

Undying love for photography

DIEHARD. Despite the fact that his cameras were once destroyed and others stolen, Ivan Ssebuuma, has immeasurable love for fashion photography. Ssebuuma opened up to **Esther Oluka** about his passion.

Ivan Ssebuuma's face is hard to miss at fashion events. He usually dons a pair of jeans, sneakers, a T-shirt and a cap. A huge black bag strapped to his back as he keeps snapping away with a huge camera. From time to time, he will quietly stand at an isolated corner and review the shots. Ssebuuma, 22, who was born to Lawrence Kaweesi and Catherine Navugga at Nsambya hospital says photography was something he picked interest in after meeting Annette Biggers, a female photographer in the US in 1996. He had travelled there with a church choir for a tour and was helping out with different things.

"I chanced to see Annette at an event and I remember seeing her walking around with her body under the weight of cameras as she snapped away in a hall. I became inspired and wished to be like her someday," Ssebuuma recalls.

But since he was only three years at the time, he focused on completing school first. He completed Primary Seven at Maranatha Christian School, Ggaba before joining Maranatha High School where he completed Senior Four in 2010. Eventually, he joined Hana Mixed Secondary School, Nsangi for A-Level. He did not upgrade his studies afterwards because of lack of tuition.

"I wanted to join Kampala University at the time to study filming and photography. However, my parents could not afford to pay Shs1.8 m, the fees that was required at the time," he says. "So instead of staying idle at home, I decided to train myself in photography, my passion."

Humble beginnings

Despite not having his own camera, Ssebuuma had friends he often borrowed from to practice and perfect his photography skills.

"One of those people was Pastor Alex Matthew Mutagubya who had a Nikon

D3100. Another guy was Jowee Amio who specialised in shooting music videos and production. He had a Canon T3i," Ssebuuma says, adding, "Their cameras helped me to practice photography from time to time."

After some time, Ssebuuma realised that he had been interested in taking mostly fashion pictures and just like that, he concentrated in taking photos in that particular field.

Break through

In 2014, as he browsed the internet, he came across photographs that had been trademarked as Crystal Models Agency property. Mesmerised by photos, he decided to get in touch with Ronnie Nsubuga, the creative director of the agency.

"I requested him to take me in so that he could teach me a thing or two about the art of photography. Ronnie accepted. He not only introduced me to his models but also to the whole fashion industry fraternity where I based my shoots," Ssebuuma says.

The duo embarked on different photo shoot projects. Although the results were not always splendid, Nsubuga often encouraged his colleague never to give up.

Going solo

Having gathered a bit of experience and connections through networking, Ssebuuma decided to venture out on his own last year.

"I felt the need to do so after clients including designers, freelance models as well as organisations starting hiring me to shoot for them," he says.

Usually after taking photographs, Ssebuuma markets his work on different social media platforms including Facebook and Instagram by making posts as a way of attracting more clients.

Challenges on the job

There are several of them, Ssebuuma says. For starters, when Ssebuuma was still a fresh face in the photography field, particular individuals were often found of disappointing him and trying to disregard his work.

"I will never forget a time I requested to meet up a certain photographer he told me that he did not have time for learners. That hurt me a lot," he says.

Besides the spiteful statements, Ssebuuma says some clients are not always

one-on-one

How would you describe yourself?

I'm social, straightforward and I enjoy making friends.

Are you dating?

Yes, I'm dating a very beautiful young woman. We have been together for three years. I won't mention her name because she prefers privacy. She is pursuing a degree in music, dance and drama at Makerere University, Kampala.

Your advice to upcoming photographers

There will always be challenges and people discouraging and trying to bring you down. That should never discourage you but make you stronger. Never give up.

robberies and accident, I will never give up on photography because I'm very passionate about it," Ssebuuma says.

It is probably this zeal that has seen him earn a previous nomination in the 2014 Abyranz Style and Fashion Awards in the category of best Fashion and Lifestyle

Photographer of the year but, he did not take the award home.

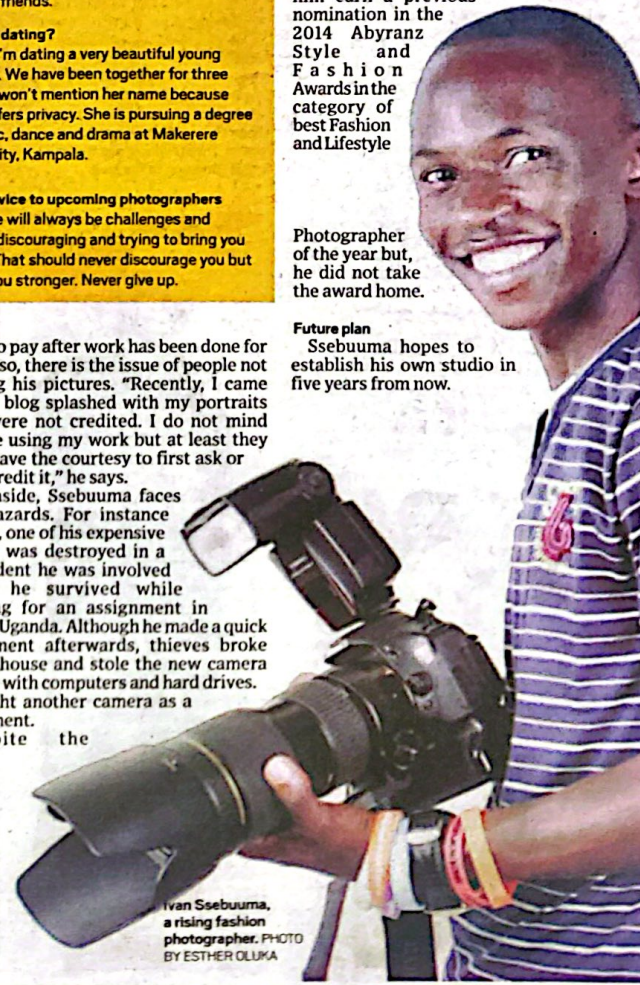
Future plan

Ssebuuma hopes to establish his own studio in five years from now.

willing to pay after work has been done for them. Also, there is the issue of people not crediting his pictures. "Recently, I came across a blog splashed with my portraits which were not credited. I do not mind someone using my work but at least they should have the courtesy to first ask or simply credit it," he says.

That aside, Ssebuuma faces other hazards. For instance last year, one of his expensive cameras was destroyed in a car accident he was involved in and he survived while travelling for an assignment in western Uganda. Although he made a quick replacement afterwards, thieves broke into his house and stole the new camera together with computers and hard drives. He bought another camera as a replacement.

"Despite the



Ivan Ssebuuma, a rising fashion photographer. PHOTO BY ESTHER OLUKA