faces and nobody complains about someone taking a million portraits. But apparently it's a problem when it's legs. People have asked me what's so interesting about legs? Well, I mean, what's interesting about faces? I am interested in legs. It's my thing and I find it weird to get criticized for that.

You've actually gotten criticized for that?

Yeah I have.

Do you feel a certain pressure of not wanting to repeat yourself but also wanting to stay true to your aesthetic and taking the photos you want to take?

Yeah. I think anyone who creates has certain kind of fetishes, things that excite them. I have my interests and my subjects and I'm never going to divert from that. I'm so fascinated by the human condition, how men or women define themselves and legs are a part of that.





Eylül Aslan Recommends:

One of my favorite music albums [Baden-Baden by Michaela Melian](#)

[Une Affaire des Femmes](#) by Claude Chabrol, an amazing movie, starring Isabelle Huppert

[A Girl's Story](#), a beautiful memoir written by Annie Ernaux

[Far From The Madding Crowd](#) by Thomas Hardy

And any movie by [Eric Rohmer](#)

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photographer

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