

FROM 'SHE DANCES ON JACKSON', 2011

'I spotted this extraordinary tree, and this big beast of a car parked next to it, from another road in Colorado. It looked such an odd scene we had

to go back, I needed to take a picture of it. The tree was bending over and kind of naked and destroyed in a certain way, but

also beautiful. The

car was

abandoned and

had obviously

been there for

quite some time.

I guess the scene

says everything

about the States,

in a certain way.'

FROM 'SHE DANCES ON JACKSON', 2012

'This young woman was a mother and a full-time student of auto mechanics. She'd been taking part in a St Patrick's Day parade in Lexington,

Kentucky. Public events like this are a godsend for finding people willing to be photographed. I spotted her from a distance as she had striking red

hair. I used my 5x4 camera and made two exposures. I usually take two at most when I'm working with that camera, in case someone has blinked in the first.'



ANESSA WINSHIP IS mulling over two key questions: what inspires her and what she aims to say in her work. 'It's really difficult to say; things are shifting for me because things are shifting full stop,' she says. 'I guess I'm questioning the world I live in. It's often a very unjust world and I guess that's possibly at the heart of what I'm doing.

'I'm also questioning how one represents the world and there are many conversations about that

happening at the moment. I think if I can trigger or touch an emotion in the people who are viewing the work, if it sparks something or asks a question, then possibly it has served its function.'

Winship is one of the most highly regarded documentary photographers working today. One of the Society's Hundred Heroines, and named an Honorary Fellow in November, she has received international recognition in major awards including World Press Photo (awards in 1998 and 2008), the Sony World Photography Awards 'Photographer of the Year' (2008) and the Henri Cartier-Bresson Award

(2011). Although she began by working in the UK, in recent decades she has predominantly made her images abroad, particularly in the USA and Eastern Europe.

Her interest in photography was sparked as a child, when visiting her grandmother's house.

'I would look through the family pictures, which I found fascinating,' she says. 'There was one particular picture that took my imagination - a wedding picture - and within the group was my grandmother when she was around 14 years old. It was a strange thought that this teenage girl could be my



FROM 'GEORGIA SEEDS CARRIED BY THE WIND'. 2009

'We were in the city of Kutaisi in Georgia in Eastern Europe. We had arranged to go to a gym and to a dance rehearsal in the same afternoon. I had made a portrait of the taller of the boys, then we realised we needed to get to the rehearsal before it was dark. In my panic, I exposed a film that had already been exposed, so this was a double exposure made by mistake. Both dancing and boxing are hugely popular in Georgia, so for me it represented a lot of things about the

national psyche.'



'It's the magic of an image appearing, as it were, out of nothing'

o grandmother, who to me was ancient. It seemed magical. That was the seed, really, of my photographic interest.'

After leaving school, Winship went to art college in Hull, where she says she felt 'really out of my depth', but her course included a photography module that reaffirmed her fascination for the medium and 'the magic of an image appearing, as it were, out of nothing'.

She went on to study film, video and photographic arts at the Polytechnic of Central London - now the University of Westminster - in the mid-1980s. There

she met fellow photographer George Georgiou, who later became her husband. They have travelled together and supported each other's work ever since. The course, she says, has had an important influence on shaping her practice.

'Photography courses today are geared towards going out into the world and making a living,' she says. 'That was absolutely not on the agenda there. We weren't even thinking about a career. The course itself was incredibly intense and very academic, as well as actually

making and taking photographs. All of the discussions around representation and the other political stuff were completely mind-blowing and are still interesting and relevant today.'

'Left reeling' at the end of the course, both she and Georgiou did various photography-related jobs while saving up to carry out their own projects.

