

A prolific photographer comes of age.

David Uzochukwu



Artwork: David Uzochukwu. Courtesy of Galerie Number 8.

Nothing is ever quite as it seems in David Uzochukwu’s photography. His subjects—often Uzochukwu himself—are captured balled up in never-ending bed linen, floating on rivers made of clouds or melting into lush landscapes. Through elaborate production and post-production, the 19-year-old creates hypnotic images that ache with strange emotion: The faces he photographs appear wrought by unnamed pains and joys.

A self-taught photographer, Uzochukwu began shooting at age 10, when he discovered his mother’s point-and-shoot camera. He took photos (and posted online) relentlessly until he got his break a few years later when he did his first editorial shoot at the age of 14. Now based in Vienna, Uzochukwu continues to shoot while working toward a degree in philosophy. The setting feels right for someone whose photographs are born of emotion, executed with academic rigor and crafted with a philosopher’s penchant for deep reflection.

You often photograph your subjects in seemingly boundless natural landscapes. What’s the appeal of the infinite? In real life, I’m drawn to environments that aren’t obviously man-made and that have not obviously been influenced by man. I find nature very calming and inspiring in all of its beauty and cruelty, and in its existence, which is completely independent of people. Visually it’s appealing because of the vast

amount of color, and the textures that keep repeating themselves.

Your favorite subject to shoot seems to be yourself. Why? It’s more practical to shoot myself because I’m always available! That’s one part of it. And then there’s the fact that portraiture is incredibly intimate. It’s partly to do with not having to communicate a vision but knowing exactly where I want things to go. [Self-portraiture] feels like it’s truly and entirely a product of my own. To know that no one else is involved in the creation of the piece is fantastic—very cathartic.

Which growing pains have you worked through in your photography? Anything weighing on my mind can be worked through like that—frustration, boredom, longing, a deep existential crisis now and then. Being a teenager, a brother, a son, a friend, a minority, a human—it’s never-ending material for issues. I always know when I need to lose some emotional baggage, but I don’t necessarily vivisection the emotion before it’s locked in place visually.

You’re represented by Galerie Number 8, which represents artists that explore cultural identity. How does your work do that? My work is such an intimate reflection of who I am. My mother is from Austria and my father is from Nigeria. I was born and raised in Austria, as well as in Luxembourg and Belgium. It was a lot

of going back and forth, a lot of belonging and not belonging, and always somehow being a minority and being excluded in a way. There’s this yearning for home and at the same time, there’s a sense of home everywhere.

With all the different geographies running through your life story, which places in the world inspire you? When I was in Oregon a couple of years ago it felt like someone had put visuals of my dreams out there into reality. It was a very surreal feeling. But regularly I’m surprised by how incredibly beautiful landscapes are right in my backyard. Any place with a wide-open sky has a very high chance of touching me.

Where do you want to take your work in your 20s? I’ve always tried to chase that one image; I’m very single-image focused right now. But I’m trying to expand and make larger bodies of work. Also, I’d like to do more motion film, and see how I can incorporate that into my process.

People make a lot of the fact that you’ve achieved so much at such a young age. Does that feel like pressure or is it freeing? It’s definitely freeing. I’m excited about where I am right now, with opportunities that are absolutely insane to think about. I just consider myself very fortunate to have found something that I truly enjoy and that I can see myself doing for a very long time.

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Uzochukwu’s *Giving Way* is a 2016 series inspired by Chinua Achebe, whose novels documented the fracturing of society in colonial Nigeria.