

Eduardo Izquierdo

Unusually Natural

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In a time when nearly every portrait image displayed in the public domain has been airbrushed, it is no wonder that artificial images have become the norm. Now anything that is untouched seems strange, our idea of 'natural' has evolved.

In light of this it is no wonder that Izquierdo has titled his series 'Unusually Natural'. The beauty of the naked body is perhaps only fully appreciated by cultures that use clothing as a form of modesty. Modesty itself is linked to our perception of sensuality, a word that swims around my head when looking at the images. Izquierdo has played with this idea of beauty and naturalness in two ways.

Beauty itself can be broken down into two separate strata's: inner and outer beauty. It is the second that comes into focus in Izquierdo's work. Physical beauty is valued on a subjective basis, predetermined by our cultural values. Yet beauty has certain formal qualities, enveloping within it elements such as unity and harmony that can be arranged into a regular, symmetrical pattern. By arranging these elements in a unified organic order you can build up a central mood or theme.

Izquierdos' work does just that: his photographs follow the rule of thirds, the golden ratio. He has played with symmetry, deliberately unbalancing some of his images with a head turned to the left, or an arm raised up higher on one side than the other, disrupting the flow of orderliness and harmony.

This in itself is an interesting feature, as symmetrical shapes and patterns are supposed to be more appealing to the eye, as our brains are able to digest the information more quickly. The fact that Izquierdo disregards this in his quest for creating unusually natural female portraits, creates another bench mark as to how we have evolved as a society. Symmetrical images could be regarded as being perfect, yet as physical perfection is unobtainable, and unless the viewer is drawn into the realm of the artificial, it becomes somewhat boring. By playing with this idea Izquierdo draws us in, we take time to breath in all the different elements in the photograph as we have to take longer to process the image. He has not produced these images in a clinical way, rather he has sought to capture real life poses which make the images all the more striking in my opinion.

Society plays an enormous part in how we determine what is beautiful, sparking the seemingly endless debate over how ethical it is to feature underweight models on

runways and the covers of magazines. With white women dominating Western advertising and films, they become pedestalled icons, a diluted yet paradoxically distilled essence of what beauty in the West is. Izquierdos' approach is interesting, as in his aim to explore feminine beauty he has chosen to photograph only fresh-faced Caucasian women.

The Greeks have helped shape the way we view beauty, their sculptures exhibit some of the most beautiful figures. The fact that they are still beautiful today stands testament to their understanding of symmetry and proportion. In profile the human forehead and nose should flow seamlessly into one another. In one of Izquierdos' portraits a woman stands perfectly parallel to the camera lens. Her face fills the frame, her forehead filling the top half, flowing down to her nose, which dominates the centre of the image. Her porcelain-white skin mimics the flawless marble the Ancient Greeks employed for their statues of gods and heroes.

Artificiality comes in various forms, and in today's society where accessories come in every form, it becomes easier for us to appreciate what's natural. This is after all what art can teach us. It does not seek to imitate nature; rather, it is at its best when it presents us not with the familiar everyday objects and signifiers of daily existence, but with the ideal of freedom. This idea of freedom is denoted by the lack of jewellery; none of the models wear make up; the clothes that they wear or kept to simple cuts and monotone colours. For me, the concept of freedom constitutes a true beauty.

Izquierdo states that through these photographs he is trying to determine why we accept an artificial concept of life. While I myself have not chosen to explore his images in the same way, I do find myself asking the same question.

By eliminating materialistic symbols, Izquierdo has removed the artificial from the frame, leaving us with what is natural. In viewing these images, either online or in print, we position ourselves on the side of artificiality. True beauty – whatever it is that we believe it to be – absorbs us, allowing us to see clearly the unusually natural.