



when he's OUT

MARK VESSEY HAS HIS GOALS SET HIGH. INTERTWINING WORK AND PLAY, THE 24-YEAR-OLD IS OUT TO LITERALLY CAPTURE HIS OWN EXPLORATION OF WHAT IT MEANS TO BE GAY AND DISCOVER HOW HE FITS INTO THE GAY SCENE. WITH AN UPCOMING EXHIBITION, THE REGULAR PHOTOGRAPHER FOR reFRESH TELLS JOLEE WAKEFIELD HOW HE HAS HIS LENS SET FIRMLY ON THE FUTURE – AND THE WORLD!

A NIGHT OUT with friends is the perfect setting for Mark Vessey's work and what he hopes to be his life-long project.

"When I'm Out is my exploration and discovery of being gay and working out how I fit into the scene," reveals the emerging photographer. "I always knew I was gay and this was a way to help me know what being gay means."

And it still is.

Vessey continues to explore his sexuality out on Brighton's gay scene, but he's not stopping there. The self-confessed anxious, curious 'student at heart' has his lens set on creating a picture book, capturing the gay scenes of the world, and unwinding all of the layers of "being gay and knowing what it actually means". That's after conquering London with his upcoming exhibition and assisting one of the best photographers in the world, of course.

"Aim high, that's my motto," he says.

Aiming high seems to be working for the 24-year-old.

His work has already featured in numerous exhibitions, a highlight he says was Attitude, a huge 50in x 40in piece that featured at the Royal Academy of Art's Summer Exhibition last year, and sold works to people from around the world. Plus he's been out and about capturing the gay scenes of Brighton, New York (like

when the doors to the iconic Studio 54 were closed for the last time), Cape Town and London, and has had his own business, Point and Snap, for two years.

While gay bars are the basis for his photography, Vessey also likes to confront traditionally 'risqué' places like escort agencies, cruising grounds and gay saunas.

"I took portraits inside saunas. I wanted to find out more because people put a front on it," he says, "these places aren't as mysterious as at first and not as taboo as I once thought."

Vessey's When I'm Out project has not only helped him to understand his own sexuality better, but given his parents a better understanding of it too.

"Dad went into WH Smith to get a copy of reFRESH to see my work," he laughs, "he couldn't find it and had to ask for help. When the assistant yelled out 'It's in the gay and lesbian section', he said he was quite taken back. I told him that's how I felt at 14."

Vessey spent his happy childhood years with his parents in Chingford, Essex. Not ready for London, he moved to Brighton five years ago to attend university and study photography.

"Chingford was like Footballers Wives. Total suburbia that wasn't for me," he laughs,

"I wouldn't say it was totally homophobic. But it wasn't exactly OK to be gay there either."



When I'm Out is at the Box Bar, London WC2H 9HA, until the end of February. For more information visit www.pointandsnap.com

You could almost say Vessey is afraid of suburbia: "there's trees and grass," he explains with reservation in his voice, "I much prefer grittiness and realness."

"As soon as I arrived in Brighton I ran down to the sea, I put my feet in the water and never looked back.

"It was the first place where I could be myself and feel safe."

And so began When I'm Out.

The title When I'm Out actually stemmed from a joke with staff at Brighton University three years ago.

"When talking to my tutor about my work I always started with 'when I was out' and that was the beginning of a life-long project."

The name for Point and Snap came about in a similar way: "My boyfriend at the time used to mock the way I took pics. He said I'd always just point and snap..."

Vessey's style is recognisable by its soft focus/taking things out of focus, just as much as its' content.

"The deep meaning behind my work is me experiencing it. It's not pretend.

"I like that my work has different layers of meanings for different people, even my friends and they're with me a lot of the time!

"Actually, my friends have to put up with a lot. I talk about my work all of the time, and take pics every time we go out."

To give another example, he explains: "take Sony Records in New York. They bought a piece and didn't understand it was about me coming out. They didn't get it, they saw something else."

Now, his aim is to conquer London before heading to New York to continue When I'm Out and get a few tips from the best.

"David Armstrong is my hero. He works with editorial and art-based work in New York," he says, "It would be a dream to assist him and establish myself."

"But first, my introduction to London." Vessey prefers his work to be displayed in places like bars as opposed to galleries.

"I don't want to be a photographer who argues where their pics are hung at an exhibition and work with buying/selling, etc. – I don't need my ego fed and would like my work to eventually feature alongside the greats."

Secretly, he confesses: "it would be nice for people to recognise work and go 'Oh, that's Mark Vessey's work from When I'm Out' and enjoy it.

"The idea is to exhibit my work in bars I like or have experiences in, so that it suits the space.

"Moving on from the first exhibitions I believe the work has a life of its own now, with the photographic exploration of different cities working as one body of work.

"The Box Bar exhibition is an introduction of my work to London and will include a mixture of When I'm Out and some editorial pieces I have shot for reFRESH.

"I still feel that there is so much more to be discovered yet, which is so exciting!"

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