

**Building cinematic worlds from (extra)ordinary scenarios, Milan-based photographer Naty crafts stories with her lens. She talks to Mariquita de Boissière about making art that people can connect with, and why representation on the blockchain matters.**

A familiar chime, and a Zoom notification flashes across my laptop. I click through and, as the video connects, am transported into a softly lit room that exudes the kind of timeless elegance usually reserved for cinema. It is only three in the afternoon in Milan, but the half inky shadow, half golden glow cast across Natascia's face is more suggestive of the magic hour of dusk. Contrasting with the electric blue that threads through her braids, the bright orange tones of her pullover burn brightly against a purple-illuminated backdrop.

The youngest in a line of painters and photographers, for Natascia Mercurio — or Naty, as she is better known within web3 circles — art runs in her blood. As such, she brings a creative flair into every aspect of her life. Dusk, electric blue, and bright orange are uniquely distinctive of her photographs too; art and life, synthesised.



*Just Me and You, by Naty.*

An art director, filmmaker, and photographer, the twenty-six year old Afro-Italian wears many hats. "Too many," she says with a laugh. Naty has received accolades for her work from within NFT circles and beyond. 2023 began with a **TIME collaboration** with Deepak Chopr — just the next step in a career full of features —, as well as recognition from Sony, who label her as one of "today's most insightful and influential photographers." Elsewhere, her work has graced the pages of Italy's most prominent daily newspaper, *Corriere della Sera*, as well as respected art magazines and journals.

Although Naty's creative direction — from student of art history to graphic designer and Art Director — had been established long before she minted her first NFT, her decision to put her photography on the blockchain was not taken lightly. "I like to really study things and take my time. When I started seeing my favourite photographers getting into this new technology, I took a step back and watched to see what they were doing and how they were doing things," she explains. "Only once I had learned enough, was I ready to release my collections. I've always been a cohesive kind of person. I just need everything to make sense."

**"I want my photos to say something."**

— Naty

It was during the enforced isolation of the Covid-19 pandemic that Naty discovered a new, and more authentic, connection to her art. "We had so much time with our thoughts and, as tragic as it was, I think it really did help me figure out what I want to convey." As Milan's Lombardy region found itself plunged into chaos, becoming the European epicentre of the outbreak, Naty took to the streets with her camera. What arose was the collection

*Fleeting Moments*, a series of photographs that capture the dystopian transformation of everyday life in one of Europe's iconic cultural capitals turned Covid 'ground-zero.'

"It was very hard to only have certain times where you could go out, and then to see so few people around," Naty shares. "But it made me realise that I don't want to just take pretty pictures. I want my photos to say something. It was so touching to see people live their lives, but in a different way. It impacted me and my photography in ways that I could never have imagined. I knew that I had to make a project out of it."



*Lonely Crowd*, by Naty.

Picked up and reproduced by the Italian press, **Just Me and You** features a solitary couple sharing an impromptu beer and pizza dinner on the deserted walkways of Sempione Square, flanked by Milan's famed Arco della Pace. Meanwhile, in **Lonely Crowd**, a single figure sits with their back to the camera, at a table for eight. Though the other seven chairs remain empty, masked passers-by stroll past, wrapped in a cool, shadowy oblivion.

The warm, golden-orange tones that stream over the diner and the façade of the restaurant compound the sense of isolation. "Even within web3, my work stands out because it's a combination of emotion with storytelling," Naty says. "At the same time, there's the colour factor. Vincent Van Gogh worked with yellows and blues, and I'm doing something similar, but from a cinematic perspective; in Hollywood, a lot of cinematographers use teal and orange."

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— Naty

Naty's signature application of Hollywood's complementary colour duo adds depth to her storytelling. Through the yin-yang harmony of the two tones, they draw out singularity and emphasise separation — as used to highlight the solo diner in *Lonely Crowd*, or the emotional isolation of the subject of *Damaged*. "Making people feel something is the ultimate goal for me," Naty tells me. "We each have unique experiences and come from different backgrounds. Yet, art is one of the few things that can bring so many people together."

It is the Milan-based photographer's desire to establish connections and build empathy that drove her to shoot **BLM** in Italy during the protests and aftermath of the murder of George Floyd. The image was awarded and recognised by **500px**, the global photography network, during their Black History Month competition last June.



*After Work, by Naty.*

Thanks to how the blockchain facilitates an immutable proof of ownership, Naty has gained further accreditation for her digitally-augmented photographs; if there was ever any doubt about whether a piece was by Naty or not, the blockchain is the ultimate arbiter. In minting her art onchain, Naty brings her work closer to her collectors — many of whom see themselves reflected in her art.

One such relatable image is **After Work**. Describing the process that led to its creation, Naty explains, “Before I take a picture I just look at the moment as it is. I saw this man resting his head on one hand, totally lost in thought, at about 8pm. The collector who picked up the piece later DM’d me to say that he had gone through the exact same moment that day.” Smiling, she adds, “He told me that he had never seen anything like that on the blockchain. It makes me so happy when someone relates to a moment that I captured.”

“In web3, there’s so much communication; I feel safer.”

— Naty

The disintermediated access that artists have to collectors in web3 is laying the groundwork for a more personal connection between both parties, unencumbered by galleries that have often, traditionally, lain in the middle. “It really gives me a reason to continue to do this,” Naty says. It has also led her to draw comparisons between herself — a full-time artist and photographer — and her grandparents who originally inspired her to first pick up a camera. “I actually never met my grandfather because he passed away one year before I was born,” Naty tells me. “But I grew up seeing his photographs. The living room was full of them.”

Looking off into the distance, Naty recalls her childhood: “I remember coming back from school and sitting on my grandmother’s lap, listening to her stories about travelling the world and taking photographs. They were just as passionate about photography as I am, but it was never to be anything more than a hobby for them. There was no way they could have made it work as a profession back then.”



BLM, by Naty.

She pauses. "That artists can more easily make a living from their work is a huge step forward. I couldn't think about doing anything else. This is what makes me feel alive."

Galvanised by these realisations, Naty is on a mission to onboard more people who, like her, might not find instant representation in the closed-off world of conventional art. "In web2, I would post my pictures but never show myself. I never saw anyone who looked like me and felt like I was never going to be accepted. In web3, there's so much communication; I feel safer."

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— Naty

She continues, "I really want more people to come in and have their voices heard. That's why I want to push myself to be seen more. The blockchain, or at least Ethereum, is still heavily US-based, for example. But Italy is such a beautiful country. We really need to put it out there because there's so much culture, so much art. I would love to get way more people onboarded."

A reminder flashes up on my screen, informing me that my time connecting with Naty and her cinematographic mise-en-scène is almost up. Before we draw to a close and say our goodbyes, she shares some final thoughts on the magic behind her creativity. "The thing that I love most about street photography is that everything is so candid. You never know what you're going to find. But, at the same time, it's very much about how you're feeling, as the creator. It's almost like the Law of Attraction. You're going to attract what you feel, right? Whenever I feel sad, instead of staying at home, I go outside. For some people, that doesn't work. But for me, when I'm feeling difficult emotions, that's when I end up taking some of my best shots."

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