

# FEATURED

## HANNAH KOZAK



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AN: Please introduce yourself. Where do you live?

HK: I'm Hannah Kozak. I was born and raised in Los Angeles and am happy to still call it home.

AN: Please tell us how you got into photography?

HK: I started photographing my family and friends when I was 10 years old. My father had a Kodak brownie that I used. My first 35mm camera was a Minolta SRT-201, later I loved Nikons. I had an FM and then an F4, which I still love. I dream of a Hasselblad. However, I don't collect equipment, I collect photography books which started when I was much older. In high school I remember loving the smell of the darkroom especially the fixer. I still love everything about photography. From opening a box of Tri-x to loading the film in the camera, to lining up the film to the sprocket and watching the counter move to number 1. I love the

magic of getting the proof sheet back and seeing the images, captured in time on film, forever.

I started sneaking onto movie studio sets when I was in my teens, taking photos of actors on shows like Charlie's Angels and Starsky and Hutch and selling the photos to movie magazines. I became obsessed with Elton John. I plastered my walls with Elton John photos covering every square inch of wall space available when I was 14. I tracked down his house in Beverly Hills and shuffled through his trash to try to find anything with his handwriting on it. I watched him, as he played tennis with Billie Jean King on his backyard tennis court. I found someone who knew someone and managed to get his autograph while he was being interviewed at the Beverly Hills Hotel. The word "fan" comes from fanatic and it's that fanatical mind that has driven me whether I'm obsessed with Elton John, The Jackson Five and later Michael Jackson, photography



books, traveling or Kundalini Yoga. I get obsessed with whatever I love including people. I go in waves. I become obsessed with Pablo Neruda's poetry and buy every book I find on him and stay up all night reading his words. I'll fill up on him and then not be able to stop reading about Anne Sexton.

I loved photography so much that I got a job in a camera store when I was 18. I learned about equipment and in the process began to study shutter speeds, f-stops, lens focal lengths, composition and most importantly, light. My camera became my friend at an early age and it taught me to see people even when I didn't have my camera in hand. Timing, intuition, composition, understanding light, and watching people all helped me become a photographer. I would click with the person, not just click the shutter button.

I prefer to be with people I can be honestly inti-

mate with or I feel very lonely even around other people. Casual, light relationships don't hold much appeal for me.

AN: The images we are featuring are from your *Pain & Loneliness* series. Tell us about this work and what motivated you to create it.

HK: I was motivated by loneliness, love, loss of love, isolation, solitude, feeling abandoned and rejected. In Jungian psychology it is understood that an encounter with one's own dark side or "shadow" is always horrifying but also a necessary part of genuine growth.

I use my camera as a way to connect spiritually with life. My work is largely autobiographical but truly as Richard Avedon said "My portraits are more about me than they are about the people I photograph."



This series started eleven years ago when my marriage crumbled—not dissimilar to what I’d witnessed with my parents. We went back and forth for years and I found myself unable to eat, sleep, or work. I wrote to my spiritual teacher who gave me a stringent yoga set to practice daily. That yoga helped with a block in my second chakra, which is where creativity is stored and unleashed. This helped me deal with my emotional state.

I originally used Kodak high-speed recording film with my Nikon F-4 and a 50mm 1.4 lens. I wanted intentional grain, as I couldn’t see clearly. I have always loved the 50 mm as it basically sees what the human eye sees. I was someone who was curiously detached from my emotions most of my life, no doubt stemming from watching my mother being abused when I was a little girl. (This came in quite handy when I later worked as a Hollywood stuntwoman.)

My camera gave me both the connection and separation I needed from my feelings. By turning my camera on myself, I found an outlet to deal with my pain. In the film *Gentlemen’s Agreement* there is a line I love “sometimes when you’re troubled and hurt you pour yourself into things that can’t hurt back.” I put the project away in my closet for a decade.

In the Hindu tradition, there’s the idea of “the guru next to you” which means anything in your life can be your teacher, if you have the right attitude. I learned that getting too used to anything can be fatal. My marriage was spiritual kindergarten compared to my next pivotal relationship. I met someone that I connected with on a deep level. I had no control over our meeting: it was destiny.

