

pearl press



# ISSUE NO. 15: EVELYN FREJA

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Evelyn Freja was born on a rural farmstead in Pennsylvania to a British mother and military father. She is a photographic artist based in NYC whose work revolves around the quiet nature and belongings of her habitats and travels. After spending a year in New Zealand, Evelyn took up photography as a means to highlight her daily life where culture and nature, and solitude and belonging overlapped. After briefly working in the magazine world for a few years, she found the courage to quit her 9-5 office job to pursue photography full-time.

Cover image: Evelyn Freja

Curated by: Delilah Twersky

## AVIATION:

‘Aviation’ began in a deliberate but organic way, drawing inspiration from both my personal life and from my research on working women in environments and industries that are typically male dominated. Some of my earliest memories are of my father, who was a pilot, and how he spent so much time away from home and in the air. I began questioning the roles gender play specifically in the aviation field when I was in university. I spent years corresponding with many women who are licensed pilots. Their backgrounds are often as diverse as the positions they hold in this community: some piloting instructors, students, retired flyers, military pilots, and volunteer ambulance pilots.

Female pilots make up not even 5% of pilots world-wide. As a photographer balancing editorial and commercial work, this felt very reflective of my own industry here in New York, as most working photographers are men. This statistic pushed me forward in the project, eventually leading me to photograph the ‘99s: International Women Pilots,’ as well as photographing other female pilots within New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Connecticut. Though none of the pilots I photographed knew each other, they all shared one common thread: the love of being 14,000 feet in the air. Each pilot I photographed has carved their own path in aviation, helping to change (albeit, slowly) this industry.





