





VILLAGE OF THE DAMNED

37-year-old German artist
LORETTA LUX
produces eerily composed
portraits of children that are as
charming as they are chilling.

Welcome to her
artificial pastoral.

BY EVE THEROND



WHITEWALL: *There is this aura of mystery hovering around you. Nobody seems to know your real name and, like your subjects, you give the feeling of being totally insulated. Is this image as calculated as your photo images?*

LORETTA LUX: What I enjoy most is working. I'm not much of a public person. I don't go out often, and prefer to put all of my energy into my work.

WW: *Loretta Lux was quite unlike any student I've ever had," Gerd Winner, your art professor at Munich's Akademie der Bildenden Künste, said of you. "It was as if she had no past." Do you hate your past? Do you refuse your own childhood? What was it like growing up in East Germany? Were you an introverted child? To what degree can you compare your childhood with those of your subjects? Do you see yourself in them? Can we say it is an attempt to make a self-portrait,*

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Loretta Lux
 ...
 The Rose Garden
 2001
 Ifochrome print
 Courtesy Yossi Milo Gallery, NY

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Loretta Lux
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 The Irish Girls
 2005
 Ifochrome print
 Courtesy Yossi Milo Gallery, NY

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Loretta Lux
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 The Walk
 2004
 Ifochrome print
 Courtesy Yossi Milo Gallery, NY

as if you were trying to photograph this Loretta that you've lost, this Loretta with "no past"?

LL: I don't consider my work autobiographical, yet whenever an artist creates a piece, they are invariably influenced by their own experiences and visual memories. In Communist Germany, I grew up in a very restricted world. As a small child I didn't know anything about it, but as a pupil I started to understand and resent the fact that I was imprisoned in East Germany with, as it seemed then, no chance to get out. I didn't want to be a little Communist and sing Soviet songs. But I count myself lucky that I was still young when the Wall came down and that, as a result, I have the freedom to express myself now.

WW: *Why do you dress your subjects with vintage clothes from your own childhood?*



**“ I DIDN'T WANT TO BE
A LITTLE COMMUNIST
AND SING SOVIET SONGS ”**



LL: The clothes are a personal choice and I have certain preferences when it comes to deciding on their shape and color. My mother and grandmother had very good taste and always dressed me nicely.

WW: *For someone who likes to hide in the shadows, who is as secretive as her subjects, you have received a great deal of attention from the media over the last few years, and you've become a collector's darling. How do you deal with it?*

LL: I'm happy and honored that so many people connect with my work and respond strongly to it. I'm gratified that the reaction has been so positive, and I'm flattered by the articles and reviews in the United States, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and elsewhere. Although I began this body of work in 1999, for the first few years I was not interested in showing it. I wanted to wait to share the work when I was ready. It was not until 2003, when I met my gallerist, Yossi Milo, that I made the decision to show the work.

WW: *How did you first meet Yossi Milo?*

LL: Yossi first contacted me in the spring of 2003.

WW: *Was it the turning point of your career?*

LL: It surely was.

WW: *How did he convince you to be represented by him?*

LL: He felt passionately about the work and we spoke about it a great deal over a period of time. I was impressed by his eloquence and his passion for art in general and my work in particular.

WW: *As a Lucie and ICP Infinity awards recipient, you've become one of the hottest names in photography in a remarkably short time, although I'm not sure why your work is thought of as photography rather than more generally as art.*

LL: The work has been seen both as photography and as art. It's just that some people make distinctions between different types of media such as painting, photography, sculpture, and film.

WW: *Do you remember the first time you held a camera?*

LL: My grandfather gave me a camera when I was a schoolgirl, but I didn't use it much at the time. In the DDR we didn't have proper color film. The colors in the film available were horrible — predominantly green and blue.

WW: *What is the power of a photograph to you?*

LL: Photography can preserve time and beauty. I love pictures. To me, taking pictures means appreciating the visual world.

WW: *Would you have taken on photography in 1999 if digital alterations weren't possible at that time?*

LL: Coming from a painting perspective, conventional photography was never a viable option for me. I prefer having complete control over the image rather than being forced to depend upon what is in front of the camera.

WW: *You seem to enjoy standing out from the pack. Would you let yourself be photographed? If so, whom would you choose?*

LL: I prefer to be behind the camera and to choose the moment of exposure myself. As a photographer, I know too well how different one can look in a photograph taken by somebody else. I think I'm too conscious to be a model, although I would have found it interesting to be photographed by August Sander.

