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LORETTA LUX, GERMANY'S HOTTEST
NEW EXPORT, MADE \$5M IN PRINT
SALES LAST YEAR - FIND OUT WHY

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Above: The Rose Garden, 2001.
Right: The Walk, 2004.
All images © Loretta Lux.

Lux control

The ethereal world of childhood provides a rich seam of inspiration for **Loretta Lux**. She talks to **Colin Pantall**

Pale children stare out of empty landscapes, their young bodies clothed in strangely patterned tweed and wool. Half adult, half child, they are the invention of Loretta Lux, a photographer whose digital sorcery has created a magical world that sits somewhere between fantasy and reality.

Born in Dresden in 1969 and now based in Monaco, Lux's work is partly inspired by her early childhood in East Germany. 'My life as a child in the DDR was very dull, but at the weekends my grandparents would take me to museums,'

she says. 'The pictures I could most connect with were those with children in them.'

Inspired by Old Masters and German romantic artists of the 19th century, Lux initially studied painting. But in the end she found 'all those paints and the turpentine' too messy.

'One reason I took up photography was because it isn't messy,' she says. 'Another reason was because painting has a long history and there are painters like Velasquez and Caspar David Friedrich – you can't compete with them. I thought I would approach

painting through photography instead.'

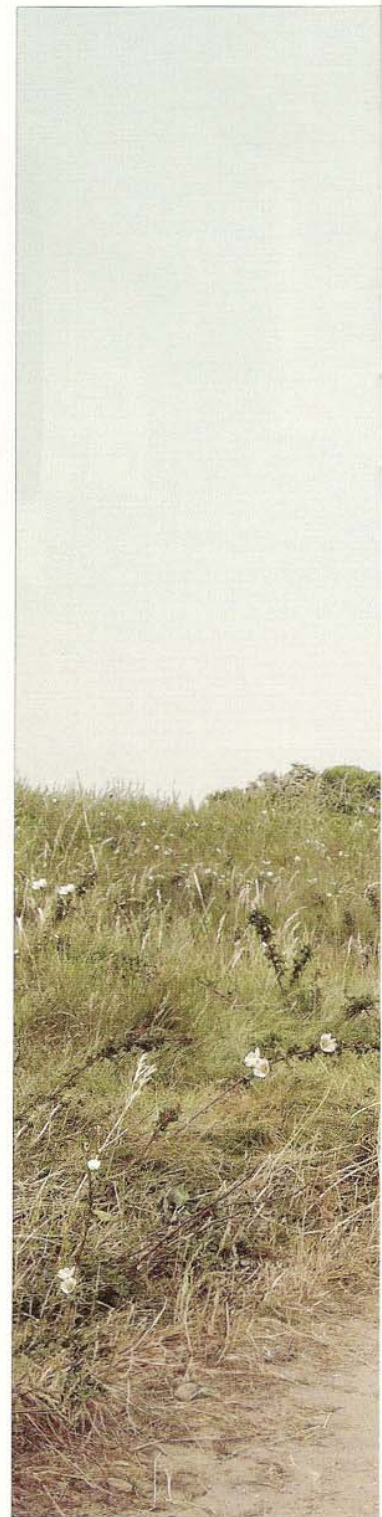
Luxurious vision

Lux started taking photographs in 1999 – and discovered she was drawn to taking pictures of youngsters. She explains: 'Children are a fascinating subject for me. At first, I only wanted to make good pictures. I didn't theorise about the pictures. That came later.'

'I started with my nephew because he was available. I'm not the kind of person who is happy approaching people on the street,' says Lux, who has

no children of her own. She continued to photograph the children of friends and relatives, rejecting commissions in order to focus on children that she found visually fascinating.

And that is Lux's real gift. She recognises the power of children and carefully chooses her models accordingly. Maria, perhaps her favourite model, radiates wisdom beyond her years with an all-knowing self-awareness, while the red-haired girl in the rose garden





possesses a distant gaze that takes us into a world we can only imagine.

'In my work, I combine photography, painting and digital technology,' she says. 'I spend a great deal of time arranging the photograph, in a way that is very similar to what a painter does on the canvas.'

'I start with a mental image, with a particular idea, which I then try to portray. I carefully select the clothes, the models and the backdrop [which she

often paints]. I have a few photo-sessions with the children and pick the best pictures and I then spend a great deal of time manipulating the image into what I want. It takes me three months to come up with a final image that I can get printed, but most of the time I don't get that far.'

