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PARTY LIFE

A Louis Vuitton fashion shoot, photographed exclusively for the Japanese style magazine *Commons & Sense*

Lens Canon EF 24-105mm f/4L IS USM

Exposure 1/125 sec, f/5, ISO1600

WANDA MARTIN

Hungary is a nation synonymous with great photographers and Wanda Martin is the latest name to emerge from that artistic pedigree. Now based in London, she tells Keith Wilson why she feels more at home here than in Budapest...

WIKIPEDIA will tell you that Broadway Market is “an east London street running from London Fields to the Regent’s Canal in the London Borough of Hackney.” But, to the trendsetters working a stone’s throw away in Shoreditch, Broadway Market is a lot more than that. According to fashion and music photographer Wanda Martin, the café we meet in is, “in the middle of the hipster area, so they’re bound to have oat milk”. Being twice the age of the average clientele and without a beard, I feel out of my comfort zone. Wanda on the other hand, with her bright red lipstick, arched eyebrows and dark shoulder length hair, looks as comfortable as a lioness surveying her domain. She greets me with a radiant smile that stays in place for nearly the entire length of our hour-long interview; filled with infectious chatter, poignant stories and bursts of laughter over copious cups of flat white coffee. Served with oat milk...

Tell me about your background. You’re from Hungary and your dad was a photographer...

That’s right. My dad lives in the countryside of Hungary and he was the one that first taught me. He’s still doing photography. Growing up, I was interested in art history because we have some film directors in the family and theatre directors and a sculptor, so I grew up with art from day one. My dad didn’t

02 GOING AWAY

From fashion cover story, 'We gotta get out of this place', shot for *The Impression*

Lens Canon EF 24-105mm f/4L IS USM

Exposure 1/320 sec, f/4, ISO200

03 FOUR WOMEN

A modern take on vintage in this Burberry fashion exclusive shot for *Commons & Sense*

Lens Canon EF 24-70mm f/2.8L II USM

Exposure 1/125 sec, f/6.3, ISO1250

04 TONGUE & GROOVE

Wanda prefers to shoot with natural light like in this fashion shot of model Anastasia Ivanova for Germany's *Flair Magazine*

Lens Canon EF 24-70mm f/2.8L II USM

Exposure 1/160 sec, f/5.6, ISO400

want me to be a photographer because I always got good grades at school. He wanted me to do something more financially stable and normal!

We've all heard that!

Exactly. Then art happened and I started painting first and my images are inspired by paintings. Even in my fashion work I'm inspired by paintings, especially from the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries.

Was it your dad that gave you your first camera back then?

Yes. The first pictures I took were of things like raindrops on flowers, that sort of thing. My Mum and I went travelling a lot, so the camera would come with me. Then I started taking pictures of myself, self-portraits, when I was around 16. I'm from this little town in southeast Hungary, near the Romanian border, and I started photographing my girlfriends, because they all wanted pretty pictures of themselves and there was already a fashion element to it, even back then.

Did you find fashion photography quite a natural thing to move into?

Yes, even though my dad started out doing photo journalism, later he started doing advertising and fashion and was doing really well in Hungary. When I went to university, I moved to Budapest and studied fine art and conceptual photography. I was 18 and my first flat mate there was a fashion designer – that's how I first got involved: "Oh, you have a nice camera, would you like to take some pictures of my collection?" And eventually, I just got more and more commissions from Hungarian magazines,



which gave me opportunity to work with emerging fashion designers in Hungary.

What brought you to London?

It was in year three at university and I had this chance to apply for the Erasmus Mundus Masters Degree, a European scholarship, and my dream was to live in London, even though I had never been here before that.

Why London and not another west European city, like Paris or Milan?

First of all, it was the literature that I liked, the Brontë sisters and Jane Austen – the romantic writers. Then, later, I got involved with the rock and roll music scene and punk culture was centred on London. So, as soon as I finished

university in Hungary in 2014 I started on the Masters Fashion Photography course in London. Then I graduated and I've been freelancing ever since.

You have built up an impressive list of clients and brands quickly; you must be very busy?

I'm working constantly, even when I'm not everything inspires me. Whether I'm walking in the street, or when I go out. I shoot on 35mm when I go to gigs and always have this 35mm film camera with me and just take pictures. All my other work is on digital cameras, but some personal projects I shoot on film.

