

Celebrating Women in Photography Today

MISS PIN UP

Shelby Alexander

When I began this project I wasn't sure how it would fit in with the work I had been doing to date. There were obvious threads; sexuality, identity, self expression and performance. All subjects that appear in my practice time and time again but this was also very different. Here were women voluntarily performing, often nearly naked, in competition with each other.

I was struck by the juxtaposition of the exposed flesh and the tales of fear, repression and pain that the girls shared with me. Here before me was an enactment of the feminist struggle with the philosophy of embodiment, the reclamation of the female body and mind as one thing. The girls were living a duality, who they are and who they want to be. But, perhaps surprisingly, there was little tension between the two contrasting states for them, only the joy and freedom of finally expressing what was inside all along. As with all of my work on identity and gender, what the mind perceives as self and what the body is or could be, fascinates me.

Miss Pin Up encourages self realisation and invites all women to discover their identity and trust in themselves, to understand the power of self sexualisation and to express themselves on stage in front of other women knowing that if they make a mistake they will be loved and supported. They build personas, craft performances that are political, avant garde, whimsical, sexual and funny - often all at the same time. They experiment and innovate, rehearse perfect and perform. All for a prize that is coveted only by those in the room. But the scale of the achievement is so much more than simply winning the contest. Here, the taking part, the sisterhood, the growth, the journey, is everything. In this series I became fascinated by the moments of transformation as the girls embody their alter egos as the makeup is applied, the costumes tweaked, the shoes buckled, their inner voices rising to the surface.

Born in Adelaide, Australia, Shelby is a documentary and street photographer based in Bristol.

Shelby fell in love with the power of photography when she was given her first camera at 9 years old. She studied photography and photographic practices at every opportunity and went on to gain a BA(Hons) in Documentary Photography at the University of Wales College, Newport where she spent time exploring ideas of lost childhood and loneliness and the notion of the family. She was awarded 4th in the Ian Parry Award in 2001 for the series of work that she made in America titled "Baby Doll" about child beauty pageants, one of the images from this series was also included in The Telegraph's Travel Photographer of the year exhibition in 2004. Shelby is returning to her career after taking time out to raise a family and is currently working on two long term projects about loneliness and identity and running street photography workshops as part of the AirBnB experiences.

MORE INFO

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