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An instant camera picture makes everything on this planet look a bit more beautiful, softer, it allows you to dream and make reality a bit less realistic.”

– Ferry van der Nat photographer Mr.

Interview

Mr.
Ferry van der Nat



*Interview with **Ferry van der Nat**
Words by **Jacquill Glenn Basdew***

Fortune favors the brave, fortune favors the bold, fortune favored Ferry van der Nat.

One might think of the work of Ferry van der Nat as provocative, scandalous even. Or one simply loves it. But it's impossible to not to feel something when looking at his work. For now, allow the current view you have, or don't have, of the work of Van der Nat to be reshaped. Try to see Mr. as the start of a new era, an era in which there are no boundaries when it comes to the sexual expression of self, and where the body is celebrated in every imaginable way. Ferry van der Nat celebrates the human form in his own unique way.

Jacquill Glenn Basdew: Did a younger Ferry van der Nat ever envision having his own book containing self-shot instant camera photographs?

Ferry van der Nat: Never. The younger me envisioned a lot of things, but a photo-book of my own was not one of them. I simply wasn't interested in photography when I was younger. That's the beautiful thing about life, you never know how the world in which you live will shape you.

JGB: Where do your roots lie?

FvdN: I was born in a small village in the south of the Netherlands called Hendrik-Ido-Ambacht.

JGB: Sounds like an interesting place.

FvdN: It's not, not at all. I left my hometown when I was 17 years old. I moved to Dordrecht, which I saw as a big city at that time. Amsterdam would have been the best, but that simply was too much to handle for an adolescent.

JGB: Moving out at the age of 17 is quite young. Were the circumstances that bad?

FvdN: Hendrik-Ido-Ambacht was so-so, it just wasn't the right place for me. I felt that I was different from the other people living there, and that they noticed that I was nothing like them as well. I had no other choice than to leave.

JGB: What kind of journey did you as a 17-year-old embark on?

FvdN: At that age the photographer in me was just a fiction of my imagination and I was simply Ferry. The world of fashion and photography was not yet within my reach. I started out doing something a little less glamorous: baking and cooking.

JGB: That is the complete opposite of photographing male nudity. Did growing up in a religious community give you the feeling that you could not be who you really wanted to be?

FvdN: I came out as a gay man at the age of 27, which in my opinion is quite late. Before then I knew I was not being who I genuinely wanted to be. When I was younger I was always busy drawing the female form or putting my sister in make-up. My mother did not mind. She was and still is the type of mother that is always proud of her son, no matter what. My Dad, however, who was occupied as a construction worker, was not a big fan of me not being more like him. I will never forget the day that I decided to accompany my father to the construction site where he was working. I came along to "help" him out, and to show that I was also able to perform real work. It was horrible. I had to lift heavy objects, I got dirty and had to talk the talk the construction men were talking. Make-up and drawing were the things I felt most comfortable doing at that time.

JGB: So moving out of your hometown, away from your Dad, and the strict local society must have felt like total freedom?

FvdN: Not quite, total freedom came after the age of 27. Before, I was living together with a woman whom I eventually even married, but to no one's surprise that marriage did not last.

While interviewing Ferry van der Nat it becomes clear that this man has gone through so much. It is remarkable that even though his life has not been easy, he still managed to follow his

“I was the type of person that was always observing each and everyone, quite shy even.”

heart and live each day with passion for what he loves to do: create.

JGB: Your marriage ended, you were openly gay and the photos you now take of men are quite "out there." Were you just as bold as your pictures when you were younger?

FvdN: I was far from bold. I was the type of person that was always observing everyone, quite shy even. After the divorce, I had friends coming over constantly. I would do their make-up, help them get dresses, and after the whole ritual we'd go out. Since we were living in the "new-wave" era, all of them were bisexual one week, gay the other, and then back to straight, quite wild except me, even though being a homosexual was far from what you would expect a "new-wave gay" to be.

JGB: You quit the kitchen after 9 years, and exchanged your spatula for a course in becoming a make-up artist. How did that come about?

