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the 'rose-colored glasses' issue!

with work from la casita de wendy, mimi kato and eden veaudry

PLUS! confessions of an optimist...


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snap-delicious!

MANKIND MAG's Kelly Roberson has a seat with one of our favorite [rose](#) photographers, Akasha Rabut.

If you relocate to Chicago in the dead of winter, your glass must be perpetually half-full. Such is the life of Akasha Rabut, a photographer whose dreamy, luscious images speak volumes about her single-minded dedication to the craft. As springtime blooms in the Windy City, here's what Akasha's dreaming of—and doing...



photo credit: akasha rabut

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~~Q: You've seen more places in your 28 years than most people have in a lifetime. What's your favorite spot?~~

A: I grew up in Hawaii, but when my parents got divorced and my mom moved I started going back and forth between there and California. We started traveling seriously when I was seven. I've been to Australia, Costa Rica, Mexico, England, France, Italy, and Switzerland, but hands down my favorite spot is New Zealand. It was a magical place with breathtaking scenery.

~~Q: Did you take your camera on those trips?~~

A: I didn't actually start photographing until I joined the yearbook staff in high school when I was 15. The only reason I signed up was that I didn't have a camera and I wanted to take photos. But I still didn't get my own camera—I borrowed my friends' and started setting up scenes with them and taking photos. Then I moved to California and took a photo class, and it was the best thing that happened to me.

~~Q: Even while you were in college, you were developing inventive ways to show your work. That's a dreamy thing for a 20-something to do.~~

A: During my last two semesters at the San Francisco Art Institute, I opened an art gallery and boutique called Brown Bear. I'd go to school, work on my photos, and go to the gallery. We had a new art show every month showcasing all the talented people I knew. But the economy got to us, and the day in June 2008 we won the Best of the Bay Award we closed. I decided I needed something new in my life. I wanted to move to New York City, but it's expensive. I'd never been to Chicago and decided to try it out; it's a baby step closer to the Big Apple.

~~Q: That's definitely seeing the world through rosy glasses moving somewhere unknown to try to break in. You're so upbeat about what you're doing.~~

A: I'm doing freelance editorial and fashion work now, but it's rough going. But there are some amazing people I'm working with, like local designer Abigail Glaum-Lathbury. It gets me excited, and I have to be able to shoot—it keeps me sane. It's in my blood. I love making photos. If I'm not doing that, I get really sad. I look at photography all day long—books, the internet, fashion, old magazines, current photographers.

~~Q: Even though your photos have very different settings Big Sur and the documentary work in a high school for mothers, for example they all have this incredible feeling of joy. How do you get to that place?~~

A: I'm inspired by everything I see, but one of my biggest influences remains one of my professors, Darcy Padilla. Every time I take a photo I ask myself if Darcy would like it. My mom is also an amazing artist, and she believes in me, which helps me to keep going, keep trying. I may move across the country, but I get to bring my camera with me. I'll skip food to buy film, it means that much to me.

~~Q: What's next for you?~~

I'm printing a body of work and trying to find a place to show it. I love editorial work, and I also love teaching and being with young people. I really just like sharing my pictures with people.

~~Q: Will people feel the world is better after they see your photos?~~

A: When people look at my images, I want them to think, 'Wow, things are beautiful, and we can be happy during hard times.' It means a lot to take a photo and create an emotion, even if it's anger, but a smile is better. I think it's my way of making everyone realize we're all human beings and we're all in this together.



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AKASHA'S PHOTOGRAPHY TIPS

"Film is my best friend," says Akasha of her dedication to her old-school cameras. "I can predict what it's going to do, I can manipulate it, and I love the grittiness and rawness. I'm not switching to digital anytime soon."

No matter: There are things us mere mortals, armed with our point-and-shoots, can learn from Akasha. Here are a few tips:

1. Forget about yourself. When Akasha is setting up a shoot, she concentrates on shapes and patterns, but not on herself. **"Become part of the surroundings."**
2. Embrace your inner graphic designer. Try to move the viewer's eye through as much of the photo as possible, using the landscape, the people, the colors—whatever works.
3. **Be a realist.** There are no do-overs for Akasha. Take the photo as is and see what happens
4. Observe, observe, observe. Watch people for their signature mannerisms and movements—licking lips, for example—and capture that.
5. Watch for emotions. **"My eye is glued to my camera to find out what people are feeling,"** she says. "I'll sit and watch them until I see them do something, or I'll ask them questions about what makes them happy or sad, and after that it starts happening."
6. Get silly. In her Big Sur work, many of the subjects are half-hidden with their hands. It was a trick Akasha decided on to break the ice. "If I'm shooting someone I don't know very well, it helps me break the ice to have them do **silly stuff.**"

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