



BY **VIVEK VERMA**  
PHOTOGRAPHS **NINA PAPIOREK**

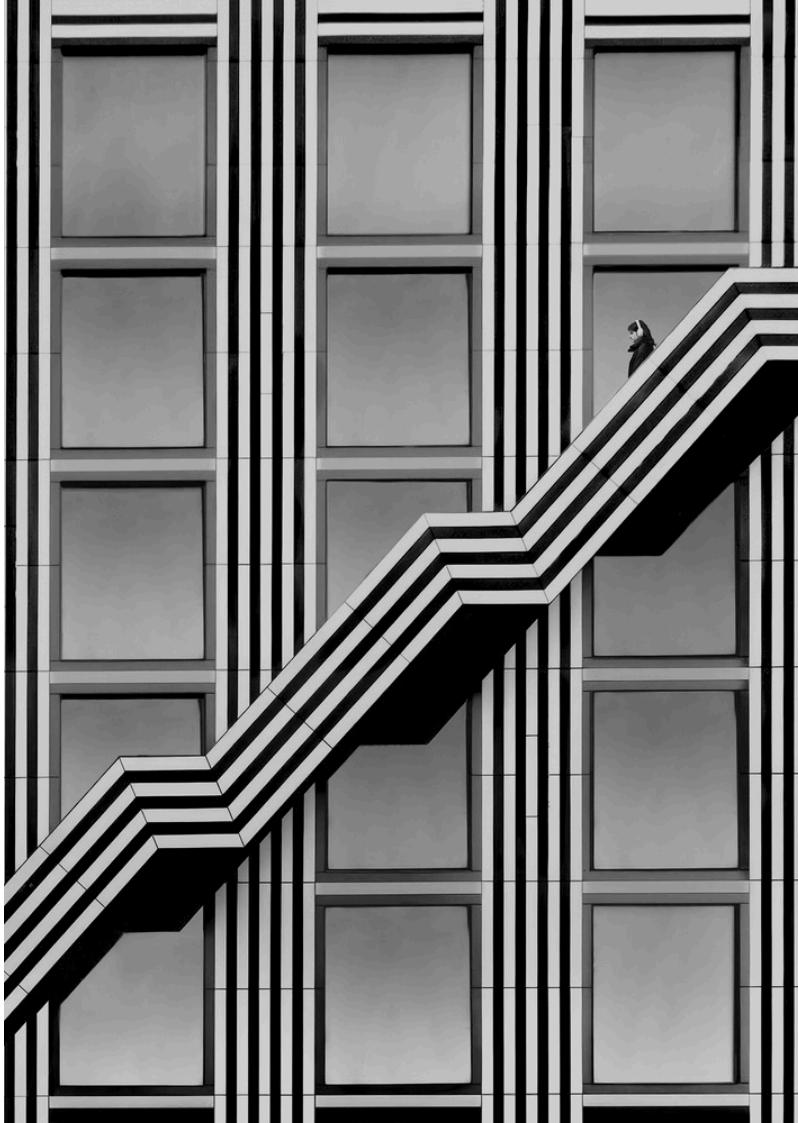
INTERVIEW

# Nina Papiorek

For years, I've been captivated by Nina's black-and-white imagery — photographs that transform streets and urban landscapes into something almost lyrical, rich with new meaning and quiet power. It's taken us a while to align our paths, but at last, the interview I've been itching to share is here.

**I. What made you fall in love with photography, and when did you realize it is an inseparable part of your life?**

There really wasn't a single, pivotal moment in my life as a photographer. I've always been interested in photography since early childhood and thought photographers were "cool." But there was no one around me who was equally interested, so I put it off during my teenage years. I actually started relatively late, at around 24, when I bought myself my first camera for my college graduation to take with me on a trip. So, unfortunately, I can't tell the famous story of my grandfather, who introduced me to photography at a very early age and whose cameras I inherited. Rather, it was a gradual and steadily growing process; one day I simply went to the store and bought my first camera. The good thing about this boring story is that I take photographs out of absolute personal conviction, and I still fall in love with photography every day.