FvdN: At some point in time my path lead me to another small village in the Netherlands called Genderen. During my time there I was living with a close friend of mine and her mother, who was an at-home-hairdresser. The women coming to her "salon" which was a small room with one mirror, one chair, and a lamp, had to wash their hair at home, come in with wet hair, get the haircut they wanted, and afterwards leave the house with a wet hairdo, but then cut in the perfect shape. Experiencing that, and having done the make-up for my sister and friends before, were just things that made me want to earn my money making people more beautiful for a living. But looking back now, at age 50, I do see a pattern, because while working in the kitchen I was more focused on making sure that the food looked good than on making it taste good.

JGB: What feeling did working on something you were really passionate about give you?

FvdN: It was a relief, but nonetheless tough. You have to keep in mind that I made this 360-degree career switch at age 27, and started following a complete new course in a new field at that age as well. I attended a school where they gave classes on becoming a make-up artist. The classes were very expensive and very time-consuming. Most of the time I had to run to my family or friends for money or materials, but I have been lucky in that I've always been supported in the best way one could imagine. Plus, while taking this course I remained working in the kitchen as a fulltime chef, which meant that the waitresses were being put in make-up during my breaks so that I could practice what I had learned during my hours at make-up school. The result? Instead of obtaining my degree in 4 years, I got it in 2 and managed to graduate cum-laude.

JGB: What does the first ever job of a cum-laude-graduated-make-up-artist look like?

FvdN: The first job I had was one I got through an old colleague of mine with whom I was working at my last job in a kitchen. He was a member of the Working Girls, a group of transvestite performers.

JGB: For someone who describes his own personality as shy, how did the big personalities of transvestites not intimidate you?

FvdN: In all honesty, at first it did scare me a lot, but at the same time the job really kicked me out of my comfort zone. I was in the right place at the right time, because while I was making the wigs for the Working Girls they in that same period became a worldwide phenomenon.

It's hard to believe that a man as brave as Ferry van der Nat was once anxious about choosing a career in make-up simply because he was afraid of dogma. At that time society did not respect a man practicing a female profession

as fully as it does now. Luckily, the association with the Working Girls gave him what he needed—a boost of self-confidence—but also affirmation from the outside world that his work was outstanding. As Ferry van der Nat, a man who comes across as soft, genuine and caring shares his stories from the past, it pleases me to see that despite all his successes he's remained a humble person that respects and does not judge his fellow men.

JGB: Your past on its own has the dimensions of a biography. Let's use this modest introductory interview to give the readers a better understanding of what this book is all about: the photographer in you. When was he born?

FvdN: He has always been there, it just took a lot of years of discovery and figuring out life to arrive finally at the point where all the things I'd done and seen resulted in me behind an instant camera.

JGB: Was your love for photography "subconsciously" ignited by a previous occupation?

FvdN: Absolutely. By the time I finally found my way to Amsterdam I had met a photographer named Roberto Baldassarre, somewhere in 2007. Mr. Baldassarra was at that time working for L'Uomo Vogue, and back in the days when opportunities were up for grabs I was lucky enough to contribute styling-wise to the issue of L'Uomo Vogue that featured Marcel Wanders. Being close to the fire, which was Mr. Baldassarre and his camera, I realized I wanted to be that person behind the camera shooting the frames.

JGB: Out of all the cameras in the world, why did you choose the instant camera camera?

FvdN: I am romantic, and instant camera photographs are in my opinion very romantic. An instant camera picture makes everything on this planet look a bit more beautiful, softer. It allows you to dream and make reality a bit less realistic.

Ask Ferry van der Nat a question and you'll get the story of a lifetime in return. Touching the instant camera subject made visible how much he loves working with his instant cameras. It could not be a coincidence that he also owns a Big Shot Polaroid camera, the same model that Andy Warhol used to work with.

JGB: Could you say that Andy Warhol is the reason you started working with instant cameras?

