

# Jonas Bendiksen: Curiosity in Practice

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## 7. Working with People

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Meena Lohar, a mother of one and carpenter's wife in their one room dwelling. Mumbai, India. 2006. From the project *The Places We Live*.

# Approaching People

“I try to always be honest about why I am there, what my intentions are, what I’m trying to do. Because in my experience, people smell whether you are creating a sort of story [or] a narrative that’s supposed to please someone or it’s trying to camouflage what you’re really trying to do. People smell that from five kilometers away.”

In the opening section of this lesson, Bendiksen explains why his approach is upfront and honest when it comes to working with people. Establishing himself clearly as a ‘photographer’ - he does not hide away his camera and is clear in his intentions, even explaining where an image could end up down the line if asked. He warns that if you are over-elaborate in explaining yourself, or come across as insecure or ashamed of what you are doing, then, simply put, people will sense it. This will only have negative implications; it will put people into a cautious or wary state, and you will not get very far.

“I’m trying to [photograph] totally openly with a smile. And I look [my subjects] in the eye, and I explain exactly what I’m doing. Normally that gets you a lot further.”

If you go about it openly and positively, in Bendiksen’s experience, you’ll be far more likely to gain access to people and locations.

- Be friendly and polite. A smile can go a long way toward putting somebody at ease.
- Make eye contact with the people you are photographing.
- Be open and honest about what it is you are doing.
- Be confident in what you are doing there, and what you are asking of people.
- Have your camera out when you approach people, rather than it appearing hidden.



Tursin (24), his wife Wurla (25), and son Eneral in their self-built house. Tursin is an expert skier and skimaker. Hamlet of Akorum. Altai Mountains, Xinjiang. China. 2013.

# Being an Outsider

Much of the same can be said about the situation of a photographer entering a new environment, such as a small community. Bendiksen jokes about how bizarre it might appear that ‘the photographer’ who is there to photograph, isn’t taking pictures at all!

While he may not take pictures intensively from the start, he will at least try to establish that he is there to take pictures, by having his camera on him at all times.

“I’ll take pictures also to get people used to that action. You know, normally when you start taking pictures in any given situation in the beginning, everyone will be sort of like, oh yeah, click, click, click. ‘Oh, I heard that. Oh. What did you take a picture of now?’”

By doing this fairly early on, you may be able to remove the novelty factor of ‘the photographer’ sooner. Though Bendiksen does not believe the ‘fly on the wall’ documentarian or invisible photographer can be a reality — you will always be a part of the “fabric of the situation” no matter what — you can effectively get to a stage where the people you are photographing are no longer as fascinated by what it is you are doing the novelty wears off. At this stage, you may be presented with more genuine candid moments, even in formal portrait situations.

Babushka Tanya's run down apartment. Her building was on the front line between Abkhazian and Georgian forces during the 1993 war. Abkhazia. Sukhum. Georgia. 2005.







Til Bahadur Gurung, a former village-level administrator who was labeled 'an enemy of the people' by the Maoists. The Maoists shot him in the spine, and he has spent the last seven years in this bed, unable to move. His wife Manmaya is in the background. Nepal. Kathmandu. 2005.



At the Thickwood Arena during game night. The stadium is the home of Fort McMurray's junior league ice hockey team, the "Oil Barons." Players getting ready in the locker room before the game begins. The game was a deciding play-off game, which the Oil Barons lost. Fort McMurray, Alberta. Canada. 2007.

# Connecting

“If I were to say exactly what it is that I like about being a photographer, one of the top things would be that it gets me out there. Near and far. It gets me out there in the world outside of my own head and my own space. I get to meet really interesting people, and photography is a reason that I can have an interaction with them and just look at the world with their glasses [on] a little bit, and visit their reality and their world. So to me, it’s that meeting with people, which is sort of attractive about photography. Yes. Sometimes it’s uncomfortable. Sometimes it makes me nervous and all this. But there is that feeling I’m meeting real people and we see again and again out there that reality is so much more rich and strange than most fiction you can dream up. And I just love, love, love connecting and touching that.”

# FAQ: Model Release

Model release forms are used as legal confirmation that the person who has been photographed consents to their image being used by the photographer. The text will specify the details of this usage. Release forms may also allow for the photographer to use the subject's name alongside their image. In most situations a release is not required; however, there are cases where it is essential, for example for commercial or advertising assignments.

It is advised to be clear and concise on your release form, such as below:

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In exchange for consideration received, I hereby give permission to [PHOTOGRAPHER] to use my name and photographic likeness in all forms and media.

Full Name:

Contact Information:

Signature:



In the Kumbharwada, the Gujarati potters neighborhood, a potter's son plays among hundreds of drying clay plates. The Gujarati potters are one of the original inhabitants of the area, and are among those who stand to lose the most in the city's redevelopment plans. Mumbai, India. 2006. From the project *The Places We Live*.

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