Film is having a renaissance with some professionals, as well as



WANDA MARTIN

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students, who love seeing the printed image appear in the tray...

Yes, it's beautiful. My dad recently started rediscovering his archive from the '70s and '80s, when he was shooting his 'nights out'. Eventually, we just started to putting our 'nights out' pictures next to each other and it's very interesting. Sometimes you can't really tell which one was taken in 2018 London or 1970s socialist Hungary. We are planning to have an exhibition sometime. London and Budapest. I have an agent in Paris and they have a gallery as well, so it could be a travelling exhibition.

Some of your images are in a studio, others are outdoors on location – how do you start?

When it's commercial work I shoot in studio and in the last few years I had to learn how to use studio lights. When it comes to a fashion, editorial or personal work I prefer shooting on location, especially in old Victorian houses.

It all starts with the backgrounds, so the casting and locations are important to me. I prefer using natural light because of the painterly element – if you look at the old masters there's the window at the side and natural light coming in from the side – that's what inspires me visually.

// It all starts with the backgrounds, so the casting and locations are very important to me //

Which camera do you use?

For eight years I was using a Canon EOS 5D Mark II. I love that camera because we went through so many things together, so many adventures. But six months ago I started using an EOS-1D X Mk II and it's made my life much easier.

Why is that?

Especially when I'm using natural light in England the weather can be quite gloomy and grey, so we have less light to work with, but with the 1D X Mk II, sometimes, I go up to more than ISO5000 and it's still perfect. I like the grainy, noisiness because there's a filmic element to it, like when I'm shooting with film. But for a commercial shoot you can't be that artistic, because the client wants to see the product first, so we're shooting with artificial light and in a studio. Visually, paintings inspire me but theme-wise I'm

05 DREAMERS

Rock and roll, youth and sub-cultures are a major thematic influence in Wanda's fashion photography

Lens Canon EF 24-105mm f/4L IS USM

Exposure 1/160 sec, f/7.1, ISO3200

06 LOVERS

From a series focusing on couples, shot for Wanda's masters in fashion photography and first published in *Dazed Digital*

Lens Canon EF 24-105mm f/4L IS USM

Exposure 1/250 sec, f/5.6, ISO2000

07 PORTRAIT OF MATTHEW

Model Matthew Roberts was the subject for a series, *Young Blood*, for Hunger TV

Lens Canon EF 24-105mm f/4L IS USM

Exposure 1/125 sec, f/22, ISO100



interested in youth cultures, sub-cultures, rock and roll. Even though I've been doing fashion for six years now, the music element is still very important to me.

Since coming to London who have been your influences?

I was assisting a photographer, Ruth Hogben, for six months. She was the first assistant for Nick Knight for a while, but I don't think assisting is as key as it used to be, because now with social media you can advertise yourself, so I never assisted apart from that. There are many other photographers who I admire: in fashion I really like Tim Walker, but everyone does – it's a bit of a cliché, but he's a genius! When it comes to documentary photography and film-making I used to be obsessed with Larry Clark. I like people who are photographing their friends, or an intimate circle, like Nan Goldin.

Shooting an intimate circle of friends is something you've done...

Yes! When I was working on my final Masters project, even though it was fashion photography, it was conceptual and I ended up photographing couples.

I took some photographs of people I barely knew, and there's always a bit of tension when you say 'let's go to the bedroom'



What was it called?

It was called *Lovers*. I was shooting gay couples, straight couples, lesbian couples, basically through my friends' groups, so they would let me in to their intimate zones – into their bedrooms.

It must be a tough brief – a lot of trust being placed on you...

Exactly. There were some strangers, but the more successful images were the ones where I really knew the people. I took some photographs of people I barely knew, and there's always a bit of tension when you say, 'let's go to the bedroom'.

You have also photographed the dancer Sergei Polunin, who is renowned for being unpredictable

and difficult to work with. How did you find him?

I have to admit that, at the time, I had no idea who Sergei Polunin was!

