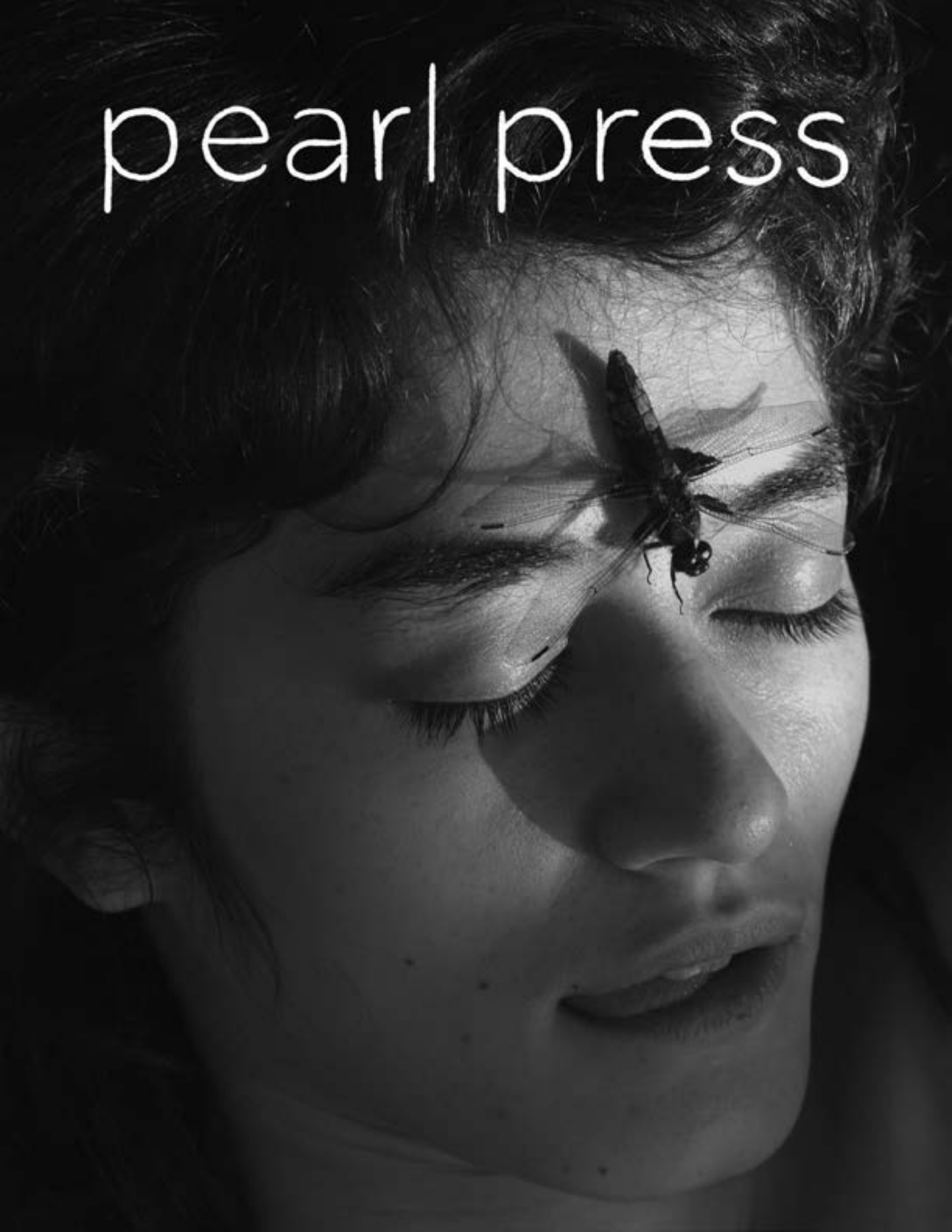


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ISSUE NO. 9: CHLOÉ MILOS AZZOPARDI

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Chloé Milos Azzopardi (c. 1994) is a French photographer and artist. Coming from a painting background, her approach to photography finds itself to be experimental. She received an MFA from the European School of Visual Art and currently works in Paris on long term projects where she mixes together her knowledge of installation, photography and book making. Her work explores the relationships between human and non-human beings, trying to get out of a prism of utility or servitude, while her research focuses on the representation of mental health, ethology and the construction of post-capitalocene imageries.