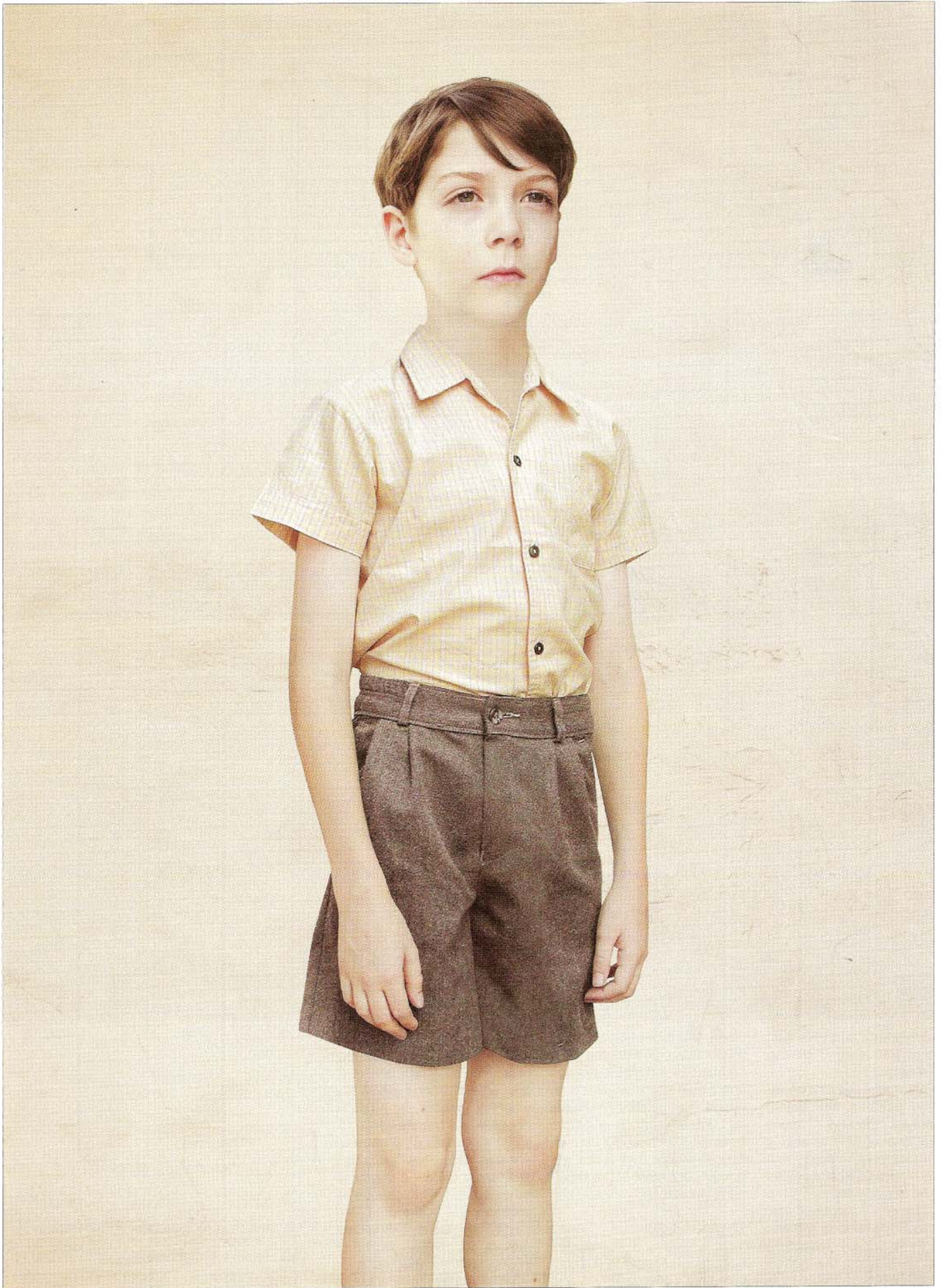
Digital age

'I started with a digital camera right away because for me conventional photography was

never a viable option. I want more control than simply depending on what's in front of the camera. I don't like to say what equipment I use – I don't get paid to advertise cameras, so why should I drop names,' she says, before letting slip that she uses a Leica – a Digilux in other words. The cheque is probably not in the post, but Lux hardly needs it. She sold almost \$5 million worth of prints in the last year alone.