**II. Was there a particular photo or moment that made you realize black and white photography defines your visual language?**

From the beginning, black and white photography has been my preferred medium. I love its simplicity and straightforwardness. There's nothing distracting; the focus is entirely on the essentials, the narrative elements of the image. Since I pursue a very minimalist approach to photography, the black and white approach supports this as well. Additionally, shooting in B&W is a wonderful way to add some surrealism to a scene.

### **III. People and their surroundings play a big role in your images. What interests you most about this connection?**

For me, my photographic focus is often on capturing people in their surroundings. It's always candid street photography, I don't like posed photos, because in my opinion you can always see that in a picture. It's much more about capturing genuine scenes and the right moment, which is precisely the art of fine art street photography. The loneliness of the person is a stylistic device that gives the viewer plenty of scope for their own interpretation and appeals to their emotions.

Unlike street photography in general, however, it is not important to me to capture a scene for posterity in as documentary a way as possible; the artistic aspect is more important to me and I want my pictures on the wall. This is an aspect that applies less to street photography in general. People often don't like to hang recognizable strangers on their walls.

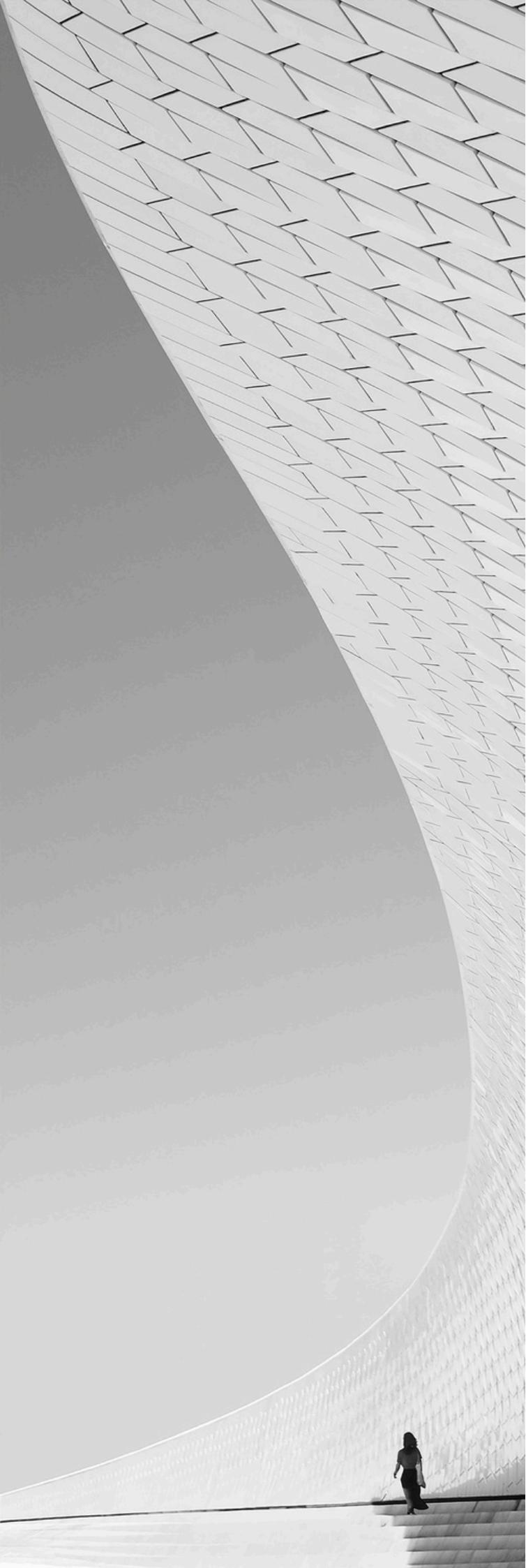
I try to eliminate distracting picture elements during the shoot, often a simple step to the side to hide a rubbish bin standing in the way or simple tricks such as a change of perspective to get a scene that is as clean and tidy as possible. As I often integrate architecture into my photos, especially as a background, this is exactly the kind of clean look that I want to achieve and that fascinates me. It often makes the world or the surroundings seem a little surreal and captivates the eye (at least for a short time).