Cover image: Chloé Milos Azzopardi

Curated by: Delilah Twersky

FORMS THEY INHABIT IN TIMES OF CRISIS:

This series draws on the crises of dissociation and depersonalization that I have been experiencing. It's a common psychological response to trauma. These are disorders that affect a person's ability to form a constant «self» : People living with it may not feel their body, momentarily forget their own name or what their face looks like. I learned to deal with depersonalization by intensely observing my environment, by projecting myself into the sensations of other living things, be they plants, stones or animals. Losing some sense of individuality - where my body begins and ends also led to a struggle to understand the boundaries of my environment. The distinction and hierarchy constructed between human and animal and between nature and culture seemed to me more and more obsolete. This series is built in echo with this trouble but also with the first sentence of Ovid's Metamorphoses: «I want to say the forms turned into new bodies». It suggests that bodies are not finite entities but rather changing, crossed and inhabited entities. I envision these photographs as an ecosystem in which metamorphosis is possible; an environment in which I seek to know what the notions of individuality, plurality and otherness can mean when the limits of bodies are challenged.



Q: The work is so romantic and vivid, even the black and white feels as if it could have color in it, do you see your editing of the work holding an importance in the message of dissociation and depersonalization?

A: It's funny you say romantic because not a lot of people think that, but I think that they are. I'm not sure that the editing has something to do with dissociation. I think it's more the moment when I shoot because it's mostly about framing. I worked a bit in Calais, you know it? The jungle in Calais is a place in the north of France where a lot of refugees are trying to survive, I worked there as a volunteer a few years ago and I saw some people giving little cameras to kids so that they could get more familiar with their environment without being overwhelmed. I saw that, and of course I'm really not in the same situation, but I think the camera was useful to put things at a distance and also to really look at them deeply. It's like being super far and super close at the same time. When you focus on shooting something then you are almost only in your eye or the thing that is in front of you, the most important thing is that you're not in your body. The fact is, sometimes during a crisis I couldn't feel my body at all, at least I couldn't realize that it was my body. I think it is more this process of being in your eyes or absorbing yourself in the environment, but not being too focused on your own presence that deals with dissociation and depersonalization. The editing is more full pleasure. Maybe the cropping is still about trying to isolate a subject but editing with colors is like painting and I am from a drawing and painting background. I learned painting with a colorist, therefore it wasn't about having a good shape, I just learned to do colors. This is what gives me the biggest pleasure when I look at artwork, or just outside my window and in my own work. This is just a place of pleasure to me.









Q: You mentioned that this is an ongoing body of work, so it is really something that can continue forever as it holds so personal to you, do you feel it has been healing to take these photographs?

A: I was actually speaking about this a day ago with a very close friend because this friend was telling me that she was seeing me changing in the way I was feeling things and that's true. I think it's because since I began this series and then speaking about it...at first I wasn't speaking about dissociation and depersonalization, I thought it was too intimate and maybe it didn't relate to my practice you know, sometimes we're too afraid to say the thing that is most important...but, I felt that something has changed. I don't know if it's only because of the series, but now I can feel way more of my emotions than before. For almost 10 years, I couldn't feel a lot of emotion, I had some trouble with my friends because they were like, "do something, react, be moved!" There was something wrong with me but I didn't know what. I think it's thanks to this series that I made a little path of acceptance of this condition, but also I knew it couldn't last forever because it's not an illness that you have forever, it's more a response to trauma. It's psychological. If you work on it, hopefully at some point you can get out of it.









