

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Vanda Ralevska

Originally from the Czech Republic, London-based Vanda Ralevska is a landscape photographer whose artistic preoccupation with beauty brings out a distinctly poetic side to her work. Nick Smith puts her in the spotlight



NICK SMITH How do you describe your work?

VANDA RALEVSKA I describe myself mostly as a landscape photographer. I do a little impressionistic photography, but that isn't my main thing. I quite like to work with images that somehow convey the atmosphere of my experience more than anything else. I do like to produce beautiful work with softer pastel colours, but there is a darker, stormier side to what I do, with rain and reflections.

NS In real life you are an IT consultant...

VR That's right. Photography provides a welcome antidote to my professional world of exact numbers. I did maths and physics at university and when I came to the UK I did an MSC in computer science. So although I have a technical side to me, I don't really use a lot of equipment. What I really enjoy about photography is the solitude and the silence it brings, away from my busy professional life.

NS Why did you move to the UK?

VR One of the reasons I moved to the UK was that when I visited the first time I was smitten by the beauty of the countryside, especially the coast. Growing up in an inland country I could only dream about the sea, and the closest I got to it was on holidays to the Black Sea in Bulgaria and Romania. So the first time I got on the ferry and saw the White Cliffs of Dover, I knew it would not be the last time.

NS How did you get started in photography?

VR I was about 16 when my dad gave me a red Konica camera. Back then it wasn't so usual for a teenager to own a camera, and so it was quite a precious thing to have. We didn't have much money and

I don't think he realised the significance of what he had given me. That's when I started not just taking photos, but enjoying being outside too. I once got into trouble climbing into a derelict castle I had been drawn to due to its decaying atmosphere.

NS A lot of your work is now shot close to home?

VR Yes. Bushy Park in south-west London is one of my favourite places, along with Richmond Park and, along the river, Dorney Lake. You can find beauty on your doorstep quite easily if you look for it. Part of my adventure is to get the photographs I want close to home.

NS Is being familiar with the subject important?

VR Definitely. When I walk from

Waterloo to Canon Street, where I work, I take pictures along the river, and there is always something to see. My favourite time to photograph is the early morning, with the light when the day is beginning.

NS You have examples of your own poetry on your website...

VR The artistic or poetic side of me has always been there. I come from a family of musicians and I played the flute at the age of six. And for me poetry is the same as photography or any art. It's about the feelings that are evoked in you. I tend to give my photographs poetic titles. Some people would argue that we should leave it to the viewer to title the picture. But I do it to show what I feel.

NS At what stage do you think you are now?

VR I'm developing, really. I'm just on a journey and I'm enjoying that. A few years back I tried to turn my photography into a business, but I ended up taking pictures for other people, and I stopped enjoying what I was doing. My passion for photography was dying and so I decided to go back to the creative journey, wherever it takes me.

opposite (top)
As dawn greets the day.

opposite (bottom)
Sea fever.

above Morning magic.

VANDA'S TOP TIPS

- » **One thing I never go on a shoot without is...** an open mind. I try not to pre-visualise anything because part of the fun is to explore where you are.
- » **My one piece of advice would be to...** find the extraordinary in the ordinary. There is beauty everywhere and that is the reward.
- » **Something I try to avoid is...** crowds. Don't get me wrong, I love people and have a lot of friends, but when I am photographing I prefer to be alone.

VANDA'S CRITICAL MOMENTS

1982 My dad gave me my first camera – a compact Konica film camera.

1986 Took my first favourite photograph: autumnal leaves fallen on to trees reflected in a pond.

1997 Moved to the UK where my passion for photography grew into an inseparable part of my life.

2011 Abandoned commercial photography in favour of own artistic pursuits.

2012 Co-founded a community called Landscapes by Women. First public talk, at a photography school in Belgium.

2015 Joined the Arena Photographers group. Organised the Mistresses of Light exhibition in London's OXO Gallery with Beata Moore.

To see more of Vanda's work, visit mylandscapes.co.uk