'We struggled and somehow managed to scrape bits of money together to do our own work, and I think that's probably how we've continued,' she says. 'We've never been financially o



FROM 'IMAGINED STATES AND **DESIRES: A BALKAN JOURNEY', 2000**

'This picture was taken in Kosovo. The man had fled his home during the conflict from 1998-99 and I think had gone into Albania. When he returned, he retraced where he'd been and found a suitcase that he had intended to take with him, but he had left

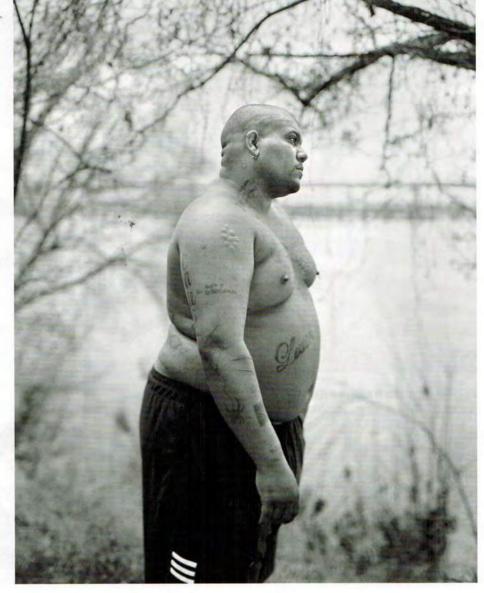
without it because he had been in such a rush. He was dragging this suitcase, which may have contained all his worldly possessions, on two branches, along a muddy track. There was something incredibly poignant about it.'

FROM 'SHE DANCES ON JACKSON,' 2011

LEFT

This image was made near a river in Richmond, Virginia. Towards the end of the day we saw three men coming away from the river who looked slightly different to most of the other people. I asked this guy if I could make his portrait. I made one from the front then he took off

his T-shirt. As he did that I saw something about him when he turned to the side and asked him to turn to the side again and made that portrait of him. For a man who probably comes across as quite scary, he suddenly was rendered soft and soulful.



• rich but our lives have been rich in terms of what we've ended up doing and the people we have met.'

In 1999 Winship and Georgiou went to Kosovo to document a country recovering from more than a year of armed conflict. This journey began a decade of living abroad. Their time in Kosovo was followed by periods in Belgrade and Athens, then five years in Istanbul.

Despite the varied locations, there's a consistent visual fingerprint to Winship's work which, in the words of the *Guardian*'s Sean O'Hagan, 'engages with the dilemmas of belonging, exile and memory' and results in 'a kind of imaginative social documentary that is both rooted in place, yet elusive.'

She says that when choosing subjects

'I do take more pictures now, because I can, but I rarely play them back ...'

she works mainly instinctively. Most of her work, after leaving Britain in the late 90s, was with strangers and, as her chosen equipment was often a 5x4 camera, exposures were usually limited to one or two per person. Although she now mainly works with a digital camera, she says the discipline of large-format photography has stayed with her.

'I really do still love film and I always will,' she says. 'I think it's important for young people to experience working with film. It creates a particular kind of methodology, in that you have to limit yourself. I do take more pictures now,

because I can, but interestingly I rarely play them back, mostly because I'm a kind of Luddite really. I create something of the formality of using a 5x4 by putting a camera on the tripod, which slows things down and creates a sort of little enclosed environment.'

Today, although based in the UK, Winship travels and works widely. Her thirst for knowledge and understanding remains undiminished.

'I still love going out into the world and I'm still asking lots of questions,' she says. 'And I don't have any answers. I'm only one person and in a sense everything I do is completely subjective. Quite often people want you to have answers and I'm not sure that I do. I suppose, in a way, I'll always be a curious child.'



FROM 'IMAGINED STATES AND DESIRES: A BALKAN JOURNEY', 2000

ABOVE

This was taken in Kosovo, after the NATO bombings had finished and people had returned home. This building was a burnt-out house. A group of kids was playing within the structure and one boy was on a donkey. In the background there are two signs; one is a Serbian sign and the other represents the

opposing Albanian forces. The symbols of these two fighting sides are there, with the child in the middle of it. It was a strange, serendipitous moment.'



PROFILE

VANESSA WINSHIP HonFRPS

Born in 1960, Winship is
one of the UK's leading
contemporary documentary
photographers. Much of her
work over the past 20 years
has been made in the USA
and Eastern Europe, and
explores themes such as
exile, memory and belonging.