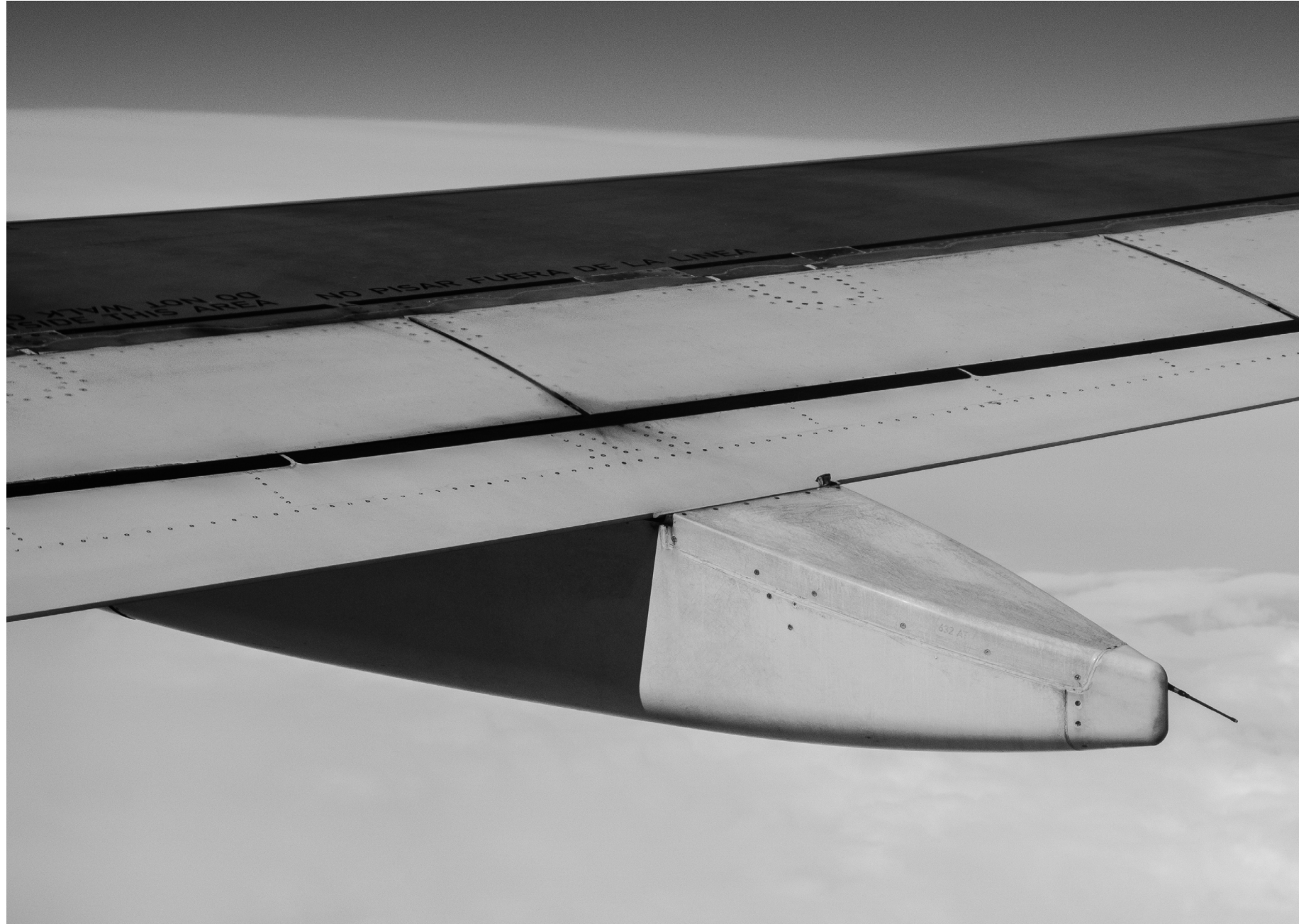


## Q: Can you talk about the origins of this project and how your father fits in with the work?

A: Some of my earliest memories are of my dad. We only had one car growing up and so we'd all jump in the car (my mom would be driving us), and we'd drop off my dad at the airport, then we'd go home. This project happened very naturally. I'm very deliberate with what I like to photograph; and when I'm not taking pictures, I'm actively thinking of taking pictures. I mean, my whole life really revolves around photography and the intersection of journalism and art, finding myself there.

So, I started this project back in 2018. I was just thinking one day, you know pilots would be a great thing to photograph, something I relate to and I have this background that ties to my family and growing up. But, it wasn't until a couple months into the project that I realized most of these pilots are white, male, and slightly older. Which, of course, there is nothing wrong with. But being a photographer, this industry has been very similar. Most photographers are men who are white and older. Both of these industries are changing, not as quickly as we'd like, so I thought it would be good to connect with these female pilots and get some answers. Why aren't there many pilots who are women? It became this journey of taking time away from my 9-5 office job (that was very soul sucking), and meeting these incredible women.











**Q: Where do you search for inspiration? Are there things that you were watching, reading or listening to when you were beginning to understand what the series was about?**

A: I know I said earlier that when I'm not taking photos, I'm thinking about taking photos; but in addition to that, when I'm not taking photos, I'm reading. I read all the time. I don't know if it's really inspired aviation, but I recently read 'Pure Colour' by Sheila Heti. It has nothing to do with aviation itself, but it talks about the narrator and how her father dies and touches base on their relationship. I've often found myself revisiting certain chapters and pages. It reminds me of my relationship with my father and how this aviation project came to be. In a way, yes, I was very interested in flying and aviation, and of course industries where women are considered the minority, but I also started this aviation project to feel closer to my dad who is a very closed off, private, introverted person like myself. I've revisited that book a lot recently, especially since my parents are getting older, there are a lot of parallels.



**Q: Do you have any specific stories that you heard during your time with these pilots that you'd like to share?**

A: There were many pilots who I reached out to of all different ages and experiences; some of them were student pilots who were just beginning to fly on their own, some were retired and had just gotten their licenses after they retired from their previous careers, and then there was Shannon [pictured below]. Shannon was a pilot I photographed in New Jersey. She's actually the co-founder of the 99s New York Chapter. The 99s are this incredible, incredible league of international women pilots. There's chapters literally all over the world and she helped to co-found the New York Chapter. She was one of the first pilots I met up with. She was super nice. She told me she got her license when she was in her 20's! One of the first times that she went flying with her friend (they both had their licenses), they got into a horrible plane crash and unfortunately, her friend ended up passing and Shannon broke her back in two different spots. Not just through physical recovery, but emotional recovery, she didn't fly for years after that. Eventually, she got back into it and now she flies all the time. She's a volunteer medic, so she flies these children who have terminal illnesses, from hospital to hospital. That story hit me so hard because that's one of the worst things that can happen if you're flying alone or you're flying with another pilot who is not as experienced, and you crash. That's the worst case scenario and it's a theme of resilience. Taking time to heal from that and bouncing back. That's what she did and now she's helping all of these children just by flying.





## Q: Do you see this project as ongoing?

A: This project is definitely ongoing and I don't see it ending any time in the future. Because of COVID it came to a halt, no one wanted to fly in a tiny cockpit with this virus going on. Now I'm slowly putting feelers back out there to photograph more pilots. I'm thinking about applying for different grants and scholarships. It's very limited in the Northeast of the US. There are so many amazing pilot schools and pilot communities all over the US. It would be great to travel around and meet them and see how it differs.





## Q: Was there a different process for you while shooting aerially?

A: I've gone up a few times with different pilots and it's always funny because it's such a hard feeling to describe being 14,000 feet in the air in this tiny, little, weird car. You just look out and you're surrounded by all of this sky. It makes you forget about things like, "oh that horrible stressful email that I got" or "oh no that horrible school assignment," whatever is going on in your life all of a sudden, it doesn't seem nearly as big. And you look down and all the houses are miniscule. None of that matters, we're just tiny little cohabitants on this planet, soaring through this solar system.

I've gone up with quite a few of the pilots and it's always special. The pilots that I was photographing invited me to fly to Maryland from New York City. We all hopped into this plane together, three women, and we flew to Maryland. We sat down on a boardwalk there. I'm actually vegan but I didn't want to tell them because I didn't want to be a nuisance. But, they ate crab, muscles, and I had my little french fries and it was such a great day of getting out of the city and flying somewhere new with these women that I didn't know, but I thought they were so cool.





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