

OTS MAGAZINE

THE EMPOWERED WOMAN: EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH AWARD WINNING NYC CELEBRITY|FASHION AND PORTRAIT PHOTOGRAPHER - NICOLE WILSON.

Nicole Wilson is an award-winning and internationally published New York City-based photographer and artist. Her work has appeared in top fashion magazines and representing top brands the world over. She specializes in portrait, fashion, headshot, lifestyle, branding, celebrity, and couples photography. She prides herself on not only delivering a fine art level of photography but also giving her clients a fun, easy, and positive experience from start to finish while working with her. Her clients include everyone from top fashion magazines, brands, and celebrities. to regular people looking to capture special moments from their life. Each shoot is special to her, and she is so grateful to do what she loves every day.

As you all already know we love celebrating various individuals globally, giving everyone a safe space to share their stories, talk about their passion and display their beautiful work for all to see, this time we are celebrating "Empowered Women" because we believe "Empowered Women Empower Women". We hope you enjoy reading this interview with the lovely Nicole Wilson, do not hesitate to share.

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OTSM: Hi Nicole, Please fully tell us about yourself and your personal background.

NW: Well, to begin with, my name is Nicole Wilson and I am an Award-Winning and internationally published multidisciplinary Photographer, Artist, and Creative Director based in my hometown of New York City. My clients include everyone from the world's top fashion & entertainment magazines, luxury brands, and celebrities. to regular people looking to capture special moments from their life.

In terms of my background, as mentioned, I'm a native New Yorker and grew up in the heart of Broadway's theater district or as locals sometimes colorfully refer to it, Hell's Kitchen. I grew up in a well-known artist's community called Manhattan Plaza where I was surrounded by working and celebrated artists of every discipline from playwrights and actors, to musicians and artists. Some of the more recognizable members of the community that I grew up with are Timothee Chalamet, Alicia Keys, Larry David, Donald Faison, Christian Slater, Terence Howard amongst many others. My father was a Broadway actor and my mother comes from a long line of artists on my Italian side though she is a Psychologist. Both my parents instilled a deep love of the arts in my sister, Julie (who's an award-winning and Grammy-nominated producer), and I from an early age so we spent a lot of time going to the theater, visiting the local art galleries, seeing films beyond my years. My father took me to see "Gone with the Wind" at three at the Ziegfeld theater and according to him, I was mesmerized. This does sound like me. I'm perpetually awe-struck by beauty and great art.

I spent the first big chunk of my life pursuing acting where I did a lot of theater and ultimately film and television, though I always painted as well and even exhibited my paintings which was figurative in group shows in Manhattan and Brooklyn. I always knew I would go into the arts, without sounding too pretentious being an artist was inherent to my being. It wasn't really a question of if but when could I get out of school to pursue my professional life.

I always identified as an artist, though I've gone through several career iterations from acting to fine art and illustrative work, to ultimately photography. All the arts excite me, and fortunately, I have been able to express myself across multiple mediums with some ease, though I'm admittedly a pretty poor singer and musician. I'll leave that to those that are truly gifted in that realm.



OTSM: How and when did you discover you had a passion for photography?

NW: It was a little bit of a harrowing journey to arrive at. In my 20's I was diagnosed with a rare kind of Ovarian Cancer. I spent several years of my life quite ill, in and out of surgeries and hospitals, stuck in bed for long periods of time, and afterwards I was put on medications that really left my physical health in the shambles. I had an English teacher that used to tell us kids, "Wisdom is achieved through pain and suffering" and while I don't know if I'm wise, I definitely learned a great deal about myself and life during that period of time, along with gratitude for good health. Health is a form of wealth you don't really appreciate it until you completely lose it.

It took several years for me to regain my health in any measurable way, but when I did I knew I wanted to rejoin life again and try to reclaim the person I was before the trauma of being sick. I opted not to return to acting, and instead, I looked toward the visual arts which had always fed me in a quieter but no less passionate way. One day, I sort of got this wild idea that I would be great at photography. It sort of struck me out of nowhere, and so the special man in my life, bought me my first camera (a Canon 6D Mark II), and honestly, it's been a fast but amazing ride ever since. I absolutely love the immediacy of photography, and that I am creating works of art with real people and a creative team in the moment. The collaborative process is familiar to me because I was an actress, and so it's honestly the perfect marriage of several of my passions fit together.

OTSM: In your own words please describe your style as a photographer?

NW: My style as a photographer is emotive, at times raw and romantic, and definitely cinematic.

OTSM: Do you remember your first experience with the Camera?