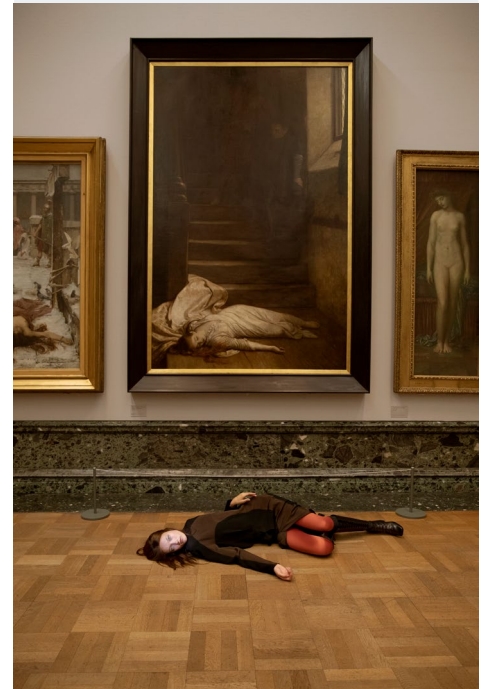
Was that an advantage when it came to photographing him?

Yeah! I'd never shot a dancer before so I thought, 'let's Google him and find out who he is'. That was the year there was a documentary coming out about him, but I decided not to watch it before the shoot, because I'd get star-struck or distracted.

The make-up and styling team, they were going, 'That's amazing! You know, he's the bad boy of the Royal Ballet and he does whatever he wants.' Luckily, because I didn't know of him I didn't feel intimidated. I liked all these stories,



STORY BEHIND THE SHOT



FASHION IMITATING ART IMITATING LIFE

On a recent fashion shoot Wanda and her model found their inspiration in London's art galleries...

Working for *Numero Russia* magazine, Wanda and her model, Yumi Lambert, had to work quickly to get a portfolio of photos directly in front of large portraits during visiting hours. "We were shooting at the National Portrait Gallery and Tate Britain," she recalls. "I got permission, but I had to be quick because there were still visitors going around. Yumi Lambert is an amazing model and she was imitating the poses on the paintings, 19th century and 18th century paintings, of how women used to be represented. So mocking it a little bit, but giving this twist to show how much has changed." The shoot has prompted Wanda to continue the theme as a personal project, but without official permission she and her collaborators will have to work "more like a guerrilla way". She adds: "We will go to these amazing exhibition spaces, museums and galleries with these modern friends of mine, so a gothic friend can imitate the pose of the Madonna! I will still shoot with my camera, because I'm planning on having an exhibition at some point. I imagine lots of massive, glamorous, prints!"

because I'm into rock and roll and he has a rock star attitude. So I thought he was the perfect person for me to photograph. He was one and a half hours late...

That's pretty good for a rock star!

I once photographed a band, with seven people in it, an English punk band called Fat White Family, and I shot them for *i-D*. One of the boys showed up on time, one was running an hour late, one was running two hours late, one of them was three and a half hours late! In the end, they all made it, but I ended up having time for only one group shot.

Sergei arrived and he was professional and not shy, although he didn't talk much, but he was nice and I was surprised because I was expecting something else.

In the shots you can see he's a bad boy because he's stripped to the waist baring all his tattoos ...

And back then he didn't even have the head of Putin on his chest!

Oh, so he has Vladimir Putin tattooed on his chest now?

Yeah. Back then he didn't, luckily. We had a stylist on set and I asked him, I definitely want to see his bare chest, and so he was half naked – he didn't mind one bit. In the video I made about him he was dancing and taking the clothes off, just moving. Beautiful.

When you shoot your videos are you using a different system, or is it still with Canon?

// Instagram is a bit like an online portfolio. So I'm trying to keep it professional, posting images most days //

It's still with the Canon because I consider myself as more of a photographer. When I shot Sergei, I was using the 5D Mark II.

A lot of photographers still struggle with combining both; for many it's one or the other...

It's a totally different approach. Of course, photography is about stills, but sometimes I have a separate person doing video. I'm not a control freak, but I just prefer doing it myself, especially the editing, because even when you have bad footage, editing can save the video. Commercial work can be tricky, because they usually have someone else doing the retouching and don't like letting others do it.

When you shoot video, which lens do you use? Is it a zoom?

Yeah, definitely. I used to work with the 24-105mm and now I have the 24-70mm f/2.8, so that helps when I'm on location.