FvdN: It is not necessarily because of Andy Warhol, but what I can say is that Warhol has been, and still is a great source of inspiration to me. Mapplethorpe as well.

JGB: Your photographs highlight the male form, dressed and undressed. Would you say that you are obsessed with the male form?

FvdN: I think the male form, especially when nude, is something extremely fascinating. When I see a body, I see immediately what it could be if I were to photograph it with my instant camera. The body basically drowns in the super bright light of the instant camera. The outcome of that, especially when the models take good care of their own bodies, is mind-blowing.

JGB: The men in front of your camera are far from shy, but you on the other hand are the opposite. Is there a certain message that you wish to bring across through your photography? Are the photographs a way of speaking a language you are actually a bit shy to speak out loud?

FvdN: What I like about my photographs is that you can see how vulnerable the men in front of my camera are. I don't immediately pull out my instant camera because it is simply too costly to only shoot with an instant camera. What I do first is shoot digital images, and as soon as I notice that the models feel comfortable with

the camera I start shooting with my instant camera. That way I can document their pure form and vulnerability.

JGB: How do you decide who you want in front of your lens? And how do you get the trust of your subjects in order for them to give you their purity?

FvdN: I prefer to work with people that I approach myself, and who are at the same time willing to be photographed by me. If someone is forced into getting his picture taken the result will never come across as genuine. I only shoot men that intrigue me from the get-go. It then remains to be seen if what made me want to shoot them in the first place can be seen in the pictures. I simply can't tell, even if I am obsessed with the way someone looks, how that person will perform in front of my camera.

JGB: How does one prepare for a shoot with you?

FvdN: I am very transparent in the way I work. I always take the person out for lunch or a coffee. By doing so I get to know the person I am working with better, and vice-versa. It creates a kind of trust that eventually will help make the end-result, the picture, look so much better and more sincere.

JGB: A lot of people will still see your work as plain nudity, pornographic even. How do you see your own work, and how would you like other people to see it?

FvdN: It is nude at times, for sure, and in some ways pornographic as well, but it is not simply shot as your everyday point-and-shoot image. A great thought process takes place before I take my pictures. I once decided to translate a drawing of the artist Jean Cocteau into one of my instant camera pictures. The result was my male subject wearing a horsetail, completely nude. The image was breathtaking, but one

who is not familiar with my thought process will probably see the picture as graphic instead of understanding what I tried to tell. So to answer your question, I don't want to influence how people see my work., I just want them to know my thought process and allow them to create an opinion with that knowledge.

JGB: What is it you are looking for in a picture?

FvdN: In my pictures I want to show the best version of the subject who is at that very moment posing for me. It surprises me how many people are unaware of the beauty they possess. So my challenge is to take their physical beauty and capture it, and make it even a bit more beautiful. That is what I am looking for in a picture.

JGB: Do you feel you have succeeded in doing that?

FvdN: One of my muses, Daniel van der Deen, got booked by Versace immediately after they'd seen the instant camera pictures I shot of him, so I think it's safe to say that I am succeeding so far. A instant camera picture can make every human being a bit more beautiful, it's all about that flash right in the middle of your face.

"It is all about that flash right in the middle of your face." With these closing words, access has been granted to a collection of the various shapes and faces Ferry van der Nat has been able to capture over the past years. This book contributes to the start of a new era, an era in which there are no boundaries when it comes to the sexual expression of self, and where the human form is celebrated in every possible way. Enjoy.

“The body basically drowns in the super bright light of the instant camera. The outcome of that, especially when the models take good care of their own bodies is mind-blowing.”

Mr.
Gert
Jonkers

Editor-in-chief **Fantastic Man**

Camera! Flash! Nudity! Action!

