



*The Waiting Girl*, 2006

## Loretta Lux

With the right models and deft computer work, her images both haunt and intrigue

**HYPNOTIST** Stare into the eyes of a Loretta Lux portrait long enough, and you're bound to feel both completely mesmerized and completely spooked. Lux's starkly pale, prepubescent subjects haunt the viewer from inside the image as if they were hiding some terrible secret. Remarkably captivating yet exceedingly eerie—the formula has turned the German photographer into an art-world phenom, earned her the coveted Infinity Award for Art from the International Center of Photography and made her a millionaire.

A former painter, Lux, 38, brings her images to life with the attention to form, shape and color that she learned at the easel. The artistry begins at the photo shoot, but her signature style—the brushstrokes of her new medium—comes later, at the computer. First she strips out the background and replaces it with a quiet setting—a grassy field, an abandoned building—from her personal stash of paintings and

pictures. Then she erases any object that crowds the picture, like a tree or toy, so the child appears to be part of a dream. "I don't care about traditional photography," Lux says. "I want more control."

Lux started taking children's portraits nearly eight years ago, when she shot a couple of rolls of film of her nephew. It took her only one day with that little boy to realize what comes across so vividly in her work: children are the perfect subjects to photograph. "They have no reservations," she says. "They are the most honest models."

But exactly what her portraits are supposed to mean remains a mystery, and Lux doesn't offer many clues, saying only that the images, which can take up to a year to complete, are less about the subjects than they are a metaphor for the idea of childhood. "I want people to decide what to see," she says. Whatever they do decide, they're not likely to forget it.

—BY CAROLYN SAYRE

