

OLEG DOU

by Betty



Interview |

Zoom: Could you briefly tell us something about how your works are born? What technique do you use to create them? At what level does photography enter?

Oleg Dou: All of my works are made with a digital camera. I tried film cameras, but they produce a grain that usually is good for pictures, but not for mine. Digital cameras produce noise so I use strong studio light with lowest ISO.

Photography is a main part of my work and most important—you can't simulate emotions and light with a computer. So I do my best to take a good picture that is also technically perfect. I retouch using a computer. Actually it's the same thing fashion photographers do with the skin of models. And I have a funny story how my style appeared.

Right after I bought my first camera, I took portraits of my friends and I tried to make them look like in fashion mags. But I had no skills to make it good—they were too blurry. Then it dawned on me that I could make use of this, so my initial mistakes became my own style.

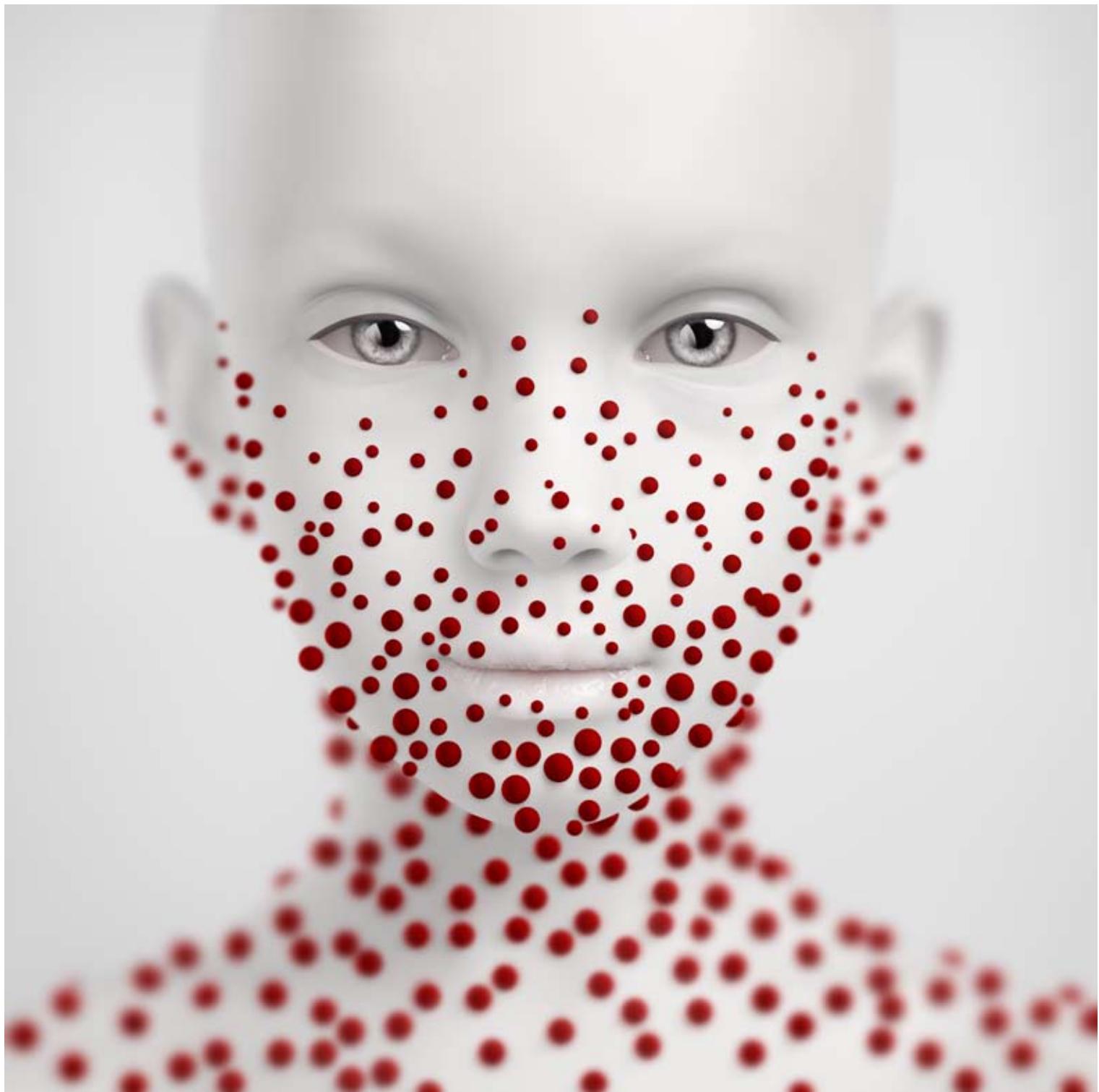


Interview

Z.: The faces you create are sterilized, without intimacy. They seem to be portraits of cyber-robots that do not feel pain (you could pinch them or pull out their tongues). And yet their fixed gazes seem in search of lost emotions, as if they had some long-forgotten memory that was not sufficient for them to be actually felt (if I'm not mistaken, in the "Tears" series, the tears are the result of nostalgia).

O. D.: I have a passion for the human face. I use the artificial nature of digital photography as a tool to reach the point between opposites such as alive and dead, attractive and disturbing, beautiful and ugly. Thus I'm searching to transcribe the feeling of presence that you get while passing a plastic mannequin. All the faces I make seem to have no emotions, yet they do. I try to make the viewer see something that is personal to him. So when you see tears you can transfer your own feelings to the picture.





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*Upcoming exhibition: April 2009- "Tears", Espace-art 22, Brussels
June 2009, Solo show, Interalia, Seoul*



Z.: This conflict is also seen in your more recent series, "Toys",

although here it is mitigated by youth and the use of accessories (a Pinocchio nose, Mickey Mouse ears, Bambi's horns). Is there a message behind these photographs? Has childhood also been denied its own individuality? Where did the idea behind this series come from?