I remember with happiness the day I met Ferry van der Nat on a late-night flight from Milan to Amsterdam, some 10 years ago. He was the chatty individual dressed in black in the next seat. It turned out Ferry and I worked in the same industry. We had mutual friends. As teenagers we had even lived in the same town – Dordrecht, a forgettable city – but we had never met before. Ferry and I shared a taxi into town, and in the years to follow we’d run into each other once in a while. Technically speaking, Ferry wasn’t a photographer yet, but a fantastic make-up artist who went on to open a vintage fashion boutique not too far from where I live in Amsterdam. And then, one day he showed me a series of photos he had taken. He smiled his broad smile as I studied a set of racy instant camera photographs of a young gentleman with a huge erection.

Can just anybody be a photographer? Not in my book. It takes a set of special skills to be a good photographer, despite what my late grandmother said years ago when my sister Els announced with pride that she was to enroll at the esteemed School of Photography in The Hague. “A school for photography? You must be kidding. What is there to learn about photography? You just press a button, right?” Bless Grandma Jonkers. She was born in 1898, and in a way her view of the modern world wasn’t so far from what most people think today. Everybody walks around with a decent 12-mega-pixel camera in their phone, thinking they’re a photographer. Needless to say, they’re not.

“Most importantly, in order to be a portrait photographer you need charisma and charm.”

First of all, there is the concept, the direction, the idea – something Ferry clearly worked out from day one. He portrays men by means of the wonderful old-fashioned technique of the instant camera. Then there is the

light – you can’t really call yourself a photographer if you don’t know how to handle light, or use the available light to its best magical advantage. For this, Ferry mostly seems to use the standard flash that comes with his camera, and he uses it to great, smoothing effect. What better than to use the factory settings to work magic?

But most importantly, to be a good portrait photographer you need charisma and charm. Good portraits dwell on splendid inter-human relationships, and just how naturally and generously the photographer can make his or her model feel at ease. That’s why fashion photographers always holler things like “Gorgeous!” “Love it!” and “You’re beautiful!” on repeat, even if the photos they are taking are terrible. You have to go for it. You have to love the moment and be able to share your love and respect in order to get it all back into the portrait. Your admiration and dedication must be honest. It’s the essential key to a good portrait, as I learned through my own occasional stints as a portrait photographer for BUTT, the international quarterly for homosexuals that I co-founded. You can’t be shy behind a camera but you can’t bark your demands through the lens either. My friend Marcelo, whose work includes many bodies in a state of arousal and not so many clothes, once told me his trick for taking a good nude picture: make sure you are naked, too. Undress yourself.

And indeed, it works! One day I wanted to portray my friend Sander for a BUTT retrospective book. We ran around naked for a good hour, camera and beer in hand, chatting, laughing, swapping cameras. Portraiture is a dialogue, and in the process I got some nice pics of myself in return.

I’ve never actually seen Ferry take a photo. But I can imagine how these sessions go, how he’ll be his chatty, charming self, showering his models with compliments and encouragement while images cascade from his camera like a jolly waterfall. And I like to think that Ferry is naked himself, too.

Mr.
Alan
Prada

Deputy Editor-in-Chief **L'Uomo Vogue**

Over the years we've worked with Ferry in many different ways. Suddenly he announced that he wasn't interested in doing fashion styling for us anymore (he had styled many portraits, mainly of artists, for L'Uomo Vogue in Amsterdam over the years) as he wished to focus exclusively on his photography. I wasn't surprised. Ferry has always been a volcano of ideas. I imagined that he'd lived many different lives, always able to reinvent himself. His path into photography is probably the most true to his nature. He has a special flair for beauty,—whether it's an exquisite vintage piece of clothing, an upcoming photographer's style, or a new face - and through photography he is able to put all of his multiple talents into one shot, HIS own creation.

Mr. Yanniek

Yanniek was presented to me by his agent, Jorma, at Republic. He was 'brand new' and I was already crazy about his look after a couple of digital shots. When he arrived he was so laid back and posed as if he had been modeling all his life - so natural. I loved his features - his great ears, his fine nose, lazy eyes, and creamy blonde complexion. Altogether a classic beauty indeed. Shortly after our first shoot he went off for his first runway show season. He was booked for some great shows, and they ended up keeping him in NYC for many more months.







MR. YANNIEK

