

j-fj//g.

A LIFETIME OF photographing naked women began for Jean-François Jonvelle, most improbably, in the cathedrals of France. "It had nothing to do with women!" Jonvelle reassures. Indeed, it was the structures themselves that inspired the then-17 year old to first pick up a Canon camera and "use the light of the south".

Shortly after his church tour of France, Jonvelle moved on to photographing his sister's friends. This phase marked the start of a fixation with what the Parisian calls "the tenuous instant of an encounter". "My work has revolved around desiring, provoking and arranging encounters. I've always been fascinated by the palpable tension, the electric, troubled trembling that can arise between a woman and a man who barely know each other."

And for Jonvelle, 57, there is no better context within which to conjure up such moments than in the private spaces of his subjects as they go about the minutiae of their lives. In the bathroom, bedroom, shower and closet, they preen, ponder and pee. They fold clothing and tie shoelaces – all in the nude. The Frenchman insists, however, that the intimacy he shares with his subjects is not solely about nudity, but about the confidence they project. "The fact that a woman can be photographed nude in front of me is because of her confidence in me. And it's these moments of confidence that make the sharing of these instances so dynamic."

To speak to Jonvelle about his work is to catch a glimpse of a man whose entire life revolves around women. "I depend on women's wishes," he writes in the introduction to his fifth book *Jonvelle(s)* from which these images are taken. "I am constantly aware of everything around me, especially women, who represent my work and indeed my life. They are always there, unswayed by passing fads, adventurous, unafraid of what they are, of their desires, their fantasies."

A regular contributor to *Marie Claire*, *Elle*, *English Vogue* and *Stern*, Jonvelle treasures the natural beauty which is all-too-often hidden beneath the surface of our mundane realities. "The everyday things in life are what often kills couples. I try to make these acts more beautiful. People like [my photos] because they find themselves in these ordinary acts."

For Jonvelle, the process of capturing "the poetry of everyday life" is actually a "combat". "The photographic act is something that is never certain because you never know whether or not the photo will be good. Nothing is known in advance." Still, after more than 20 years of professional photography, there's no sign of him stopping anytime soon. So what is it that keeps him going? "The pure pleasure of it."

jean-françois
jonvelle

French photographer **Jean-François Jonvelle** has been capturing the *je ne sais quoi* of women in their private spaces for more than 20 years. Samantha Morris speaks to one happy man.



jean-françois jonvelle