NW: My childhood friend's mother, Susan Johann, who was and is quite a talented photographer who photographed many well-known actors and playwrights used to take photos of me and her son. She had a studio in their apartment, and I remember thinking it was a very cool job and that she herself was this very cool artist lady. I wanted to be like that. My own first experience with a camera was probably a little camera my parents bought for me in Middle School and I used it to take pictures of my friends. But it wasn't until much later that I looked at a camera as an artistic tool. Once I had that in mind, it opened up a whole new world for me.

OTSM: How big a role does photography play in your life?

NW: At present, it plays the biggest role in my life. It's my child, my compass, my love. I'm either planning a shoot in my mind, creating mood boards, seeking out inspiration, in discussion with clients about perspective shoots, editing shoots, or actually on-location shooting. I'm a very immersive type of person. Obviously, I also enjoy spending time with my loved ones and dogs while doing other things like going to the theater or the cinema to replenish myself and refill my cup, but yes, photography takes center stage.



OTSM: Which photographers influenced you, and how did they influence your thinking, photographing, and career path?

NW: I feel like I'm something of a Frankenstein because I came to photography later and had so much exposure to the other arts and artists as my foundation. That's not to say I don't have photographers I really love who have shaped me. I am very much someone who learns by observation, so I take it all in, the artists who I'm drawn to, and then I interpret it through my own lens. For one, I absolutely adore the work of Annie Leibovitz and the intimacy and drama of her portraits. I recently went to a pop-up show of hers in Chelsea and wow, I was awe-struck with her talent, her colors, and tones, her obvious love of capturing people, emotions, and telling a story. I would absolutely love to model a career similar to hers, she walks the fine line between portraiture, fashion, and fine art and that's where I believe my work lives as well.

I also love the work of Gregory Colbert, who I actually have the pleasure of knowing, he famously created the Ashes and Snow exhibit, his work as a photographer and filmmaker depicting nature (mostly animals paired with people) is so raw, beautiful, and compelling. I love the directness, stillness, and sensitivity of his work, he captures something deep within us all. In terms of fashion photographers, the work of Peter Lindbergh, Patrick Demarchelier,

and Lara Jade are all photographers whose work speaks to me and my sensibilities. The truth of the matter is, I'm always discovering new photographers I like, some that no one has yet heard of yet.

OTSM: When I read these words I felt so happy to see how much you enjoy what you do and also making sure your clients feel at ease with you during a photoshoot- "I pride myself on not only delivering a fine art level of photography but also giving my clients a fun, easy, and positive experience from start to finish while are working with me". What advice would you offer to other aspiring photographers who wish to set their own style and not be like everyone else, because I believe it's always better to be authentic to your own personal style.

NW: I think what I would share with all young artists is the importance of finding your own voice and identity in your work. The best way to do that is to discover what you like and expose yourself to the best that field has to offer, learn how to do it from a technical side, but to also understand yourself and how you personally would express and interpret a particular idea. You can't be, for instance, Annie Leibovitz, there's no one who can take an Annie Leibovitz photo better than Annie. So in the marketplace, being a knockoff is going to mean you are replaceable and ultimately hollow. If you want to be irreplaceable and unique, you have to be you and put yourself into the narrative. Not everyone may love your work, but over time, if you create good work and are authentic, then ultimately you'll find your audience and ideal clients. It's very easy in the world of social media to hop on trends and build your work around a trend or even copy someone else's style. The trouble is trends come in and out of vogue and when it does, if there's no you in your work, you're just not that interesting and you won't stand the test of time. Basically, you become disposable.

OTSM: How do you make sure you get the best out of people when shooting portraits, especially if they are not professional models?

NW: First of all, my job as a photographer is to make my subject feel comfortable, or at least, to the best of my ability. Most people, even some professionals, freeze when a camera is pointed at them. Some find it very intimidating and anxiety-inducing to have your photo taken, almost like you're pointing a gun at them. I treat my camera as an extension of myself. Once I can help my subject understand that they're having a conversation with me, not a piece of machinery, I hope the camera begins to disappear somewhat. I try to keep it light in between shots and actually get to know the people I'm shooting so we develop a rapport.



OTSM: What Would You Consider the Most Important Components of Your Style? And Do You Feel You Have A Signature Style?

NW: I'm not a technical photographer, or I don't identify that way. I guess what that means on a certain level is that I have a strong artistic eye and foundation as an artist. It's been polished over many years. So when I'm working I do tend to forget about the technical aspect, and just try to create beautiful and interesting images in the moment. I kind of flow through my shoots and get into a zone. The things I do wind up thinking about most are composition and gesture. Because at this moment in time, I prefer to work outdoors with natural environments and natural light, I always have to be on the lookout for a great angle, composition, interesting background, and then placing the model or subject within that scene.

OTSM: Has Instagram changed the way you photograph? Has it changed what you share, or how you share your work?