When you shoot someone like Sergei, what's the lens you prefer when working in the studio?

I have some fixed lenses, but I tend to use the zoom lens because I like wide-angle. It gives some distortion to the image which has an unusual touch to it, but on the other hand sometimes with portraiture you need some close-ups



and you see something really quick close-up, so I always use zoom lenses.

You would go to the long end of the 24-70mm or the 105mm even?

Exactly. I always have two cameras with me. I use the 1D X Mark II as my main camera and the 5D Mark II on the side.

Some of your shots have a blurry effect, how do you do that?

I put some Vaseline on a filter and put that on the lens. So, I do some images for the client to be happy and then I do some artistic ones with the blurry effect.

Do the ideas or themes behind your personal projects influence your commercial work?

Yes, because the same things inspire me in my personal projects and the fashion work. When it comes to a fashion shoot, in terms of casting I'm inspired by youth culture, rock and roll culture, sub-cultures, gender studies – all these questions about identity. These are things that interested me when I was working on projects, such as *Lovers*.

Hungary is a very conservative place, especially in the countryside. When I moved to Budapest at 18 and got involved with this artistic community and music scene, I had friends who were gay and it was incredibly unusual for me. As such, it was important for me to talk about it in my personal work, in *Lovers* for example again, and just celebrate love regardless of the genders.





WANDA MARTIN

08 SERGEI SLEEPING

Wanda had no knowledge of dancer Sergei Polunin when she was commissioned to shoot him for Russia's *SNC Magazine*

Lens Canon EF 24-105mm f/4L IS USM

Exposure 1/200 sec, f/5.6, ISO2000

09 SERGEI RECLINING

Since this image was taken, Sergei Polunin has had the face of Russian president Vladimir Putin tattooed on his chest

Lens Canon EF 24-105mm f/4L IS USM

Exposure 1/200 sec, f/5.6, ISO2000

10 SERGEI DANCING

A sequence that Wanda repeated on video: "He was just dancing and taking the clothes off, just moving. Beautiful"

Lens Canon EF 24-105mm f/4L IS USM

Exposure 1/100 sec, f/11, ISO1250

PROFILE

WANDA MARTIN

Fashion and music photographer

Wanda Martin is from a family of Hungarian artists and photographers. After gaining a BA in photography at Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design in Budapest in 2014, she came to London to complete her MA in fashion photography. Since then, Wanda has worked for many of Europe's leading fashion brands including Dior and Burberry. Her editorial clients include *Vogue Italia*, *i-D*, *Numero Russia*, *Dazed Digital*, *Glamour Spain* and *Wonderland*. Wanda is the art director of the LA-based men's fashion and music title *Foxes Magazine*. She also shoots fashion videos for *Foxes* as well as *British GQ*, *Wonderland*, *Coitus* and other titles. Her work has been exhibited in London, Budapest, LA and Luxembourg and she is represented by The Art Board, Paris.

www.wanda-martin.com



Social media is arguably the biggest change in photography in the past decade. How do you usually use social media for your day-to-day working?

It's one of the most important elements in a photographer's life. Instagram is my main platform. I use Facebook as well, but mainly for personal use. Even though I have my website, Instagram is a bit like an online portfolio. So I'm trying to keep it professional, posting images most days. I have to put a lot of work into that with captions and hashtags.

It's also important that people can match an image with who's behind the camera, so I post a lot of behind the scenes material, not just beautiful pictures. I get most of my work from people contacting me through Instagram and you can find other amazing creatives to collaborate with, like stylists, make-up artists, models and artists. Even if you're an emerging photographer you can

showcase your work and you don't necessarily need an agent now, you can reach so many magazines, and clients can find you all through social media.

What's been the best piece of advice that has helped your career as a photographer?

There's so many talented photographers out there and if I have to give advice to someone just starting out, I'd say you can't be shy. You have to put yourself and your work out there. You have to be persistent and introduce yourself to people and send out emails constantly.

Even if you don't get a response you have to send another email. You have to be confident and not be put off by rejection, and if you don't feel confident, you just have to take on that role. Even though I'm very sociable, I get very shy when it comes to important people who I know I have to get up and talk to, but I do it anyway. 📷