

WOMEN OF COLOUR

Washington DC based fashion portrait photographer Violetta Markelou unveils *WOMEN OF COLOUR*, a portrait series of six inspiring women with unparalleled style. In an everchanging and transient city, Washington DC's fashion scene remains conservative with a styleless reputation. *WOMEN OF COLOUR* challenges this stereotype by highlighting the unique style and attitude of these women who live and work in the district. This exhibit provides an in-depth account of professional women who break the stereotypical mold of the Washingtonian professional. A careful study of human perception is conducted. Personal style and perception versus outside perception is examined. Not only is the exhibit a collection of fashion inspired photography with a photojournalistic influence, it also highlights each subject's individual style while capturing their thoughts which are literally printed, in the exhibit, under each piece of work.

In this series, the theme 'colour' is used literally and figuratively. Colour is bold, and it inspires authenticity that each subject embodies. The women in this photographic series make the conscious decision, every day, to represent themselves as they want, choosing not to blend with their environment. For each individual, arriving at this point of self expression of style has been a journey. Through excerpts from oneonone interviews, the viewer gets a glimpse of what the effects of the journey has had on each individual.

Women of Colour asks the viewer to see beyond the aesthetic of fashion and individual style and introduces the idea of these elements as a necessary means of communication. Violetta creates fashion-forward portraits in spaces that lend to how she "sees" each subject. Determining light, mood, location and styling for each subject to match those perceptions was key. For each of the subjects featured, individual style is not just a means of expression but an integral part of who they are. Violetta encourages you to look at these women not just as fashionable and stylish women but as courageous women who choose to take a stand for their vision.

A woman with dark hair and red lipstick is peeking over a sea of white balloons. She is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. The balloons are densely packed and fill most of the frame.

MY HAIR WAS THE FOCUS OF ATTENTION.

"I hid behind my hair in a lot of ways. But I knew I was more than that. I'm funny, I'm silly, I'm compassionate. But I knew none of that was going to translate because my hair was the buffer. My hair was the focus of attention. I was hiding behind my hair because I had a lot of insecurities. And I only felt beautiful when my hair was out. When someone else told me I was. And I realized I need to tackle that. Because as small as it may sound, it wasn't healthy. I needed to stop looking for confirmation and approval from other people. I need to look into myself for that."

**I DO
WONDER...
WHERE I
WOULD BE
IF I WENT
TO FASHION
SCHOOL
INSTEAD.**

“There are certain expectations, to be a ‘professional’. Fashion designers are artists or artisans. Being an architect. Sitting in an office...It’s deemed more acceptable. I do wonder...where I would be if I went to fashion school instead. When I commuted in the city, the red line from Rockville to Dupont circle is...the driest bunch of commuters you’ve ever seen!”



A woman with a shaved head is the central figure. She is wearing a vibrant blue, long-sleeved, sheer top that reveals her chest. She is adorned with multiple gold necklaces and large gold hoop earrings. Her expression is calm and direct as she looks towards the camera. The background is a dark, neutral tone, and the right side of the image features a solid blue vertical panel.

**I WAS ALWAYS
VERY ANXIOUS
FOR THE FUTURE.**

“The cancer...It’s always in the back of my mind. It makes you fearless in a way. But the fear lingers from time to time. I just try to keep a positive attitude. Whenever I feel that fear, I just tell myself, it won’t come back. You have to put mind over matter. Every little feeling be it a pain here or there, I get scared. But, I pray...and I think that’s all I can do. What mattered to me in the past doesn’t matter anymore. I would always worry about the future. I was running wild! I was always very anxious for the future. Now I live in the moment. You never know how strong you are until being strong is the only choice you have. I really believe that.”

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Beyond a photographic portrait series, *Women of Colour* can be a platform for future forums, workshops, and programs that focus on women's issues. Ranging from inequality in the workplace to violence and economic justice. *Women Of Colour* can include mentor programs that pair women of all ages and backgrounds to work together to evoke positive interaction. The message of *Women Of Colour* is empowerment. The goal is to continue the conversations and experiences shared through the series. Through various platforms, *Women Of Colour* can become an ongoing conversation about women, and the issues and obstacles women face today.

Contact :
Violetta Markelou
Photographer & Visual Artist
202.997.7747
violetta@violettamarkelou.com



violetta markelou

PHOTOGRAPHER & VISUAL ARTIST

From her first time flipping through Harper's Bazaar and American Vogue at age 10, Violetta fell in love with photography. It was the beauty, the lighting and mood, combined with the fashion, that fascinated her. Specifically, the works of Richard Avedon and Herb Ritts were most influential. The images they created for fashion campaigns inspired her to pick up the camera and formally study the medium. Photography courses in high school, photographing family and friends in the style of fashion portraiture, and advancing her education in this art is how she began.

A graduate of the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, Violetta studied Photography and Visual Arts. Throughout her education Violetta worked in the beauty industry for over 10 years. She started her company, VM Photography & Makeup, LLC, in 2004. Her company produces fashion, commercial and editorial photo shoots for individuals, companies and corporate clients.

In March 2014, The Fashion Group International of Greater Washington DC awarded Violetta Markelou the 'Rising Star in Media/ Photography' award. Working with internationally recognized beauty companies and currently working with film, video and photography production, Violetta specializes in High-Definition makeup. In both beauty and fashion, VM Photography & Makeup is a leading expert in the fields of photography, image consulting and makeup.

"For me photography is not just about being technically able to take a great picture. It is an intimate process filled with inspiration, but most importantly, great communication and trust between the photographer and subject. Being able to communicate ideas, concepts and vision through photography is extremely gratifying. It's what drives me to keep creating."

Her work has been published in *The Washington Post*, *VOGUE ITALIA* 'PhotoVogue', *DC Modern Luxury*, *Washington Life Magazine*, *Washingtonian Magazine* and a national campaign for Planned Parenthood.