



**City girl Shravya Kagolanu's work has made it to the top 10 shortlist of the 2017 Sony World Photography Awards in the Student Focus category**

Kag's (as she is known) shortlisted image *Pages of Memories* is a self-portrait revealing the photographer's love for reading and exploration. While the background is a small alcove in the Strand bookstore in New York City, the remaining elements were shot separately and composited over the background to create this surreal image. Over 227,000 images from 183 countries were submitted for the awards.

Excerpts from an e-mail interview:

## **Tell us something about your childhood and education.**

I am a 90's kid and I grew up in Vijayawada. People would mistake me for the girl in the film *Little Soldiers*. After engineering, I moved to Chennai to pursue Master of Arts in Broadcast communications.

After freelancing as a photographer/cinematographer, interning as a copywriter and also a brief stint as a supporting actress in a Tamil feature film, I co-founded a media company specializing in wedding and documentary photography services. Two years later I moved to New York City where I am pursuing Masters in Photography at School of Visual Arts.

## **Something about the contest...**

Around 400 institutions from across the world registered for the student category award. A few classmates, including me, were contacted by my mentor and the department chair, Katrin Eismann, to send particular images we had made for school assignments. *Pages of Memories* happened to make the cut and was shortlisted.

## **Your first reaction when your work was shortlisted.**

I don't think I would ever forget the timing. I was backpacking in Europe in December when a bus mishap happened and I lost my bags. I was frantically e-mailing the bus company and trying to get in touch with the lost and found department.

The day I lost all hopes on my bag was when I received an e-mail saying I was shortlisted. I went numb the first few seconds. I have delayed emotions - the excitement started kicking in weeks later when I was shooting a photo series for the second round of the competition.

## **When was the first time you picked up a camera?**

My relationship with photography started in my early twenties when I started making pictures with my phone. In 2011, in Chennai, I clicked pictures at a music video shoot that somehow landed in the inbox of the CEO of the record label who engaged me for all their shoots and their music festival.

I realised I 'have an eye'. It felt very satisfying. I eventually stumbled into video when a cinematographer who was supposed to do the shoot reported sick.

## **How do you get things in front of the camera just the way you want?**

I personally prefer to capture things the way 'they' want. I am a documentarian. I find beauty in the way things exist. But there are times when I direct or stage a shot but then I explain what is required and we take it forward from there. To me, it is more about what can be created together rather than what 'I' visually want from an image.

## **If not photography, what would you be doing?**

I would have probably taken up writing more seriously. I can only imagine myself on the art side. I have been there on the other side of the spectrum and I did not like it.

## **What do you want your photographs to convey?**

I want people to connect with my images. When the subject is willing to be vulnerable in front of a photographer a mutual trust forms between the two. If this trust is transcended to interdependence, we all can understand each other better. I enjoy talking to people; one-on-one conversations and I look for their emotions.

## **Has photography transformed you as a human being?**

I have come to realize that I have a very deep philosophical take on photography (haha). When I started out, it was all about me; How I would build career and establish myself etc. But now I think of ways that my documentation can help them or how can we as a community build a saner world. Documenting has made me socially conscious; more introspective.

## **What motivates you to take pictures?**

I am very emotionally connected to imagery. I think it's the fear of loss. There are very few people in my present inner circle that I constantly make portraits of because of my fear of loss/communication. When on the streets, it's a fear of loss of the fleeting moment; when working on photo essays, it is fear of loss of the impact a story can create. In some crooked way, I find solace in documenting things the way they are to remind myself that change is constant.

## **Is photography more liberating or restrictive than other art forms?**

Photography is an art- an individualist take on mundane things of life. I believe that every art form by itself can be restrictive at times, which is why art transcends all barriers to liberate one and educate the other.

## ***Memories in a snap***

***Travelling back in time, photography wasn't as simple as 'smile and click' as we see today. Back in 1820s, early cameras would take several hours to actually capture a film! Technology is great, isn't it?***