Ours was a deeply spiritual intimacy, even more transformational than my marriage. However,



when our relationship began to shift, I sunk lower than I ever had sunk before in my life. I went even deeper into a dark depression. That period created the rest of the series. It feels trivial to try to express in words how the loss of this person in my daily life created a spiritual crisis that truly began this series and nine more essay series in the same period.

Rather than run from the depths of my loneliness, or revert to obsessive, compulsive or self-abusive behaviors, I chose to turn into the pain, let my guard down and surrender in front of the camera lens. My hope is these photos withhold as much information as they give.

These un-retouched photos remind me how brave it is to be revealing, honest, and raw while showing my soft, feminine, vulnerable side. Instead of being naked, which is accidental, I like to think

of the portraits as nudes, which are purposeful, powerful and intentional.

AN: Tell us about the aesthetics of this series.

HK: I am a lover of film noir and I believe that movies like: *All about Eve*, *Double Indemnity*, *Intermezzo*, *Love in the Afternoon*, *Now Voyager*; *Queen Christina*, *Spellbound*, *To Have and Have Not* and *The Misfits* have all impacted me.

The Rembrandt-like lighting in these films haunts me. I love the mood that the shadows evoke. Every hour of every day the light changes so I shot this series at all times of the day. The light has to express what I am feeling. I create that light with tiny quarter inch shifts of a body part.

I love black and white. It's not distracting like color can be. It's immediately abstract and I can



convey my feelings best in black and white.

AN: This series is coming across as a very therapeutic journey. Any plans to continue with it?

HK: I am beginning another part to the series, an "after" if you will since that relationship mended after an extended period apart, which is what we both needed. Yes, photographing myself became my therapeutic medium. It was born of emotional necessity.

AN: What inspires you?

HK: I am inspired by love, loss of love, loneliness, light, art, friendship, loyalty, kindness, beauty and animals— especially grey cubs. I find that solitary activities such as photography, reading, writing, meditation, and travel are all essential to my emotional well-

being. As far as photographers, I'm inspired by Eve Arnold, Diane Arbus, Ruth Bernhard, Donna Ferrato, Lee Miller, Sally Mann, Man Ray, Vivian Maier, Cindy Sherman, Francesca Woodman especially the photographers before me who photographed and celebrated the power of the nude body. I love that Cezanne, Gauguin, Lautrec, Van Gogh and Degas were all inspired and created paintings from photographs that moved them. A painter can create magic from nothing. A photographer creates something magical from what already exists. Perhaps that's why we've fought so hard for photography to be considered an art. Speaking of art, I am inspired daily by Michael Jackson. He could see with his heart because he was a light worker. His spirit lives on through the love he gave us. He truly understood one of the sutras of the Aquarian Age: *Recognize the Other Person is You.*"

I am inspired by Frida Kahlo who said, "I paint



myself because I am so often alone and because I am the subject I know best.”

I have to create, I have no choice. It’s how I get through my days and nights. I never created with an audience in mind. I am driven by what moves my heart.

AN: What is your final say?

HK: You choose love or you don’t. Risk and exploring are important to connect you with your heart’s work. Confront your fears and reveal them. Making mistakes is necessary. Facing your fears makes you a happier person in the end. I recommend becoming intimate with fear.

Also, I witnessed the grooves that Michael Jackson wore in the floor of his dance studio at Neverland from practicing at all hours of the night. He moved into Neverland in 1987 af-

ter the successes of *Off The Wall*, *Thriller* and *Bad*. The most successful artist ever and he was still perfecting & polishing his craft. I saw how important it is to remember to practice whether it’s writing, photography, dancing or singing. Everyone has a fire inside themselves.

When you get quiet and listen to your soul, your creative fire ignites. If you don’t listen, the soul smolders and dies. I would also like to say thank you to Hope Edelman, my friend, writing teacher and author of *Motherless Daughters*, for editing this interview. ♥

**See more at: [hannahkozak.com](http://hannahkozak.com)**