### **IV. Your work blends street photography, urban landscapes, and fine art. How do you know when a scene is worth capturing?**

There are few scenes on this planet that are not worth triggering the camera for. You should take a lot more pictures, because if you don't, you've already lost. In digital photography, it is easy to quickly delete photos that have gone wrong, but a picture that has not been taken is lost forever.

For me, photography always has a lot to do with TRY & FAIL, often you think you've discovered an exciting scene, but it just doesn't work as a photo. On the other hand, banal scenes can sometimes work amazingly well as photographs. The key is to be selective when choosing images in order to create a meaningful portfolio. When taking the pictures themselves, however, you should proceed rather non-selectively and with a great urge to capture things. That way, you can sometimes have a lucky shot.





**V. Having contributed to multiple book projects, how do you approach storytelling through a series rather than a single image?**

It is much easier to tell a story in the form of a small series, because with each additional image the viewer receives more and more information about the scene. Not all the images in a short series have to be outstandingly strong, but it is important to have a particularly strong starting image, while the other images might not have been considered for publication on their own. A good example here is the attached “NY Subway” series. The starting image, the lady smoking a cigarette on the deserted platform, forbidden and alone in the dead of night, conveys for me the typical NY vibe of a night of drinking. Meanwhile, photo 3 shows only the lettering on a poster, but it makes it very clear where we are: in New York.

The story is filled out and enriched more and more with each additional picture. In my opinion, a single bid can also have a similar narrative function, but these are usually the best of the best pictures..

**VI. What is your thought process when framing and composing a shot in a dynamic urban setting?**

The composition of the image is indeed a decisive factor in how your picture affects. Therefore, I always try to build my framing as minimally as possible. I always look through the viewfinder when I try to compose my image, because that often allows me to see other details or sections. Often, one passes by a scene without noticing it; looking through the camera sharpens my 'seeing' immensely.

**VII. You also work on commissioned projects for international clients. How do you balance commercial work with personal projects?**

You often have to work on things for clients that are not close to your own heart. I often receive commissions in the field of architectural photography, which I generally like very much, but I personally often miss the human factor. In my personal view, people give these photographs life, a world of emotion. It also helps to show the proportions, especially of architectural features, more clearly. As a photographer for commissioned work, however, you have to accept this and put your own wishes to one side.

This year I have an absolute dream job: I'm photographing the island of Rügen in Germany for a hotel chain. The local hotels want to use my photos to decorate their rooms and restaurants, and I have absolutely no brief other than to photograph the island “from my eyes”. An absolute dream project. Unfortunately, this rarely happens – but I cannot complain.



**VIII. With your experience, what do you think are the biggest challenges photographers face today, especially in fine art and street photography?**

I actually believe that too many budding photographers, who have not yet finally found and positioned themselves, allow themselves to be influenced far too much. Unfortunately, social media play a major role in this, as they allow worldwide access to vast amounts of photographic work. Once you've seen them, you often don't forget them and they influence your own work, even if unintentionally. Unfortunately, many photographers also tend to copy them if they particularly like an image.

But photography is an expression of creativity! It can't be the purpose of photography to copy someone else's photo and want to win accolades for it... this is where I think photography is completely misunderstood. Even if you photograph well-known places, everyone should be able to develop a different position or their own perspective on things. Of course, everything has been done before, but for me there is a great danger in copying.

**IX. You've won some of the most prestigious international photography awards and had your work exhibited in prestigious galleries. Is there one that felt particularly special to you?**

The whole "game" with the photography awards is an ambivalent one. There are often no large organizations behind them, so you have to take a close look at the selection process. It helps to take a look at the jury, the prizes or even the winners from previous years. That's why I've almost stopped entering contests recently.