NW: Yes and no, from a business perspective I think about curating my feed more, sharing series from a shoot or a magazine publication, and putting out content whenever I can. There are some great aspects of social media, but with the volume of work I do offline, it can become a second job to keep up with it.

OTSM: What sort of message do you want to convey with your work?

NW: I don't think I have an over-arching message in my work other than capturing the beauty of people, our environment as well as our emotional life as people. Each shoot is different, while I tend to like a theme for a shoot, it varies with each new one I take on.



OTSM: This is a question I always love to ask my Queens during interviews what does the word “Women Empowerment “mean to you? And how does it help women?

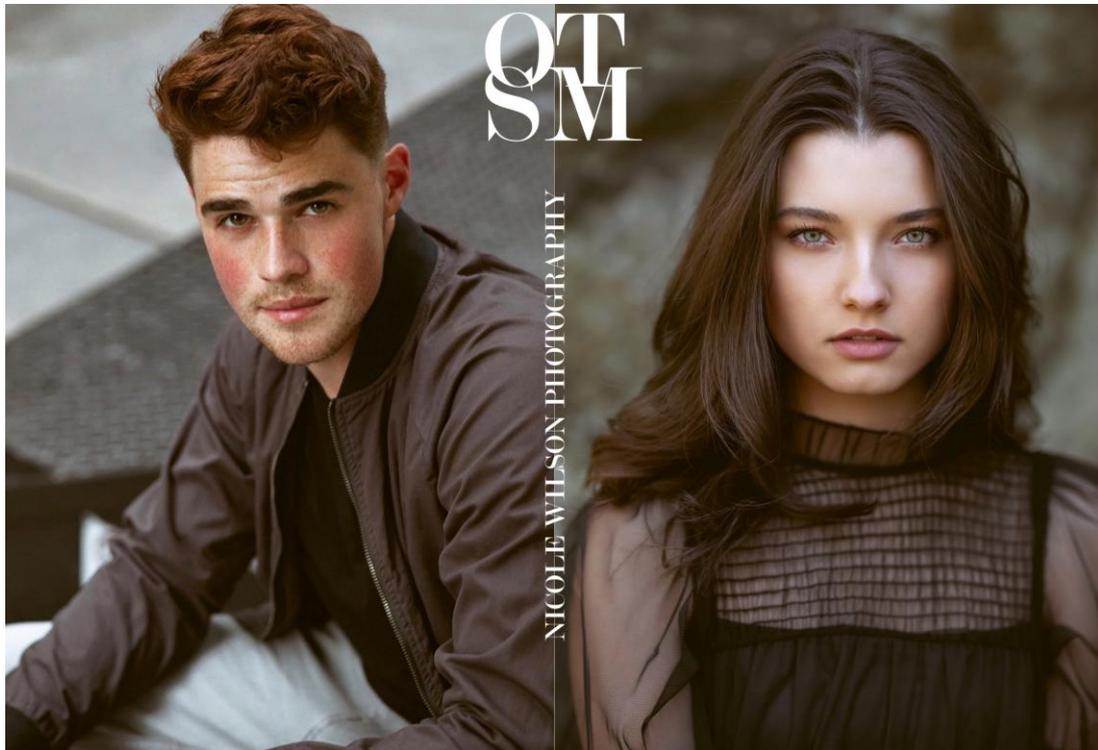
NW: Empowering women, to me, simply means freeing women to be exactly who they are (who they’ve always been) and helping to facilitate them to do what they were put on this earth to do without any double standard. Empowering women for me also means passing on the baton to other incredible women, so they feel supported and encouraged to kill it, to be bosses, to be unapologetically great, or talented, and be whatever they like.

OTSM: Why is it so important for you to run a business that empowers women?

NW: It's important because I am a woman, and in what I do, I am even without knowing it, setting an example for other women out there, the same way my mom and grandmothers set an example for me.

OTSM: How do you empower women through your work?

NW: In my work, I like to capture all aspects of being a woman, from being feminine and beautiful to being strong, fierce, and confident. I prefer to work with female models who are bold, confident, sure of themselves but also capable of vulnerability, and show that in my work.



OTSM: Do you think that female photographers are fairly represented? There are a lot of discussions online about women not having equal opportunities to men in photography, what are your opinions on the subject?

NW: Photography is definitely still a male-dominated field. Particularly in fashion and celebrity photography. While I do see more opportunities cropping up for women and many great female photographers, it is still very much a man’s world and so you do need to work twice as hard to get half as far. I’m scrappy, I’m a Hell’s Kitchen kid at heart, so I’m stubborn and relentless when I set my mind to something, but of course, there are times I feel like I have to make myself bigger and tougher to have a seat at the table. I feel like the industry needs to open up more opportunities to women and focus on creating a balance of opportunity because if we don’t have the same opportunities, we can’t develop into an equal talent or career.

