

Dmitri Kasterine and The Lady with Cat

by Rod Fry ARPS

She sits impassively with an air of dignity, a face of serenity, and yet while having experienced a great deal of life, she is still facing the future square on. Her cat beside her gives tacit approval for the photographer to make the picture.

This was my first impression when I encountered this photograph some 25 years ago. It's unusual because you don't find many people sitting on a doorstep, certainly not in England, in 1978, and not a lady of her age.

The photographer Dmitri Kasterine has sensitively made an image, which clearly shows a rapport with the sitter. Kasterine has allowed the lady to reveal something about herself. There is no political agenda, no strong urge to document, only the desire to make a picture of a scene that the photographer was intuitively drawn to. There is innocence, with a mutually complicit agreement between the lady and the photographer in the making of this picture. I asked Dmitri about this image and he said, "I was walking down Upper Richmond Road, and there she sat with her cat, both content: she sitting so graphically, the cat classically how a cat sits."

I saw this photograph in Dmitri's book *England and the English*, which is described by the photographer, "As a book of photographs of people and places: subjects that I simply liked the look of. There is no political or social theme, neither is there a thread that joins or style that unites the pictures. I chose the subjects and places arbitrarily and randomly just wandering until something struck me. I looked close at home in Putney and returned to places where I had worked or enjoyed myself."

The book is an eclectic mix of portraiture and landscape, in colour and black & white pictures, made in the 1970s and 1980s. The photographer is being too modest because while his approach is undoubtedly intuitive, I feel that there is an underlying narrative to all the pictures. There is a gentle feel to the work- England seen with an affectionate eye. The book moves from place to place in a seemingly rambling fashion, which suits this country. The book gives us an insight into the everyday life in England some 30 years ago. It celebrates the common man and the everyday landscape that forms the backdrop to our lives. It may lack the harder-edged documentary



© Dmitri Kasterine

approach of the photographers of the late 1980s but I certainly don't think that is a bad thing. Is it nostalgic? Looking at England through rose tinted glasses? I don't think so; for me it clearly resonates with my memories of the England that I grew up in.

Unlike Tony Ray-Jones work, all the major outdoor portraits are documented in the text, and you get to know the subjects before they consented to having their picture taken by the photographer. There is a connection between the subject and Kasterine, which clearly comes through in the narrative; he is not a voyeur looking at the scene to take a picture. Dmitri is involved. He has established a link to make a photograph.

Dmitri Kasterine was born in 1932, the son of a White Russian Army officer and a British mother. After attending school at Radley College in Oxford, he tried a number of jobs before embarking on a professional career in photography in 1961. He worked on several publications, and enjoyed a long association with Stanley Kubrick taking the stills for *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*; *2001: A Space Odyssey*; and *A Clockwork Orange*.

He was one of the most significant portrait photographers from the late 1960s to the mid-1980s with images of Sir Tom Stoppard,

Samuel Beckett, David Hockney, Beryl Bainbridge, Roald Dahl, Francis Bacon and Her Majesty the Queen, to name but a few. It was while he was travelling round the country on various assignments that the idea for this personal set of pictures was born. Sadly, *England and The English* has long since been out of print, but it remains one of my favourite photographic books of all time. The National Portrait Gallery, who have acquired some of his work, held an exhibition of his portraits in September 2010 to April 2011.

Dmitri moved to the U.S. in 1986, and has been working on another book project for 14 years. Despite all his fame he is very modest about his achievements. If you are interested in finding out more about him, his website is <http://www.kasterine.com>. He is still producing work, which he sends out as a monthly blog.

In my correspondence with Dmitri, he clearly comes across as a very modest and sincere man, ready to share his ideas. Whether he will ever produce this second book, or if the publishers ever reprint *England and the English*, who knows, but for me his private work still beguiles and draws me into the England he observed and photographed all those years ago.