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PICTURE

PERFECT

“A KITCHEN SINK” ARTIST IS HOW ANNA KOZAK DESCRIBES HERSELF, A PHRASE WHICH CAME TO HER AS AMY FORDE MET TO DISCUSS HER ARTISTIC PRACTICE OVER A MUG OF TEA IN HER STUDIO SPACE.

Originally from Poland, Anna explains how coming over to the UK was an adventure in itself. “I wanted to start afresh and I was kind of taken by the new reality,” she says.

Having worked for a while on a radio show back home, upon moving Anna decided to pursue photography.

“That’s when I started thinking if I can’t be a journalist or work in the same capacity as I was back in Poland, then maybe taking photographs or pictures - photojournalism - that could be an outlet for me to apply my skills and advance in my career.”

Despite these intentions, Anna discovered through study and practice that she preferred more traditional photography, something which fell into her interests and introverted personality, as she explains: “I like the slowness of photography, where you have only a limited amount of shots on your piece of film. And then you have to spend time in the dark room, you have to develop your film...I kind of like the fact I don’t have to rush anywhere, I can spend some time to think.”

Many people think photography is about simply taking a picture, with the popularity of smartphones nearly all of us carry cameras around in our pockets, but photography is all about making a picture. This is something particularly relevant to traditional photography, as Anna tells me.

“I love the moment when I develop film and it is properly exposed the way I wanted it, because I feel as if I have achieved something, I have made the correct choices. Obviously the camera is just an extension of your eye, but it’s got a different way of seeing. You can’t really tell what your picture is going to look like, especially in black and white, until you develop and print it. The unknown is probably the most appealing thing to me.”

After completing her photography course in Edinburgh she decided to pack up her belongings and make the move to South Yorkshire with her previous partner who was from Rotherham. Full of hope and happiness, she worked to save money to invest back into her photography practice.

“Somehow I ended up submitting my work for an exhibition in Rotherham at the Old Market Gallery,” Anna informs me, and it was

through this she met a member of ROAR who asked whether she would like to rent a studio space at Westgate Chambers.

After this initial meeting, she took on her first studio in Rotherham and became a member of the organisation herself

“I still am a member,” says Anna. “I am really happy and proud to be honest, I really like the organisation. And I like the fact that with ROAR you don’t have to be an amazing artist, you still will be able to feel part of something.”

“I think everyone is welcome at ROAR.”

By getting involved in one of ROAR’s Artist Talks monthly events held at Westgate Chambers where a selected artist delves into their practice, Anna met fellow members Jennifer Booth and John Stanton. Combining their equipment and with the support of ROAR,

ABOVE: Mayfly - the photograph commissioned by REMA in 2015 to celebrate International Women’s Day on March 8. It was shot with Mamiya 645 on B&W film, but it was digitally edited and printed.

RIGHT: Promo photograph for Gemma Nemer and the Button Tin, Rotherham, July 2015 - at the time the Button Tin was still in the kiosk inside Imperial Buildings, Rotherham.

they established a dark room at Westgate Chambers, a space where they could further develop their practice. The three joined together to become art collective Sometimes3, eventually taking studio space at Ship Hill in Rotherham town centre.

Working collaboratively they opted to take part in 'Open Up', a yearly event in South Yorkshire which allows the general public to see into artists studios, ask questions and participate in workshops.

Anna reflects on one year where they turned her studio into a Camera Obscura to draw in an audience. In fact, while occupying Ship Hill, Anna immersed herself in numerous, artistic projects within Rotherham, including 2016's Refugee Week and REMA's Love is Louder initiative.

These are only a couple of her many achievements, but self-deprecatingly Anna is still reluctant to still classify herself as an artist:

"An artist?" she asks. "I don't really consider myself an artist. I fell into that category because I like traditional photography which, because its obsolete in commercial terms, meant I kind of fell into fine art as well."

Much of this lies with a frustration about her current situation, juggling different jobs and voluntary positions to simply make ends meet.

She hasn't got much time left to dedicate to her artistic practice, as she simply puts it: "I have no time to waste."

Anna wishes there was more financial support given to those in the creative industry, especially in photography where the equipment and initial set up costs are very costly.

Although in this swirl of reality that has seen her photography somewhat pushed to the side for the moment, she has still managed to express her creative side through one of her other passions.

"I don't know if you know but South Yorkshire, well all of Yorkshire I think, is very rich in amateur dramatics and operatic societies," she explains. Her first experience of pantomime, "blew my mind," she exclaims.

After seeing this initial performance, she took the plunge to get involved and the following year she was given a part with this same production company. Having had a passion for theatre since she was young, Anna had previously applied for a place on two different drama courses in Poland but unfortunately didn't get through. It was at this point she gave up on theatre, something she regrets and pleads with others not to do.

"If you have a talent, ability or interest it will come back to you and then you may regret why you decided to give up on it."

She adds: "Someone saw me perform and said 'you come to life when you are on-stage!'"

Anna will appear in Robin and The Sherwood Hoodies by Craig Hawes, with a new theatre company from Rotherham FAR FAR AWAY THEATRE. You can catch the showings on March 16 and 17 2018 also at The Montgomery Theatre, Sheffield.



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