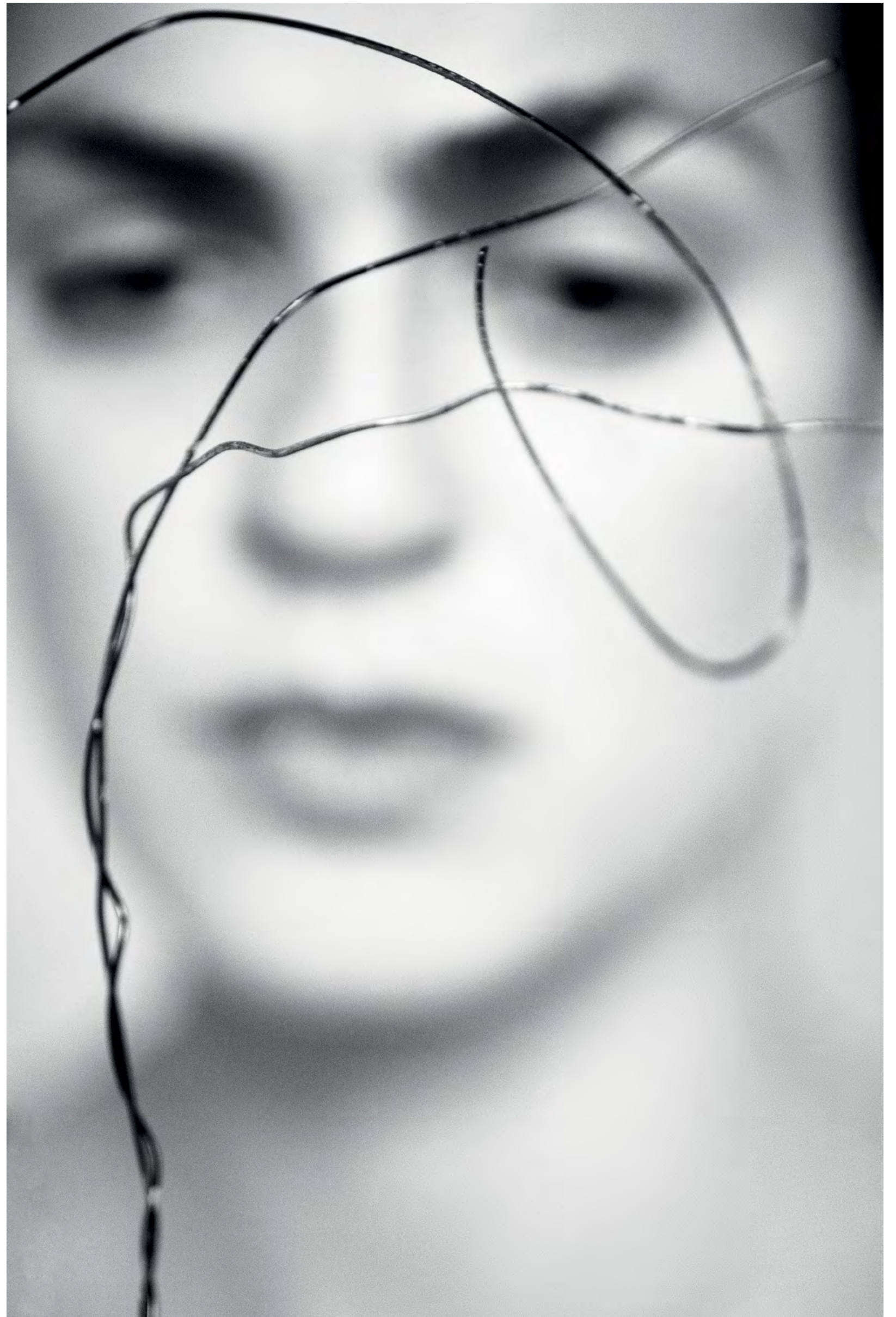


photography by DONATA WENDERS works by CRISTIANA PALANDRI

CRISTIANA PALANDRI



Donata Wenders is a master of the most important element of photography: light. Whether working in color as a set photographer with her husband, Wim Wenders, or in black and white (as she mostly does otherwise), she follows the light. Her understanding of the most essential material at a photographer's disposal lends her work a classical quality which often eludes other practitioners of a relatively young artform. Here she has turned her camera onto artist Cristiana Palandri. She captures in these images the same fragility and strength Palandri projects in her own work. Cristiana Palandri is a multidisciplinary Italian artist. She creates objects, music, and performances that simmer with the basic animal truth that: Existence takes enormous strength, and because it does, the existence of anything hangs by a thread. At any moment if the "strength" should fail, then the object, animal, or idea could easily cease to exist. She frequently uses hair, which is impossibly strong considering its infinitesimal width, but also equally frail because of it. Her work, in a way, perfectly illuminates this paradox. There is an air of mystery to these photographs that attracted us. We find Palandri in a series of characters: The artist at work. An actor in performance. A woman apart, alone in the night. The images themselves are another character binding the others together. –Matt McAuley









Donata: In 2010 we met in Cluj and I was immediately taken by who you were as a person and later I saw so much of this reflected in your work! You radiate an openness – or “transparency”, as I like to call it. You express a unique mixture of strength and fragility. There is so much of both in you and in your work. Looking back I remember you’d completed *The Ladder* at the time.

Cristiana: Yeah, the installation.

Donata: Your work expresses a fragile, yet beautiful existence that is sometimes barely surviving within the powerful and even brutal. Though the fragile part is often tormented in your work, it stays pure and alive. Sometimes I see this in nature: Even though destruction is so apparent, massive and powerful, the birds still sing ... twice as loud. In your work the beauty survives and outgrows everything that could destroy it entirely!

