A BOY

"A RESULT OF LIFE"

There is a strange balance between straightforwardness and sensitivity in Gioia De Bruijn's images of friend Guido, shot over the duration of many years. These qualities are indeed emblematic for every encounter with the photographer, even when surrounded by German techno, which is how Gioia and Izabela Anna normally meet. This time it was quieter.

Interview by Izabela Anna
Photography by Gioia de Bruijn

I know you told me, but how did you meet Guido again?
We met a few times before we actually talked - it was during the time in which we had all the same friends, went to all the same birthdays, and after parties. We got introduced to each other multiple times but never really ended up talking. Until one day when I went to some party with a friend who ended up getting so wasted that Guido had to take him outside the club to cool down. I guess Guido saw this as a good opportunity to get me involved, as he tracked me down inside the club and lured me outside to come help watch this "friend" of ours while he sobered up. Guido and I sat outside the club for hours on top of a houseboat, talking, while this guy slept off his wastedness. When he eventually woke up I dropped him off at home and spent the rest of the day with Guido at an after party in the park. I never saw that friend again, but Guido and I were pretty much inseparable from that moment.

But you did separate as lovers. How does one become whole again after being inseparable?
We never really separated, not to this day. We are no longer lovers, but I think that was never the priority in our relationship. We were in a romantic relationship, and therefore considered lovers but it was so much more than that. Our friendship was deep and special, something that I think not many people in the world experience. There was no judgement. From moment number one that we spent together, I was able to be myself with him, which is something I hadn't really felt before. He taught me to love myself, and he showed me the importance of self-love. I mean, I already loved myself, but I didn't really believe that others could as well. Much later in the relationship I ended up cheating on him. We inevitably broke up, and at that moment, when I realised I lost my lover and my bestie, I thought I'd never be able to forgive myself. It was actually him who made me forgive myself. We didn't't speak for a few months, after which he called and said, "Dude, I have already lost my lover, don't also make me lose my bestie. Get over yourself." Reunited as friends ever since.

You shoot on film, sometimes there are water drops and tiny particles of dust on your pictures. How do you generally deal with imperfection?
This is not a question that I can answer in absolutes. There are parts of life that I attach a lot of value and meaning to, and those need to be absolutely perfect. There are other parts that I don't, and those parts I couldn't give two shits about because I find them insignificant in the greater scheme of things. Well, the same goes for Art.

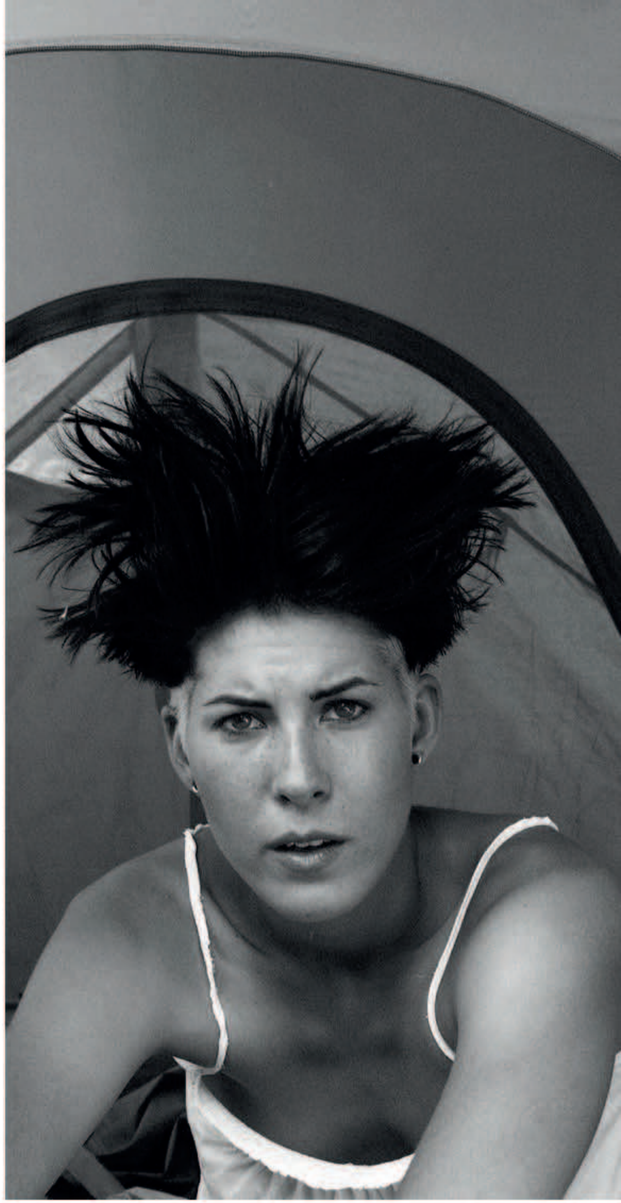
My photos are often a result of life. And life isn't perfect. I shoot on film, and then I process that film at home in my dusty house, usually without the proper equipment to obtain "studio perfection". To me the subject and the framing of an image are very important. If, for example, the framing of the photo was off in some way, but the image was otherwise technically perfect, I would still hate it. But those water or soap drops, or pieces of dust, they don't change the subject or the framing of the photo. They are technicalities. The image essentially stays the same. The technical aspect is something I don't really care for too much, I can deal with this imperfection. Ultimately, perfection hides in the imperfection.

