

Lucy Carolan

"The whole process of learning and improving is as important as any actual achievements."

Freelance photographer

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What motivates and inspires you?

Curiosity - about what I'm capable of, and about what other people are doing and how, even in fields seemingly unrelated to mine. The whole process of learning and improving is as important as any actual achievements.

Money - and the will to thrive rather than survive. I like shoes, hats, lingerie, good food, wine, and I love travelling. Actually, forget the shoes and hats for now, I haven't seen anywhere near as much of the world yet as I like, or drunk enough wine.

Hope - for openings, opportunities. At times even the mere prospect of creatively interesting commissions for (half) decent fees has been enough to keep me alive. Actual offers of worthy work, and the possibility of exciting down time - yes please - all reasonable offers considered.

How did you get where you are now?

Originally I wanted to be an illustrator. I took A levels, followed by a foundation year at Cleveland College of Art & Design, then a BA in Graphics at Newcastle.

In my second year, specialising in illustration, I was using other people's photographs as references for my work. When a 6 week photography module came up I took it and I've been a photographer ever since.

What are you working on?

After 12 years in France I returned to England in 2002 and started rebuilding my career here from scratch. I'm increasingly using digital for stills work and also to pick up the side show side of my activity, and I'm developing my interest in fashion and film. I have personal and exhibition projects in progress, and over the coming year I'll be doing some teaching in the community arts sector.

Which organisations have been particularly helpful to you?

Bridge Club North, Codeworks Connect, NFM, DWN, Arts Council, NECC, WIN.

What barriers have you come up against?

Racists, misogynists and other bullies have never stopped me, but I have still allowed them to slow my progress at times.

Throughout my career, people have said they like what I do, and even that they'd like to work with me as a result, then rarely anything comes of it. Sometimes it's because they assume I'll be too expensive or not interested. Or they think I am definitely too expensive but assume I won't or can't negotiate, that I won't travel, am too young or not experienced enough - and so on. Other people's assumptions are the bane of my life. And this when my own ought to have been bad enough.

Best piece of work-related advice you've been given?

"You worry too much. What do you have to lose - just go for it!"

Agnes SoraDo you have a mentor, or someone whose work or attitude you admire?

I come from a very working class background, so there was nobody in my immediate circle to guide or inspire by example. I was the first person in my family to take a degree and I am still the only professional artist. I get a lot of creative impulse and support from my mother, though it took me a long time to realise it.

Otherwise, I've drawn inspiration from reading about other women artists, even though so many of the most brilliant and admirable seem to have chosen to end their own lives - I'll spare you the long sad list.

I love generous, energetic ideas people and in business, the person I most admire is Caroline Theobald, of Bridge Club North.

Photo credit: Portrait of Lucy by Richard Glynn