WE ARE FAMILY

Through pop-ups across Toronto’s West End, photographer Yannick Anton is reviving, and reinventing, formal portraiture. For Anton, that means making portraits affordable, being an archivist for a broad community and updating old notions of what a family looks like.

On the heels of his most recent event, in Kensington Market, he sat down with Huda Hassan to talk about why these images add up to something ‘bigger than just a picture’

HUDA HASSAN: Tell us what inspired the idea behind your Limited Edition portrait pop-ups.

YANNICK ANTON: This project – which gives people a chance to come in with whoever it is they love for a portrait – was an opportunity for me to fill a void in photography. A lot of people have cellphones but no professional photographers. I think it’s really important for people to get that done. The idea came from looking at classic portraiture – at oil paintings of families that were reserved for rich white families – and wishing that I had an oil painting of my grandparents from that time period.

HH: Why was it important for you to make these sessions affordable?

YA: I’m hoping to have people become part of something that is bigger than just a picture. It’s about documenting the family and updating old notions of what a family looks like. It’s about creating a space for families to come in to. [The most recent pop-up] was in Kensington Market. We try to make the [pop-ups] in locations that are easy to get to.

HH: Is this the first time some of these families are having their portraits taken?

YA: Yeah. There’s a lot of young families that come through, so they’ve got babies who are getting their first portraits. There’s also older families where this is the first time they’re getting their portraits done as adults.

HH: What got you into photography?

YA: What got me into photography was being able to capture moments in time. I’ve been taking pictures for a really long time. I was taking pictures at Yes Yes Y’all [a downtown Toronto queer party] for eight years, so I learned to see how time goes by in photos, which is really cool. That’s my favourite part, watching the progression.

HH: If you could sit for your own family portrait, who would be in it?

YA: [pauses] I don’t know. I haven’t shot myself. That’s a good thing to think about. I wouldn’t have one family portrait, I would definitely have a large one for the whole family. I think that would be very cool.

HH: Have you had your family portrait taken before?

YA: [laughs] A long time ago. I haven’t had a family portrait with me for a while because I’m always taking them.

HH: What does it mean to photograph someone who might not have otherwise sat for a formal portrait?

YA: What does it mean to photograph someone who might not have otherwise sat for a formal portrait? It means making portraits affordable, being an archivist for a broad community and updating old notions of what a family looks like.

HH: I read an interview you gave to Flair in magazine. You said that your family is your harshest critic. Does that motivate your work?

YA: Yeah, my family is my harshest critic. I care what they think. Anyone that I love and care for I care about what they think of my work.

HH: What else motivates you as a photographer?

YA: What else motivates me as a photographer is being able to capture moments in time. I’ve been taking pictures for a really long time. I was taking pictures at Yes Yes Y’all [a downtown Toronto queer party] for eight years, so I learned to see how time goes by in photos, which is really cool. That’s my favourite part, watching the progression.

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‘We’re taking portraits back. We’re recapturing our gaze. I want to make a space to take photos that reflect the diversity of family in the world today’