

Photographic Restoration of the Self

NIENKE IZURIETA

By Jennifer Musgrave

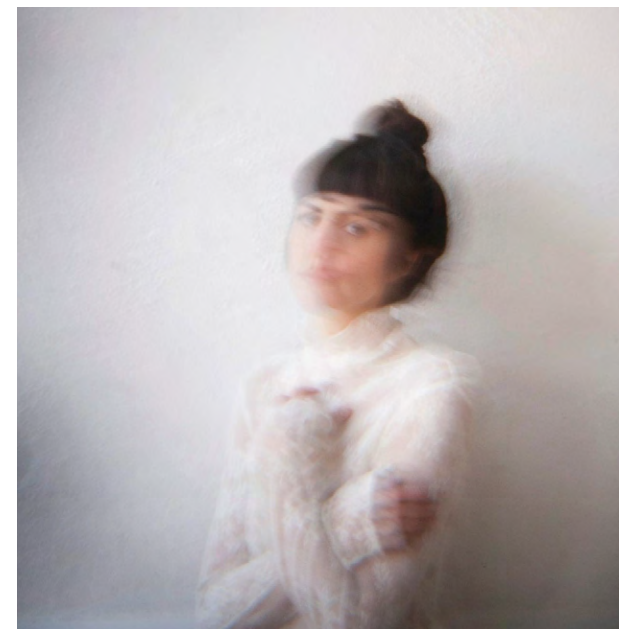


What does it take for the mind to heal?

Processing pain and trauma is still elusive to humans even in this age of technology and new-found scientific understanding. For some it involves participation in a creative act to engage the emotional component of the brain. Art, as a representation of the world, helps to unearth what is trapped below the surface. It is through creative expression that our silent, internal conversations about the events of the world can be known.

New Brunswick photographer Nienke Izurieta's act of capturing light on film illuminates the hidden self and inner psychological processes of the subject and viewer. She steps further by challenging our sense of permanence and time. In a recent installation, *Incendio*, Nienke allowed the burning of a large photograph - *Departure (Vessel)* - to be its completion. The artist asserts that this burning is a release that allows the act of letting go.

This action seems rebellious when much of society seeks to preserve and immortalize. Photographs capture fleeting moments that we naturally seek to preserve against the entropy of time moved onward. Sometimes, though, the prescription one needs for self-healing is the act of letting die patterns of thought which no longer serve.



PHOTOGRAPH BY MICHAEL MOHAN

Employing art as a force of healing, Nienke uses what she calls “Light Therapy” to initiate the self reflection process. Light is an illuminator of dark and hidden things, a metaphor for the psychological struggle of letting our true selves be seen. To see oneself without illusion - to see the naked truth of one’s regret and pain - is a freeing act. In an age of social media, where life is presented through a lens of perfection, to be seen openly and honestly is an uncommon offering. To be vulnerable in such a disconnected world is essential for belonging.

“There is a saying: ‘Every photo you take is a self-portrait’. For the most part, I think that rings true. It’s human to want to connect, but I think it goes a bit deeper than that. Humans want to be seen, to be known and to be loved. Photography has an incredibly powerful way of breaking down barriers and exposing the most vulnerable parts of ourselves.”

With self-portraiture as a vehicle, Nienke utilizes light as a physical and metaphoric illuminator to her own internal psyche.

“There are certain characteristics of light in photographs that reach my subconscious and it triggers an emotional response. That response offers clarity or insight into my life by highlighting certain feelings that are the result from whatever it is I am experiencing in life.”

In today’s world it is harder to find time for thoughtful self assessment; events fly by without proper emotional processing. Nienke asserts that taking a moment amongst the rushing to remember one’s journey and take stock of what’s happening internally is crucial when deciding where to go next.

“For me, self-portraiture is the way that I connect to the deepest part of myself. It is kind of confrontational but mostly therapeutic.”

Nienke’s photographic style incorporates movement to suggest multidimensionality and lend the subject an ethereal quality. A unique quality of light is imparted, one that seems to belong to the subjects; as though they are the source of that light. In the work “The Feminine” you see light in the eyes of female subjects communicating a very internal knowing. As Nienke puts it:

“...the most beautiful quality about the feminine collective is her quiet strength. It is simply an essence that is undisputedly authentic. In a very loud world, I am drawn to those who can say everything with their eyes.”

In the collection of photos titled *The Crown* there is a similar female focus where the adornments worn express a powerful and noble inner strength. Nienke thinks of the women as stepping into their own power. Traditionally crowns have distinguished royalty from commoners, but Nienke views the crown in this series as embodying the “higher self”.

“It is about the relationship one has with themselves and for that reason the crown can very much be seen as the extension of the mind for it is an expression of the life and beauty that is within.”

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CROWN, DIVINE AND FEMININE, MARY



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In some of her projects Nienke explores what light can communicate about a landscape and the people living within it. In the collection *NB Vernacular* the photos shine light on the state of many locations familiar to those living in the Saint John area. Nienke feels the imagery communicates a *“lack of healing, or rather, the need for restoration.”*

With the burning of *Departure (Vessel)* she takes the healing process a step further. The physical destruction mirrors an internal release of emotions. Likewise the title of the burning *Incendio* translates from Spanish to English as a certain quality of fire that can “consume” or “burn up.”

“Printed photographs are actually my dearest, most valued possessions and it makes me feel sick to think about burning photos of people that I love. It is a different idea altogether to burn a photo by which there is no digital copy or negative by which to recreate it again. Perhaps that will be the most difficult challenge for me.”





DEPARTURE (VESSEL)



INCENDIO, INSTALLATION AT BAYSHORE BEACH, DEPARTURE (VESSEL)

Prior to its demise, this piece was featured in the art exhibit *Harbour* which featured nine artists with strong ties to New Brunswick. This exhibition showcased the ways in which a coastal society reacts with preservation to the world around them. Nienke tapped into the idea that the coast tends to harbour things; things sometimes in need of releasing. Hence the burning of this print was a point of closure, a send off amid fire and water. The concept of destruction as cathartic completion does challenge one to consider if this may be applicable to our belief systems and unconscious programming, too.

“I didn’t approach the burning of the photograph as an act of destruction but rather as an act of release. The understanding of my work comes in stages and I’m not always aware of what motivates my process until I have time to reflect on it. My thoughts were clearly focused around wanting to challenge my own perception of permanency and time.”

In many ways *Departure (Vessel)* and its burning *Incendio* incited transformation of the artist more than the subject. The release of old thinking brings about the birth of a new self; a new cycle has begun and our permanence through life is once again in question. The symbiotic flow between photographer and subject brings something new to light, unraveled only upon departure from the safe harbour of the known. ↓

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