OTSM: What advice would you give to aspiring photographers out there?

NW: Don't be too hard on yourself. When you begin, you probably won't be very good and that's okay, that's to be expected. The more you do it, and the better you understand your equipment and yourself as an artist, your work will improve over time if you are dedicated to your craft. I would also encourage them to study, intern, or offer to be an apprentice and try to work with photographers you admire. I like to mentor young photographers, they often work as my assistants, and with this approach, they can learn first hand and up close with someone actively doing what they aspire to.

OTSM: If you could change one thing about the photography industry, what would it be? What would you improve?

NW: I don't have any bones I'm picking at the moment. I find the photography community on a whole to be one of inclusivity and sharing as opposed to other fields I've worked in.

OTSM: What is the most challenging part of being a photographer?

NW: Just as it is with all the arts, the biggest challenge is the ability to continue to garner a steady stream of clients and earn a living. Over time, you do build a reputation and that creates a funnel, but what you have to consider about photography is that many times, clients are only there for one session, or one job, so you have to be forever marketing yourself, relationship building and so forth so you can earn a living. The other big thing is for me and my business, I am irreplaceable. So if I'm under the weather, booked up, or not feeling particularly inspired, I can't send someone in my place to run my business or take the photos. In that way, much rests on my shoulders and my ability to work on a high level and at a high capacity, and keep my body and mind in good condition to be ready to create.



OTSM: What are some of the biggest hurdles you have been faced with as a photographer and how did you overcome them?

NW: When you're working with a creative team you have to find people that work on your level and who you really get on with energetically. I am very focused when I'm working, so I require a team around me who is both creative and positive but who can also anticipate my

needs and understand my creative process. I don't know if that's a hurdle, but finding the right people to surround yourself with is important and it can take time.

OTSM: What was the first-ever photography gear you used when it comes to photoshoots and What is your current favorite photography gear, what do you always have in your photography Bag/Kit?

NW: My first professional camera was the 6d Mark II and I had a Canon 50 mm lens 1.4 as my first lens. It was a great starting point and that is a very flexible focal length for most portrait photography. Right now, I've moved over to Canon's mirrorless system and I shoot on a Canon R5. The lens most readily on my camera is the Canon RF 28-70 mm F2 which is a fabulous lens with great versatility and low-light performance given the F2 aperture which allows for more light, crisp images, and respectable bokeh. I pair my 28-70 usually with one other lens on professional shoots since I don't love carrying a ton of gear with me as I'm a small-framed gal, usually a prime like the RF 85 1.2 or RF 50 1.2 or my RF 70-200 F 2.8 or the EF 35 1.4 with an adaptor. I'm basically a Canon spokesperson at this point, I really love having gear that supports me in creating the work I want.

OTSM: What has been the highlight of your career as a photographer till date?

NW: There have been many great highlights, but I've really loved the work I've done with Italian VOGUE, the series of editorials I've done with Vanity Teen Magazine, and most recently an editorial series I was commissioned to do by Boys by Girls Magazine.

OTSM: When it comes to post-production what tools do you use and what do you recommend to upcoming photographers?

NW: I use both Lightroom and Photoshop, though I'm very curious about Capture One as I've been hearing good things.

OTSM: What are your latest and upcoming projects?

NW: I just wrapped up a big international Beauty Campaign for a company called Ego Jasmine, I've also got several commissioned and fashion editorials set to be released in the next month. One for Vanity Teen, another for FLANELLE Magazine, another for L'EFFRONTE and another for L'Officiel.

OTSM: What was the most surreal moment you ever experienced during a photography shoot?

NW: For me, it's realizing I'm doing something I love professionally and performing at a high level both physically and creatively. This happened recently on a shoot where I realized how far I'd come from overcoming all my health obstacles to being back in a life that brings me great joy and gives me purpose.



OTSM: What are you doing when you are not working?

NW: When I'm not working or thinking about working (which is most of the time now), I like to find ways to completely decompress and get away from my computer screen and editing nook. I enjoy going to the cinema every week to lose myself in a movie, or going to the theater, taking long walks with my dogs and family, and riding my electric scooters all around Manhattan and Brooklyn, which makes me feel free.

OTSM: What or where do you draw your inspirations from?

NW: Oh, everything really. I feel like an artist must be a sponge of life. I'm inspired by people I meet, interesting fashion and clothing design, great cinematography and color toning of film, paintings, theater, the old Hollywood movie stars, music, love, and loss.

OTSM: Any last words you'd like to add?

NW: Thank you for the opportunity to be interviewed by you, OTS Magazine, it's been a great pleasure!!



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