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KAROLINA JONDERKO

SELF-PORTRAIT  
WITH MY MOTHER

CURATED BY KRZYSZTOF JURECKI



## KAROLINA JONDERKO

Born 1985, in Rydułtowy, Poland, where she currently lives and works.

Karolina has made photographs since she was 18. Her images are mostly about her personal experiences and childhood memories. She has exhibited in Poland, Germany, Portugal, England and France.

### **SELF-PORTRAIT WITH MY MOTHER** : Curated by Krzysztof Jurecki

I remember the joy of discovering Haribo jellies, Nutella and margarine among colorful clothes packed in heavy cardboard boxes we used to get from relatives who lived in West Germany, when Poland was lacking many basic things. It was a celebration, the whole family was present for these grand openings of gift boxes.

The clothes, mostly second-hand, were good enough for mother. She never felt the need to buy new ones, preferring to save money for more important expenses. She always looked modest and didn't like black. Some say that what one wears is a part of creating one's identity. My mother, all her life, wore clothes that she had never chosen.

On February 28, 2012, four years after her death, I started reliving the past. My work since then has been about building on my memories and longing. *Self-Portrait With My Mother* is my attempt to summarize that period, to move beyond the past -a final reconciliation with reality.

My grandmother's house –where my mother, my sister and I all grew up– is empty and cold now, almost in ruins. This is where I've kept my mother's clothes since she died. And now since my grandmother passed away, it's where I've been making these self-portraits, recreating dresses and outfits from memory, like my mother used to match them. I recently tried on a different set of clothes that came in one of those big boxes many years ago. I found her blond hair on the green coat.

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*Home Clothes*



*Travel Clothes*



*Kindergarten Clothes*



*Work Clothes*



*Christmas Clothes*



*Holiday Clothes*





*Weekend Clothes*



*Wedding Clothes*



*Sunday Best Clothes*



*Winter Clothes*

**Home Clothes.** I remember her sitting at the piano, focused, her hand tapping a rhythm, patiently listening to the rattle of her students, and I can still hear her gentle voice: *Let's repeat this fragment.* How was she able to listen to that; I do not know to this day. My sister and I would leave the house after a few minutes.

**Travel Clothes.** Departure day. Crowd on the platform. I am clasping my mother's and sister's hands. Suddenly I am rising. It's my mother passing me to my dad through the compartment's window. I am followed by two suitcases. Mother and sister somehow join us. It's crowded and stuffy and like that for the next fourteen hours. However, two weeks of seaside holidays are a worthwhile prize. Mom has prepared sandwiches, hard-boiled eggs, tomatoes, and tea in a bottle of Wyborowa vodka. We also have *Happy Minutes* (a children's puzzle magazine in communist Poland). Mother loves the sea. She travels lost in her thoughts, I think she can already smell the sea and hear the waves and screeching seagulls. Her blue dress may be made from cheap material, but it doesn't crease and dries in two minutes -perfect for such journeys.

**Kindergarten Clothes.** At the coal mine's kindergarten she would prepare the little ones for many performances. She would teach them songs about beloved mothers, the blackened faces of miners or brave marching Polish soldiers. She knew a song for every occasion. She wore blouses with big geometric patterns for the children. They loved her, the happy plump lady, who with rosy cheeks accompanied their singing on the piano in front of their proud parents.

**Work Clothes.** Small, badly furnished office in No 2 Primary School, that both my sister and I attended. On the door a sign, *The Principal Of After School Activities.* Mother at her desk, writing a report regarding achievements of Alkatras (a club for youngsters with problems) and Orlik (club for children and teenagers) for a meeting with the town mayor. I'm waiting patiently in the corner; I want to walk home with her.

**Christmas Clothes.** Christmas Eve, mom bustling in the kitchen, taking golden carp out of the oven carefully to avoid staining herself with the hot butter. She is even wearing makeup, green, to match her outfit. She's happy. She loves Christmas. After dinner, she is sitting at the piano and we all are singing Christmas carols.

***Holiday Clothes.*** It's summer. We awake to the intensely bright sun, the smell of freshly brewed coffee and mother's voice. I take a quick peek through the curtains, laundry on a clothesline must have been hung outside early in the morning, it looks completely dry. I cannot see anyone, but I know she's out there. I crane my neck and I am just able to make out blonde locks and cigarette smoke. The morning gossip with the neighbors is in full swing. Bare-footed and in pajamas, my sister and I jump out on the balcony and join the discussion. We love summer. We have our mother to ourselves for a whole two months of holidays.

***Weekend Clothes.*** Sunny day, the whole family sits in my grandmother's garden, sausages on the grill, twittering birds, laughter, conversation. In this dress, my mother would always be smiling, relaxed. She would wear it only on sunny, free-from-work days.

***Wedding Clothes.*** I am seven years old, the early nineties, cousin's wedding, 150 guests; I don't know most of them. I am stuffing my mouth with cake while watching my parents dance to a bad version of *Krawczyk's* song. My mother loved to dance and she was good at it. They looked great together, understanding without words. She did not like this type of parties. Chatting with relatives, whom you see only at weddings and funerals. What to talk to them about? It's much better to dance and send smiles.

***Sunday Best Clothes.*** It's Saint George's day. The whole family goes to the church fair. First we check out stands full of plastic toys, then the shooting stall where dad manages to win a bunch of garish, fake flowers, which he gives to mom. Pink cotton candy can't be missed, my sister and I have to stamp our feet to get it, as it's not healthy and bad for our teeth. But mom always gives in and on top of this, grandma gives us two golden rings with pink gems. Total bliss. At the end, the merry-go-round, we plead for one more ride, just one more. And then we're going back, fireworks going off in the background, mother, dad and grandma happy, chatty; my sister playing a toy whistle; and me with the obligatory balloon tied to my wrist.

***Winter Clothes.*** She would leave for work in darkness; we were all still asleep. She would take a red bus to her work at the music school. We didn't have a car. Waiting for the bus, in the bitter cold, uncertain whether it would come, shifting from foot to foot. On the way back she would go shopping. She would move slowly with heavy bags, being careful not to slip. Freezing cold, with a red nose and cheeks she would enter the house. Every night her soaked black boots would stand in a puddle of melted snow under a radiator in the kitchen.