Your work is always raw and direct, often intimate and never staged. Is it documentation or is it therapy? What does photography allow you to do?
It's therapy. It's always been therapy. Photography allows me to hide behind a camera and make a situation about someone other than me. It allows me to get through a lot of boring and awkward situations, without people having to look at my resting bitch face the whole time. Later, when I go through the photos, I can make discoveries about those situations. Discoveries that I usually can't do on the spot. Life overwhelms me all the time, and distancing myself from it through the camera gives me more time to understand it, albeit at a later date.

So Gioisie, what are we going to do when the world runs out of film?
Essentially, this already happened to me once. I used to shoot exclusively on Fuji Neopan 1600 film which went out of production a few years ago. I, of course, was the last one to find out about this. I literally had to stop using this film from one day to the next. I tried others but it wasn't the same. I momentarily stopped photographing altogether and I can confidently say this was one of the worst times in my life (however privileged that sounds). It took me more than two years to return and find new film that made me happy. Then, the world ran out of peel apart polaroids. Another one of my favourite things, but luckily Fuji continued with theirs and I was able to adjust quicker. Now Fuji is stopping their peel-apart instant film as well, but this time I am prepared. Every time I see it for sale somewhere I buy as many packs as my bank account allows and hoard it. This way I can gradually come to terms with the dying situation. So, if the world really runs out of all film, I would need a heads up really far in advance, so I can stock up on a lifetime supply and never experience a life without film. A life without film is no life at all. Not for me.

Life is changing in an instant, to say it in Joan Didion's words. You just found out that you're going to have a little kid (I'm very excited) and quit your day job. How do you stay grounded?
Ha, I am not sure if I do stay grounded. I used to get pretty anxious all the time, especially about change, but it is an essential part of life. The only thing that is permanent in your life is you. It's the only thing that you can count on, and until the very bitter end. It's the only constant, along with change. But it has never not worked out well. I guess keeping that in mind chills me out sufficiently to be able to face things yet to come.

So, when is self-love?
This probably differs for everyone but I am pretty self-obsessed and that has always worked well for me. No, seriously, like I said before, the only thing in your life that stays around always, is you. You can have 5,000 friends on Facebook, be the most popular girl in the world, but no one will be in your head to hear your thoughts when you lie in bed at night. That's all on you. My suggestion is learning to love those thoughts



that you're stuck with. Accept them. Everybody's mind is sick, don't try to fight. Accept your faults and your flaws, try use them to your advantage. If you can't use them to your advantage, just don't try to fight them. You'll learn to love them eventually.

Gioia de Bruijn is fond of the wilderness already present in nature and man. People look at her as if there is no camera around, allowing her to capture intimate reports that leave out the voyeurism. Gioia balances her love for champagne with a deep voice and unashamed sincerity, immersing friends and viewer's in a world where the passing of time is altered and the intensity of sound is different. Gioia lives in Amsterdam and is represented by Flatland Gallery.