

PLUS

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NAOMI

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**BEN-
SHAHAR**

Photo
JAE HYUN KIM

With a plethora of experiences and titles to her name, NAOMI BEN-SHAHAR has done almost every renowned job for the art and photography world there is to do under the sun. Ben-Shahar has built an impressive repertoire for herself as an artist, art professor, photo editor, art advisor, and exhibition curator to name a few, also having worked for reputable outlets such as *The New Yorker* and *National Geographic*.



← LEFT.
NAOMI'S HOME

- P:** Can you introduce yourself?
- NB:** Thank you so much for interviewing me! I have been in the art and photography world for a long time: I moved to NY from Israel exactly 30 years ago, to attend graduate school (MFA degree in studio art), and, amazingly, I am still here.
- P:** You've undergone a lot of career changes throughout the years in the creative industry. What were the biggest challenges you've had to overcome?
- NB:** I knew early on that I wanted to have a wide/deep variety of experiences in the art and photography worlds, and I pretty much went ahead and did just that: I have created art and exhibited my art internationally; was a photography professor (at the International Center of Photography and at Fordham University); I worked as a book and magazine photo editor (at Abbeville Press, Cabinet magazine for art and culture, the New Yorker magazine, National Geographic and more); Art advisor (for 2x4 design); and an exhibition curator (for the NYC Opera, at Lincoln Center's David Koch's theater). All of these experiences quenched some deep thirst that I had for knowledge and different points of view, and all added up to an extremely valuable lesson. But they were also a result of one of the biggest challenges: having to simply make a living as an artist in a city like NY.
- P:** It's interesting how you have had such diverse experiences in the creative field (creative director, art editor, producer, curator, etc), how did these lead to another?
- NB:** The short answer is that people I knew kept recommending me. As an artist, like many of my peers, I remained a freelancer so I can take time off of work and work on my art, travel to residencies, etc. - and I got to know a lot of people. One project always led to another somehow.
- P:** Favorite photography book?
- NB:** There are so many! Since you're asking for one title, maybe it would be: *Women Photographers*, edited by Constance Sullivan.
- P:** What motivates you to stay creative every day?
- NB:** I think it is really who I am, or, less flatteringly, my overly-active mind.



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throughout history. >

Whether I'm making art or just cooking for my family, I tend to think creatively.

P: What benefits does art provide to our society and what does "art" mean to you?

NB: Art has been both a luxury and an outlet for subversive impulses throughout history: without wanting to sound too much like a cliché, it makes us think and feel deeper and farther.

P: How did you find the career that you love?

NB: In grad school, I was inspired when I learnt that an artist I've admired (Barbara Bloom) had worked as a photo editor. I didn't know what that meant exactly at the time, but I proceeded to find out.

P: What is your favorite project you've worked on?

NB: A series of lyrical video art pieces that tracked people's interactions in different social situations in different places across the globe, as well as another video art project that I shot in the dunes in the Namib desert. As a curator, I loved working with the NYC Opera to match their productions with contemporary art and photography, then create exhibitions that were shown at their then-theater in Lincoln Center.

P: What advice do you have for those aiming to get into this line of work?

NB: My biggest advice is that it's not all about you: invest time in creating a community of like-minded people, be generous, expand your network as much as possible and grow together with your peers.

P: What do you wish you had known when you started your career?

NB: I wish I fully understood how powerful being young, smart and passionate (even if less experienced) could open doors for one's career. People are fascinated by new and fresh faces and have deep curiosity for what young people have to say, so the opportunities can be wide-open for young kids who are confident enough to put themselves out there.

P: How would you describe Naomi Ben-Shahar as a person? How would you want yourself and others to remember you as?

NB: My true self is like an onion with multiple layers that I am still, at 53, constantly and curiously discovering! These discoveries are always a result of interactions with other people. I am truly grateful for the ability to have meaningful interactions and to be living in a place with so many wonderful, challenging and brilliant people.

