

KATRIN FARIDANI

Born in Tehran to Armenian-Iranian parents, Katrin Faridani grew up surrounded by stark and intricate desert landscape images captured by one of the country's most prominent nature photographers – her father, Nikol Faridani. “I grew to love photography without even realizing it,” she says.

Fleeing the Shah's regime in 1979, Katrin and her parents moved to Ontario, where her new classmates mercilessly tormented her about her different appearance, language and culture.

When Katrin was in Grade 11, her father gave her a Nikon F-2, a professional-level 35mm camera with interchangeable lenses. In some ways, he was carrying on a family tradition begun when his own father – who was not a photographer but worked with many – had given Nikol his first professional camera decades earlier.

Katrin found refuge behind the Nikon. Through photography, she was able to express her view of the world and its inhabitants without having to defend herself.

Photography also allowed Katrin to immerse herself in the world while remaining invisible. “A camera gives you a barrier,” she explains. “It allows you to separate yourself from what is happening around you while being totally engrossed in it.”

Highly empathic and perceptive, Katrin discovered that those traits helped her to capture the visual subtext of her subject, whether in the angle of a building or the fleeting microexpression on an individual's face. “To me, things through the lens are never how they would look with the naked eye.”

Ironically, the hobby Katrin undertook to cope with her loneliness became a vehicle for her popularity. Compliments replaced taunts, and those who had previously shunned her now vied for her attention. The young girl realized that, growing up amidst her father's work, she had unconsciously absorbed his eye for composition. Not only did she love photography – she had a gift for it, too.

Katrin decided to pursue her passion at a higher level. She enrolled in Ryerson University's Still Photography program, where she learned photographic theory and technique. Infusing her intuitive artistry with newfound technical knowledge, Katrin began to experiment with her own visual style.

Over the years, that style has evolved into documentary photographer. She is equally enamored of discovering new architectural and environmental forms to photograph as she is of capturing the passion of “people engrossed in doing their craft.”

Perhaps because she learned at an early age how quickly places, people and situations can change, Katrin is compelled to capture each present moment as it unfolds. “Call it nostalgia,” she says, “but I want to save everything!”

Katrin approaches her art “like everything else I do – with my full attention and passion.” She is no longer the shy immigrant, yet at the core of her work – and her personality – is a childlike wonder about the people and environment that surround her. Through the lens, Katrin sees each moment unfold as if for the first time, which explains why her images so often reveal the unexpected in the traditional, the surprising in the mundane.

As well, she says, photographs serve as diary entries that reflect different phases along a photographer’s emotional journey. “I believe feelings go into images whether you want them or not - the mere decision to choose one subject over another is a reflection of your mood,” she says. “After looking at my photos, I understand more what I felt at the time.”

While Katrin’s deeply sensitive nature allows her to flourish as an artist, in person she is about as shy and quiet as an earthquake – and equally likely to shake things up. As a photographer, she explains, “I can embrace the fact that I am an emotional being and allow it to flow through my work.” Indeed, some of her favourite shots were taken in 2001, when she returned to Iran for the first time in 9 years to say goodbye to her ailing father (Nicol Faridani passed away in 2008).

A self-described “experience junkie”, Katrin has traveled around the globe, teaching English in Korea and Bulgaria. Today, she lives in Toronto with her husband, Shahan, her dog Oscar and 23 working cameras.

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