

ARTFORUM

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CRITIC'S PICKS

Loretta Lux

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Pictures of kids are everywhere these days—from Diane Arbus's to Nicky Hoberman's to those of various Japanese Pop stars of the moment—confronting viewers with the unsettling mix of the familiar and the unknowable that inhabits the most affecting representations of childhood. Loretta Lux's first solo endeavor in the US does them one better. Her photographs of eerily enigmatic children are strangely perfect, impeccable the way a painting can be in terms of composition and palette. Borrowing strategies from masters new and old (Balthus's knack for barely sublimated eroticism, Piero della Francesca's penchant for hyperreal vistas), she creates placid, lushly coordinated arrangements of isolated boys and girls in stark landscapes and interiors. The genesis is digital: Lux's photographs of real children are superimposed in front of her painted backdrops, the whole enhanced by an electronic paintbrush that ensures, among other mysterious perfections, a flawlessly subtle color scheme. Thus *Dorothea*, 2001, like *Maria*, *Lois*, and their friends, has strangely colored eyes, translucent skin, silky hair, and clothing that mirrors the sky spreading behind her half-length portrait. The effect is a breathtaking paradox of photographic realness and painterly disbelief, of children too real to be believed, too ideal to be real.



—Lori Waxman