Q: With the use of other human bodies in the work, and not just your own, do you project your experiences on to them, or are these individuals who share those same dissociated feelings? How do you pick your subjects?

A: I shoot only people that I'm very intimate with. The only bodies that are there are my very best friends, my brother and my girlfriend. At first, when I started photography, I couldn't shoot people because I thought that faces were too emotional, and I couldn't bare it, really, I was almost disgust. It was weird. My best friend was a bit shocked, she was like "but you are always shooting things and you never shoot me! What is happening?" I was just super, super afraid of other human emotions because you have to create a link when you shoot other people, and creating a link is almost impossible when you are struggling to feel your own emotions. I think it's because I can be close to them and maybe put them in a situation that speaks about this dissociation...but I don't know if I see these other humans as myself, the whole thing with this series is that I project myself in almost everything. I try to feel what it feels to be something else. So I guess I'm doing the same with other human beings.





Q: When you are choosing animals to photograph, do you plan for which or take what is available? Is there a significance to the snake?

A: I think I am doing photography the same way a lot of people are doing it, you know, you go for an adventure and wait for something to happen. Some people say because you are a photographer, things are going to happen, you are almost like a magnet, you agree with everything that is going to happen and you can just wander for hours and hours and you know at some point there is going to be a surprise or an encounter and it's like that with animals. I am just waiting to meet them.

For the photo with the four hands, it's kind of a long story, it was planned. It starts with a huge grape. I found this huge, huge grape. I felt forced to buy it and to try to shoot it somewhere. I was wandering in my neighborhood with my huge, huge grape to shoot it. I met three guys, they were I don't know, smoking weed on a truck because one of them had just finished work, and they saw the grape and they were like "woah, it's so huge, what are you going to do with it?" and I was like "ah, I'm going to shoot it" and one of the guys asked me if I needed help to shoot this grape? He came with me and we tried to shoot him with the grape but it didn't come out well. I took his contact info just to send him the photos. I ended up seeing on his instagram that he fosters snakes because people around him are buying snakes, then they don't want them anymore, but he's passionate about them. He has loved snakes since he was a kid. So, I asked him if I could visit him and shoot his snakes, but I barely knew him. If we didn't meet on the street, we would have never crossed paths because we are in different places in our lives and everything. I went there with my friend and I thought we would shoot in his flat, but actually he came down in the street with the snake in his sweatshirt and that's it.







Q: What specifically inspired the title for the series?

A: So it's really a mix of the first sentence of Ovid's Metamorphosis and dissociation because before I knew it was dissociation and depersonalization, I was just saying that I was going through "crisis." The first sentence of Ovid's Metamorphosis is "Je veux dire les formes changées en nouveaux corps," it's "I want to say the forms turned into new bodies..." I wanted to have this reminder of the first sentence and also speak about a place where you can seek shelter, it speaks about how i can absorb myself in something else that could be a shape or another living thing and that's where I live, it's what I inhabit most of the time when I am in crisis. I remember focusing on a snail shell, a very small one, I was really doing badly. It's the only thing that helped me at some point to calm down and to find my body again.



Q: Are there things that you were watching, reading or listening to when you were beginning to understand what the series was about?

A: I don't remember a real starting point. There is a song that I listened to a lot and that I think is related. I also write, a few years ago I wrote a small book about snails, rocks and birds living on an island. Well no, the island where they lived disappeared so they tried to become an island all together but it's so messy because they don't know how to become an island. I was always listening to "Wuthering Heights" by Kate Bush. I almost couldn't start to write if I wasn't listening to it. I think the series started almost at the same time, maybe a bit later. It's a song that is following me. But it's an exception, most of the time I think I work a lot in silence. I remember doing exhibitions in art school, every time the jury would tell me "your work is really silent." And I was like, "what? but a drawing is silent, come on. Why do you say it's silent?" I couldn't understand. I just got used to it. I am a person that works a lot in silence. I don't realize it, but I am always working in silence."



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