O. D.: Here in Russia (and I guess in many other countries) we have a tradition of taking school photos of all children in kindergarten. They are always holding toys or are surrounded by them (sometimes it's a dog, sometimes it's bear or maybe Pinocchio). Of course the toy will differ, but the thing is that it is not personal for that child—the photographer hands it to him/her, saying: "Take it and smile" and takes it back after. This was very uncomfortable for me, I tried to smile, but there were also other emotions. I was afraid of the photographer and his toy.

I think that all the work I do now is related to these photos. I still hate when somebody takes a photo of me, but by the same token I intensely adore making photos of other people... And I always try to find something behind what we see in the picture. Later I saw a lot of pictures with kids and toys with unhappy, strange or angry faces...

It looks like grownups playing with kids, making them pretend to smile when they don't want to, so the real toy in a picture is the child. And the idea of this series came from here – I combined a toy and a child into one face.

Z.: You are a young Russian artist, just 26 years old, a professional photographer. For whom do you normally work?

O. D.: Actually all of my earnings come from selling my artworks. Usually I don't make any commercial work, only if I find it very interesting.

Z.: You are beginning to generate some interest from foreign galleries who have shown, or will soon be showing your work. Can you tell us something about how this has come about? Was there someone who helped you in this?



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O. D.: I was very lucky at the very beginning. I have a French agent that works with me. She saw my works at an early stage, just 3 months after I had started to make them. She told me that I could do much more and it was very important to hear such words from a professional. Three months later, we started to work as artist and agent. She arranged several shows in France, Belgium, NL and the US.

I also have a Russian agent who helps me to work with my Moscow and Seoul gallery.

Z.: What is your view of Moscow? Is it an artistically and culturally stimulating environment? Do you meet with other photographers? Do you compare notes? What are your expectations?

O. D.: Moscow is the city I was born in. I adore it. Things are changing rapidly in all spheres of life. Of course it is a very stimulating environment for artists. I know many photographers and artists, some of them are my friends. You can see interesting trends in our cultural life: the old generation of artists with their political art against the old Soviet government; the modern Russian, middle-aged artists of the 90s with their radical performances; and young artists like me who are not interested in protest and are trying to make art for art's sake. We have a very small art scene, but it is evolving and growing quickly.

I hope the whole world will find our young artists interesting.