

Upstate.

A PORTFOLIO BY KATE ORNE WORDS BY VICTORIA CAMBLIN

Kate Orne is a photographer, creative director, and the founder of *Upstate Diary*, an online and more recently print publication dedicated to those New York artists who share a passion for living and working well to the north of the city. The prolific Orne, a Swedish native who moved upstate after years in the Manhattan fashion world, did a stint as a fashion editor at Interview in the 1990s, and has a range of commercial and editorial work under her belt (think *Esquire*, *Harpers Bazaar*, *Elle*, *GQ*, and *Vanity Fair*; *Trussardi*, *Nike*, and *Net-à-Porter*). She also spent a decade photographing in the brothels of Pakistan, where she documented the lives of women and children trapped in a world of trafficking and stigma—work that earned her a *Beremice Abbott Prize*, and a photography fellowship from the *New York Foundation for the Arts*.

When I spoke to Orne it was the middle of July, which is right around the time that a mass Manhattan exodus occurs: the city empties, and anyone who can heads for the slightly breezier, less clammy provinces. “This isn’t like the Hamptons,” she says of the authentic New York state, “where you go out on Main Street and you meet everybody that you know from the city. It’s much more widespread than that.” Orne will drive 4-5 hours to conduct interviews for *Upstate Diaries*—that’s how big it is—and capture the creative pulse of the dynamic region. While the area’s cultural history runs very deep, it is becoming more and more well known, as artists faced with space and cost constraints are increasingly motivated to leave the city—and not just for August. *Upstate Diary* brings that community together, sharing its stories online and, now, in print, with its inaugural limited edition issue featuring Carrie Mae Weems, Olaf Breuning, and much more talent you didn’t even know was flourishing above Manhattan.

When did upstate New York become a full time lifestyle for you? When did *Upstate Diaries* become a full time project?

I’ve been in the fashion world more or less all my life, as a photographer, an editor, a stylist, and so forth. I had been coming up since the late 1990s, but when I moved here five and a half years ago, I was tired of the city. I knew I wanted something more meaningful. I also new I wanted to do something here. When you live in the country, you’re quite isolated,

and I started to feel the need to reach out. I had been hearing about people here who were just like me: artists in my own community who were sick of the city, who wanted something more—people who were priced out of the city and needed more space, more meaning, a better quality of life. I began to dig, and I found more and more amazing people. I’m still finding them. About a year ago, the idea came to me: to start an online diary to really share what these people are doing.

You work has had a very consistent social interest—your work in Pakistan received praise for telling stories that wouldn’t have been told otherwise, for instance. Would you say there’s a way in which you’re doing something similar with *Upstate Diaries*, sort of creating a social narrative?

Yes. I’ve always been interested in people, in really getting intimate with them. It doesn’t matter what I’ve done in my life—whether I’ve been photographing a prostitute in Lahore, my mother suffering from dementia, or an artist upstate—it’s always been about learning about people’s stories, how they think, and what gets them up in the morning, then getting as close as I can.

Is that something you also pursue in your commercial and fashion work? Obviously, you have certain constraints if you’re working for a commercial client, but there seems to be a consistent “voice” in your photography across the board.

Well, I try to! It’s very difficult to have an intimate situation when you’re

surrounded by 20 people. I’ve always loved working all on my own—without assistants, without any of that. Even in my fashion work, I really always try to keep my crews to a minimum; I work with very little equipment. I just want to be as independent as possible when I work. You know, I am no longer going to Pakistan, but I was going back and forth for about ten years. People would often ask me, how are you able to go from that scenario, then drop into the fabulous fashion world? Well, I’m very open, and I am constantly searching, and somehow these two different experiences fed or informed each other—they created a balance.

So you’re obviously able to travel well and adapt to new environments. But how has it been being in such a rural environment, full time?