But of course there are prestigious ones that you are very proud of. I've been a finalist in the Hasselblad Masters several times, a title I've never won, but I'm not giving up :)

I see things differently when it comes to exhibitions. Every small exhibition is great. There's nothing like a printed picture, I love to go to every exhibition that comes my way. Of course, I also love visiting exhibitions.



## **XII. You've been following your love for photography for over 20 years. How do you keep evolving as an artist?**

That's actually something I've never really thought about. In the past 20 years, I've never had the feeling of losing interest in photography or even having to persuade myself to do anything. I really always want to take photos, I can't imagine anything better and it's an integral part of my life. That's why I don't have these well-known motivation problems. Maybe that's because I mainly take photos when I'm traveling, which is of course the best time of my life.

Nothing is as educational as a journey and if you can combine that with photography, then I think your happiness is perfect. When traveling, you always experience new things, discover small and big cultural differences and even the difference from the familiar motivates me immensely to reach for my camera.

## **XIII. What's next for you? Are there any upcoming projects, exhibitions, or creative directions you're exploring?**

Thank God, there are a few things coming up before the end of the year. I will be exhibiting with Mark Fearnley as the main artist at the Venice Photo Lab in Italy in October, which I am really looking forward to. I will also have a solo exhibition at the Fujifilm Store in Nuremberg, Germany this fall.

**X. Your book “akribi:” brings together your Fine Art Street Photography and Architecture work from 2009 to 2023. The title means meticulousness and precision—how does this reflect your approach to photography, and what do you hope people feel when they go through it?**

I chose the title “meticulousness” of course for the exact reason that it perfectly describes my way of working. When I arrive at a location, it doesn't take me long to create the image I want in my head. There is usually a location with a suitable focal length. Then there's the all-important moment that rounds off the photo. So sometimes I have to wait a long time and observe things until I have the situation in the box as I had hoped.

Over time, you also learn to deal with disappointment, because you can't go home with the ultimate photo every time. It's quite simply part of the job to leave a spot without success and have to come back later – it's just unposed street photography over which nobody has any influence. But it's all the better when the photo is finally successful.

The famous MAAT Museum in Lisbon is packed with people during the day. I had to spend a total of three mornings taking the following photo. In the end, you are proud of the result and the waiting times are quickly forgotten.

## **XI. What advice would you give to photographers trying to develop their own unique style?**

As mentioned above, you shouldn't fixate too much on the work and styles of other photographers. Of course, it is not easy to develop your own style and you will always be influenced. However, there should be something in your own photography that has never existed before. The road to this is very long and rocky, and as a rule you don't find your own style but it works the other way round: the style finds you. So the best tip is to always remain patient.



A big project I'm currently working on the final stages of is my second book. It will be a follow-up to "Akribie" with the title 'ikigai', a Japanese term that translates as "that which is worth living for". For me, this is obviously photography, which is why I chose this title after a trip to Japan. My two books will differ from each other in their external appearance like negatives, black and white of course.

A dream that I still want to fulfill is a photography trip through Mongolia. However, since I have a family with small children, it is currently failing to be realized. But dreams are there to be believed in. Thank you for allowing me to be a guest in your magazine. I wish you much success for the future!



## NINA PAPIOREK

Nina Papiorek is a professional street photographer from Germany, pursuing her passion for over 20 years. She has earned some of the most prestigious international photography awards, with her work showcased in exhibitions and publications worldwide.

In addition to contributing to several photography books, she is the author of online courses and undertakes commissioned projects for international clients. Her signature black-and-white imagery blends street, urban landscape, and fine art photography, often exploring the interplay of lines, architectural forms, and human presence. Guided by a minimalist approach that runs through all her work, Nina's photographs capture the poetic connection between people and their urban surroundings.

 [ninapapiorek](https://www.instagram.com/ninapapiorek/)