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## ARTS & LETTERS

### Carefully Composed Inconsistency

By NOLA TULLY

This month New York is celebrating Loretta Lux. On Tuesday, she received the International Center for Photography's prestigious Infinity Award for Art; the gala ceremony was hosted by Renée Zellweger at the fashionable SoHo party space, Sky-

**LORETTA LUX**  
Yossi Milo

light, with tickets at \$750. Ms. Lux's photographs of children will be on view at Yossi Milo Gallery in Chelsea today. And through May 14 an exhibition print of "The Wanderer" will sit prominently in the Gurkha Collection window at 683 Madison Avenue (the shop sells leather goods) as part of the annual "Madison Avenue: Where Fashion Meets Art" partnership. Art and commerce frequently intersect in New York, but this 30-something artist has cut quite a swath across the culture since her first exhibition five years ago.

Ms. Lux's photography has much in common with painting. Born in 1969 in Dresden, the artist recalls trips to museums; she had a particular interest in the Old Masters. Her interest in the works of Agnolo Bronzino, Diego Velázquez, Francisco de Goya, Caspar David Friedrich, and Philipp Otto Rung is apparent in both her palette and treatment, and her Ilfochromes have the luminosity of Renaissance paintings. Ms. Lux studied painting at Akademie der Bildenden Künste, in Munich, and started experimenting with photography in 1999.

Although she admires the discipline of painting, Ms. Lux felt it wasn't her ideal medium. "I didn't enjoy the physical aspect of it, the handling of pigments, oil, and turpentine," she told me recently. "I use the camera as a tool now, approaching painting from a different perspective." There are approximately 50 images in Ms. Lux's body of work currently, usually produced in editions of seven. At a rate of five to seven finished works a year, it's not the volume one might expect from a mechanical process. And in fact, very little is mechanical. "I organize forms and colors when setting a picture and when working on the computer," she told me in a recent e-mail exchange, "similar to what a painter does on a canvas. It takes me several months to complete a single image."

Ms. Lux's figures are mannered (think Bronzino), with pale complex-



Loretta Lux, 'At the Window' (2004).

*Stylized and staged, Ms. Lux's 'imaginary portraiture' leaves nothing to chance. The elements of fashion photography segue into another art form.*

ions; solitary subjects set in quiet landscapes. She starts with the portrait of a child, who might be anywhere from 2 to 12, taken in the studio or on location (often, in the early works, it is the child of a friend). Ms. Lux dresses them in vintage clothing, in some cases items her own mother saved from the artist's childhood. If this is starting to sound like a fashion shoot, that's because it is, up to a point. Stylized and staged, Ms. Lux's "imaginary portraiture" leaves nothing to chance. The elements of fashion photography segue into another art form.

tograph. It's not children's portraits or portraits in a traditional sense. I don't try to capture the model's individual psychology. I treat them as a metaphor for childhood and for innocence. Childhood is an important and most influential part of life. During childhood we learn to live in this world. But childhood cannot be repeated and that is in many ways unfortunate. It is tragic."

In "Paulin" (2002), a girl sits poised in the sand, delicate amidst shells and rocks scattered on the shore, each as sharply in focus as the cheerful geometry of her dress, or the smoothness of her neatly combed hair, set against a Quattrocento sky. The opacity of the girl's gaze evokes what's missing. Included is the blue-green bruising below the surface of the translucent porcelain flesh. This balancing act, between inclusion and exclusion, opacity and translucency, gives these images their power. There is no story here but rather elements of a narrative arranged meticulously.

"I consider my work to be pictorial art but pictorial art is not necessarily narrative," Ms. Lux explained. "I don't try to tell a story but prefer to leave things open. I want the viewer to draw his own meaning."

In "At the Window" (2004), the child's gaze is turned away. We view the back of her head (a hairstyle that suggests 15th-century Flemish dress) and the pastel landscape that presumably she sees, too, through the panes of glass. In Lux's new work, the viewer senses an increased interaction; the gaze is more intense.

I was struck by a lone adult male, the subject of the photo "The Hunter" (2003). Ms. Lux's father left when she was a child; her dealer, Yossi Milo, told me that she later went hunting for her three half-brothers and eventually found them in Cyprus. She has also made two self-portraits to date. "The Hush" (1999), a collage of hand-made and camera-made images and "Self Portrait" (2000), the artist against a moonlit sky. Both images quote painting, fashion, and photography, and it is interesting to note that the artist changed her name to Loretta Lux on the eve of her first exhibition in 2000. The artist, like her photographs, is carefully composed.

Ms. Lux will be signing copies of her new monograph tonight from 6 to 8 p.m. at Yossi Milo (525 W. 25th Street, between Tenth and Eleventh Avenues, 212-414-0370). Prices: \$4,500-\$19,500.

The eyes, the hands, the faint impression on the skin left by the elastic ankle socks (as in "Hidden Rooms") are composed or extracted from another image, then inserted into a composite. Such items as handmade wallpaper, or the drum in "The Drummer," are carefully created or reworked (the drum was a found object, digitally refurbished by the artist's hand). Many of the backgrounds are her own paintings or photographs taken on travels in Europe. In "The Wanderer," the background image was taken in the Pyrenees.

On the surface, her pictures are serene and exacting. Look deeper, however, and there are inconsistencies; various parts seem slightly out of scale. The eyes are haunting, mysterious, set into the ambiguity and androgyny of the anonymous figures. Their gaze suggests isolation and loneliness.

"Children are fascinating subjects for me," Ms. Lux explained. "An artist picks a subject that he likes, so I picked children because that is what I can most connect with. But my work is not about the children I pho-