What makes Lux's work so

'I spend a great deal of time arranging the photograph, in a way that is very similar to what a painter does on the canvas.'



Left: *The Boy*, 2001.
Right: *Girl with Crossed Arms*, 2001.

fascinating is its otherworldliness. This is partly due to the intensity of the children and the mystical emptiness of her backgrounds, but it is also down to the clothes in which she dresses her models. Featuring recognisable materials, nevertheless, they have an almost alien quality.

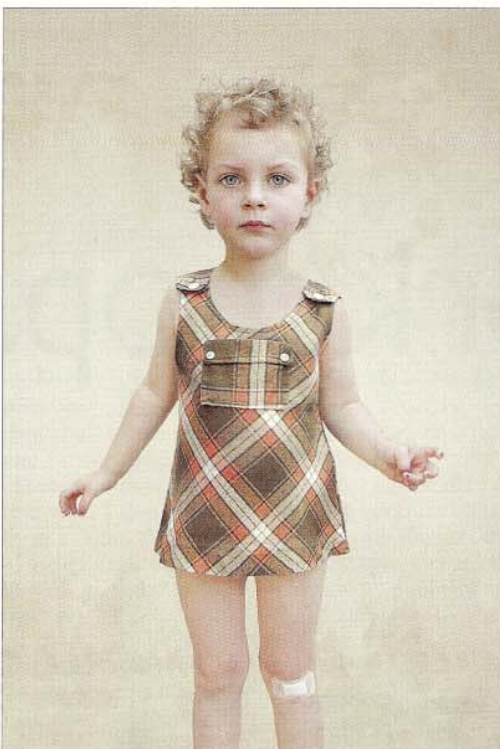
'I have them wearing these clothes because they suit the images,' explains Lux. 'I could not do a picture of a child wearing Adidas clothes. I was born in Dresden in the DDR and they are the kind of clothes I would wear when I was a child in the 1970s. In the DDR we were always 10 years behind everywhere else, so they look like clothes from the 1960s.'

So the *Study of a Girl* features a short sleeveless dress in a diagonal check of white, orange and sludgy green, a two-buttoned pocket on the chest. *The Boy* wears a flesh coloured shirt and a pair of shorts that make you itch just to look at them, while *Megumi* (not shown) wears a short-sleeved knitted top in baby blue under a matching sleeveless pocketed dress.

Despite the subject matter Lux says that her work is not about children. She describes them as metaphors for childhood, innocence and the lost paradise of childhood, adding: 'There are also things to do with my own childhood. Things like the teddy bear [in *Girl with a Teddy Bear*] are mine, so the pictures do have a lot to do with memory – especially with visual memory. The work is not autobiographical but I get inspiration from my memories of my own childhood. And like all Germans, I grew up with stories by the Brothers Grimm and Hans Christian Andersen, and they had a strong impact on my imagination.'

Lux's children seem embedded half in childhood and half in adulthood. They don't live in a Victorian-style state of innocence, but as mini-adults in their own right. 'In a child you can already see hints of the person he is to become and in the grown up you will find traces of the child he used to be,' she explains.

Right: *Study of a Girl 1*, 2001.



Standing pose

Lux carefully arranging her subjects' hands and props. One girl holds a loaf of bread, another (digitally manipulated into gripping the slippery creature) a fish. *The Bride* clasps her hands together, a girl in a tango-hued top has her arms crossed, while the red-haired girl in the green buckled dress hides them behind her back as she stands in her magical walled garden.

Sometimes, Lux changes the hand or head size altogether, transforming posture and pose into something very strange.

Particularly striking is *The Walk*. Featuring two girls in buckled shoes, these girls' heads are a shade too big for their shrunken bodies, and their shoulders a little too sloped. The children gaze, all-knowing and all-seeing at the camera, against a backdrop that is both harsh and unforgiving – perhaps like childhood itself.

'I wouldn't like to be a child again and have to depend on other people,' says Lux. 'There are no perfect parents and it's better to be in control of yourself I think. Children are beautiful, but childhood isn't.' **BJP**

To view

To see more of Loretta Lux's work, visit her website at www.lorettalux.de

Aperture Foundation recently published a collection of Lux's images in a book entitled *Loretta Lux*, (ISBN 1-931788-54-5). Featuring 40 four-colour illustrations, the book costs £20. For more information visit www.aperture.org.