You’re in nature, and nature gives you something, it fills you up with something that you simply don’t get in the city. I was raised in Sweden, in Ingmar Bergman’s landscape. So I’ve always been drawn to nature, and I also utilized that as much as I could in my fashion work. Now, it has gotten to a different level because I’m not just shooting models anymore—I’m shooting people that I’m really interested in. One of the luxuries of running *Upstate Diary* is that I can freely choose to approach these individuals, who I commit to spending time with. So I feel in many ways much more fulfilled in my work now. I’m not surrounded by that big crew here—even though that can also bring amazing experience in terms of collaboration and energy—I can work on a much more intimate level, and I can work alone. I live on an old dairy farm, a beautiful 13 acres! The house is an 1811 stone building that the previous owner had restored to its original state, so you really step back in time there. Since the historical part of the house has been completely preserved, it’s kind of like a museum—a very livable museum. Some people have their historic houses restored in a very kind of “fabulous” way, but mine is very authentic. It’s a jewel. I’m on a little rural road; I’m surrounded with gardens full of hydrangeas. And to go back to this idea of meaningful encounters, I try to invite various artists, and people I encounter through *Upstate Diary*, over as often as possible. There’s also the community that I’m surrounded by—my neighbors. In the city, there’s no need to get to know them, but here, there is. You rely upon them, because there are power outages, snowstorms, and so on. So your relationship with your neighbors is more meaningful, too, which I think is absolutely wonderful.

So you’ve shot models for fashion work, you’ve photographed women in Pakistan, and it seems like you are looking at a lot of female creatives on *Upstate Diary*. Is capturing women a particular focus or priority for you?

That is so funny—I went through a period earlier this year where I was telling my friends, “Oh my god, I think I’m doing way too many men!” It’s very important to me that I include artists who are young and old, male and female—it doesn’t matter what their backgrounds are, if they have degrees, if they are “hot” or not... I just want to have a really wide range, and selecting features is really a holistic process. When I was at *Interview*—which is a great magazine and has so much more freedom than so many others—we were still guided by advertisers, demographics, and commercial concerns. I am not guided by any of that here; I made a very conscious decision to be as free as possible. With each feature on *Upstate Diary* I really go in from a place of learning—even though I sucked in school! When something interests me, I want to learn as much about it as I can. When you are an editor somewhere like *Interview*, that process can become a little bit muddled by political thinking, where you “have” to do this or that person, for whatever reason.

Upstate Diary must be very personal for you: it’s about the world you have worked in for decades to some degree but it’s also about the habitat you live in, your immediate community and surroundings. So how has the work impacted your personal life, your surroundings, your aesthetic... even your sense of style?

Oh, I’m definitely just a jeans and t-shirt girl now! It’s a lot of fun to go out and buy the latest Prada suit or the latest Comme des Garçons dress, and they are beautiful things. Unfortunately, perhaps for some, I’m not quite as stylish as I used to be—I sit here and work at my computer and do my meetings but then I need to go out in the garden and do something, so it has to be practical, and comfortable. But of course, style is not in the clothes, it’s in the attitude, and when I moved into this house, I really got to explore other aspects of what style means. When you live within four white walls, in the city, it has a much different effect on your creativity in terms of decoration—you could say it’s like a blank slate, but that can be limiting! In this house, I have antiques and beautiful rugs that I have collected throughout my travels. I think my sense of style, over all, is being geared more toward my environment than to what I wear now. I’ve been able to create the place I’ve always dreamed of.



CARRIE MAE WEEMS, ARTIST.



CHRISTINA KRUSE, PROTOTYPES FOR LEEREN, WORKS IN PROGRESS, 2015.



CHRISTINA KRUSE, ARTIST & MODEL.



RUSSEL WRIGHT, INDUSTRIAL DESIGNER & FOUNDER OF MANITOGA. CENTER: ARMCHAIR STATTON, 1950.



PARTLY EXPOSED: SHEILA METZNER, LYNN NUDE, 1990.



MELISSA MCGILL, ARTIST.



MARIANNA ROTHEN, ARTIST & FILMMAKER.





LIZZIE FEIDELSON, ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE AT THE SHANDAKEN PROJECT.



CHRISTINA KRUSE, KUGELMANN SCULPTURE, A WORK IN PROGRESS IN ALUMINUM & LEAD, 2013.



TOP, MANITOGA BY RUSSEL WRIGHT.
RIGHT, VIEW FROM CHRISTINA
KRUSE'S STUDIO.



TOP LEFT, INTERIOR BY ANGELA
PATTERSON. TOP, JICKY SCHNEE,
ACTRESS & ARTIST. LEFT, VIEW FROM
CHRISTINA KRUSE'S STUDIO.



TOP, RUSSEL WRIGHT, INDUSTRIAL
DESIGNER & FOUNDER OF MANITOGA.





MARIANNA ROTHEN, ARTIST & FILMMAKER.



JICKY SCHNEE, ACTRESS & ARTIST.



RUSSEL WRIGHT, MANITOGA HOUSE.



SHEILA METZNER'S ARCHIVE.

Upstate.

MIKE OSTERHOUT,
CRUCIFY THY SELFIE

