

ISABELLE VAILLANT is an independent photographer, born in Paris, France.

She was brought up by her grandmother in the western part of France and has 3 daughters.

Her father was a furniture dealer and her mother a beautician.

At the age of 14 she settled in Toulouse (south west of France). She made her first photo with a Polaroid: a picture of her mother giving birth to her brother.

At the age of 17 she dropped out of school and decided to live her life alone on the road. She discovered Brittany where she settled down in precarious conditions. Nature became her shelter. She lived in a trailer in the free air and survived by doing small jobs.

When she was offered her first camera she used it to scrutinize and discover her own body by making self-portraits in the nude, fragmented in a sharp light, creating a cold almost disembodied eroticism. Autodidact she decided to tame the camera, it became the language that allowed her to write images.

She found a job at a local newspaper where she spent her days in the darkness developing the pictures of local correspondents. Her news editor gave her a little investigative inquiry job. She began meeting the local inhabitants, she invested their environment with her research by seeking their intimacy and their particular voices. This is where she made her first « professional » pictures.

With her unused film she had her first daughter pose on her days off. Her impressionist universe takes shape in the middle of unreal forests, in the incredible beauty of the Breton landscapes. The young girl has her eyes half-closed and looks straight through us. She is lying down in a field or hanging in the arms of a dead tree.

Her bucolic pictures in black and white strike you immediately with poetry, solemnity and magic. The fragmentation of the human body in space, the grave and intimate universe, the omnipresence of her children staged in a ghostly and chaotic surrounding nature, her relationship with her own nudity... All this shows an Isabelle Vaillant where solitude and the wandering of beings have become the recurrent themes of her work.

In 1998 she studied photography in Nîmes.

At the same time she became acquainted with the great names of photography: Jean-François Bauret, Jacqueline Salmont, Bernard Plossu, Letizia Battaglia.

2 years later she exposed for the first time at the Forum Gallery in Toulouse The Self-Portraits, exhibition shown in France and abroad, particularly in Japan where she is met with great success. She then started selling photo prints to collectors.

From 2001 until today she is commissioned by the Conseil Général des Côtes d'Armor (Brittany) for about 10 different works: Series of portraits in the town of Saint-Brieuc, in Belle-Ile en Terre an ongoing work for 3 years at the paper factory of Vallée on the memory of its places and landscapes.

In 2005 she began a long work called «The Body» and «The Confidence» where she collects the innermost thoughts of not less than 1200 inhabitants in a caravan.

The same year in Guingamp, it is the ambitious renovation project of urban space that will be the excuse for a journey into the memory of the inhabitants. She explores the theme of the supernatural working with the visual artist Isabelle Grelet in the castle of la Roche...

In 2008 her grandmother died. She made a series of pictures of her deathbed.

Affected by her loss she started a personal work, L'Orée (On the Edge).

She exposed in Plérin (still Brittany) and at the Artothèque in Grenoble. Her work becomes more solemn. The light gets more rare, landscapes more and more devastated and fragile. She works with a Rolleiflex, a heavy and bulky camera worn around her neck. She says she wants to photograph with her stomach, listening deeply inside herself, turning photography into ultrasound.

She travels more and more. She discovers Asia.

In 2012 she starts a series of portraits with la Mégisserie (Theatre in the Limousin area, centre of France) about people living in and about the town of Saint-Junien. The Water Tower Gallery in Toulouse commissions her for a similar work. She rediscovers years after the places and the faces of her youth eroded by time.

The same year she is invited by Gwin Zegal (the Art Association in Guingamp, Brittany). She meets a hermit, the priest of Callac, the believers and the members of the church. At the religious service she gets closer to the rituals, the remorseful looks, the praying hands.

During the past 15 years her very personal research on the body, on the cold nudity, childhood, isolation, solitude, rituals, cruel and devastated landscapes and an organic and threatening nature has inspired a work of thousands of pictures where the dreamy atmosphere, silence, the brutal contrast between the eyes of people looking at each other define Isabelle Vaillant as an artist of the intimate - between the secrets of Diane Arbus and the tragic introspection of Francesca Woodman. Her staging, the confusing combination of real and unreal, the long pauses of the camera and the slow speed give us a perception of the world where time is suspended and could tip over at any moment, making appear or disappear before us things that you believed as static.

Currently she is preparing a retrospective of her work and an edition of a monograph.

(Mohamed Rouabhi, French writer and stage director)