Cristiana: Thank you; that’s nice. I’m always working on this duality. There are (at least for me) two aspects in everything. I’m trying to make them visible – something really strong, something really fragile. Hopefully, the beautiful fragile parts are more apparent than the parts about destruction or conflict. I still remember when I first met you and you asked to take my photograph. I am shy, but you convinced me to do it because it was for a portrait that truly represented me. What excited me is that you were actually looking for something: an inner part of a person. It’s fantastic because it’s not only about aesthetics and appearances, but it’s to discover the precious parts of people. This is exactly what I see in your work, this poetry of the beauty of a person, of a landscape, and not just something with surface value. I mean of course there is a surface because in the end it’s always a mysterious and beautiful image, but it carries along with it something else – something that shows it’s more powerful. I love the affinity of our work. It can be very different, but it has some connecting aspects, especially with the black and white and invisibility. We definitely have some connections.

Donata: Yes, we both search for the essence of who we are; you through sculpture and drawing and I by looking at what light and shadow draw into the lens... It’s not the representative side, which is often strong and glamorous, but the side that is very authentic to our hearts. Enduring yet fragile in its possibility to express itself. Do you remember when we took your first portrait in that cellar? I learned how important your hair was to you. You had your hair done like a sculpture on your head. You worked with hair as a medium a lot at that time. What did it mean to you exactly? How did it express the duality and tension between fragility and strength, or if you want: life and its survival within death?

Cristiana: Hair is still very meaningful to me. It’s like an intimate friend. During that time I was working a lot making sculptures with other objects and my hair. So for me this material is like a teeny tiny sculpture that has powerful strength, because, as you said, it can resist but at the same time appears to be frail. It has both of these characteristics that you don’t really expect. So it was my way to speak about life and death and about human beings in a minimalistic way. It was like delicate architecture that I could treat like a sculpture, to transpose it into a drawing somehow, but still work directly with it. So hair carries all this meaning for me.

Donata: When we took pictures the second time in Firenze in 2012, you were working more with fur and feathers.

Cristiana: Feathers have the same instinctual quality as hair. I started to work with feathers in sculpture as a way to create another form of humanity, something between animals and people. I was looking for something dimorphic or bestial like the ones in ancient books from the Middle Ages where there are illustrations of imaginary animals. I would like to know what is the black and white for you in photography and your relationship to light?

Donata: The light always guides me. I don’t think about what I want to do with the person in advance. I don’t have much of a preconception and I always work with natural light. I ask myself: How and from where can I observe the person in front of my camera in this particular moment, while the light draws and shapes it with all its tenderness, because that’s what black and white photography really means: To preserve, how light and darkness shape this particular person in this particular space and time. That’s how I understand it. For example,

the shadow – I remember when you said, “I am shy” [laughing] which I couldn’t believe, by the way. But then I realized how shy you really are and I wanted to find a space that was rather dark. The shadow was like a cover, like a coat or dress, something that protected you. It’s the opposite of being terrified in headlights. So, I let only a little bit of light fall on you... I was hardly able to see you! And then you were able to come out of your beautiful shy shell. Yes, so beautiful. Tender and strong at the same time. There it was again. This was the one thing that I knew: I wanted to bring you into a space that would give you the opportunity to trust.

Cristiana: And most of your photographs are in black and white.

Donata: Yes, mostly. I see my photographs as drawings, sketches, or studies. Color photography is comparable with an oil painting. It’s something rather refined. I am never finished, so my images are predominantly black and white. My interest in modern art is to “draw” a minimalistic image and to find the essence of a person. I’m searching for a way to draw with photography. Soon I would love to go on and try something new. The last time we worked together, we drove a lot with your Fiat Panda. At the time I’d said, “Oh, let’s do a music video together” knowing that you have a huge affinity for music. But back then I hadn’t worked with movement. Now, I think it would be exciting to do something together with moving images and music. It would be even more complex.

Cristiana: It would be nice if we could work with movement and music. I am trying to make the two things more connected. For me, drawing is always related to music because it’s really fluid; it’s the inner part of an artist. That’s why I’m drawing a lot. So in the last 3 years I have actually presented drawings most of the time rather than sculptures, probably because I feel more connected to music. I’m always drawing to music as well.

Donata: The last time when you were doing a lot of drawings in Firenze, you were drawing blind!

Cristiana: Yes.

Donata: You had this huge paper roll, and you were continuing to draw blindly. And then you said it was an expression of what is flowing from the inside – this again is a conceptual process. Why was it so important that you didn’t see what you were doing?

Cristiana: I want the drawings to come out spontaneously. I don’t want to control the drawings, or the result. It could be for everything, but especially in drawings. I’m not always totally blind but I try to not see perfectly when I’m working. That’s why I always work horizontally without putting the papers at the end on a roll. Then, if it’s not perfect, I can throw it away. In a way it’s like my own private show, at the end the results can be surprising.

Donata: That’s completely against our time, isn’t it? Mostly we just look for the quick result, outside perfection, finished work and not the process. We all want to be adored for what we seem to be or do, fast and good. You follow the exact opposite. I love it! I would always say as well, that taking pictures is like that. You disappear entirely within a search for the other and in this you find yourself.

Cristiana: Exactly.

Donata: The process of creating really is like prayer, which is the most intimate dialogue with God. That’s why we do it over and over again, I guess.

Cristiana: Yes, it’s a way of life somehow. And for me, it’s sometimes a more real moment of life than all the rest. Yes, this is true...



Portrait in a Haze
Self portrait by Cristiana Palandri