WW: *I've read that your inspiration came from works by Bronzino, van Eyck, Velázquez, Runge, and Boecklin, but a fan of yours noticed a strange similitude with Modigliani's paintings. Both have the same graceful, melancholy, and alluring images. While Modigliani's sitters display fin-de-siècle quiet and Romanticism's ennui, your subjects are contemporary, easier to compare with robotic clones and the past-vogue brand of cool sophistication; still both the models manifest this awkwardness when assuming adult-like poses.*

LL: I like Modigliani very much, but I have to leave it to the audience to draw comparisons. Painting has had the greatest impact on my work and I continue to be influenced by the history of the medium. However, this does not mean I'm

interested in doing Old Master art. In fact, my means are very modern and I take advantage of any technology that suits me in order to get the results that I want.

WW: *Study of a Boy, No. 1 was on the cover of New York magazine for a story on toddler therapy. Have you worked for any other publications?*

LL: The photograph that appeared was not a commission. The work was created independently. I have received many offers from magazines, and even more for advertising, but I am not interested in doing commercial work. As an artist, it is not my job to promote yogurt or washing powder. Art and advertising are two different things. Advertising is for selling a product and I believe that art should not function to sell products.

WW: *Do you always have to create an allegory in your work, put some kind of masquerade or drama into it? Do you think without it an image lacks of intensity?*



Loretta Lux
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Martha
2004
Itochrome print
Courtesy Yossi Milo Gallery, NY

Loretta Lux
...
Marianne
2004
Itochrome print
Courtesy Yossi Milo Gallery, NY





Loetta Lux

...

Green Room

2005

Monochrome print

Courtesy: Yvea Mito Gallery, NY



LL: I don't consider this to be an important issue in my work.

WW: *In your last series of photographs, some images of two look-alike children are all the more disturbing in that they remind us of cloning. Is that on purpose?*

LL: If you are referring to the image Sasha and Ruby, they are not digital clones. They are real, fabulous twins. Twins are fascinating subjects but are very difficult to capture. I've always admired the famous Diane Arbus twins as well as the amazing *Country Girls* by August Sander.

WW: *Unlike some of your fellow German photographers, instead of blowing up images and choosing to follow the trend of making large-scale photographs, you chose to favor a more intimate size. I think the scale plays a large part in your work. Because your images are small, the viewer has to lean in to notice things like eerily blue eyes or porcelain lips. Is the scale your way to hook us in?*

LL: The scale doesn't make a picture. I believe that a good picture works in all sizes and that, conversely, a bad picture fails to work regardless of its size. I simply don't feel the need to attract attention by blowing up images.

WW: *I understand that you are the one who decides the prices of your work, which range from \$13,500 to \$19,500 in edition sizes of 20.*

LL: Pictures have multiple meanings and they frequently refer to other images, to life, and to the imagination. I consider my work to be pictorial art, but pictorial art is not necessarily narrative. I don't try to tell a story but prefer to leave things open and somewhat ambiguous. I want the viewer to draw his or her own meaning. If meaning is forced on the viewer, he or she is likely to lose interest anyway.

WW: *What exactly do you look for in your photographs?*

LL: I want to make good pictures: that is my primary aim. I don't actively try to pursue a story or a feeling. For the most part, I am concerned with composition and the pictorial structure.

WW: *Do the children's bored looks come from the fact that they don't like to sit for hours in a white studio, or is it you who directs that with careful instructions?*

LL: Usually I give precise instructions. Sometimes I get the result I want, sometimes I don't. It depends on the child, the day, and the mood.

WW: *Do you try to speak to your viewers' insecurities? These feelings of being different or of just not fitting in? Those thoughts like "I hate my forehead," "My lips are too thin," or "My head is too big for my body"...*

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Loretta Lux
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At the Window
2004
Itochrome print
Courtesy Yossi Milo Gallery, NY

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Loretta Lux
...
The Drummer
2004
Itochrome print
Courtesy Yossi Milo Gallery, NY

LL: I discuss the pricing with my dealer in great detail. An important factor for the pricing is the fact that I produce very little. There have been years where I released only five or six images, like in 2002 and 2003. My artistic process is very time-consuming and much closer to painting than to conventional photography even though the final product is a photographic print.

WW: *How much time do you spend on an image?*

LL: I spend an average of three months on a single image. The process of creating the work is very complicated and much closer to painting.

WW: *Your success clearly derives from an ability to evoke a fairy-tale-like "otherness," as if otherworldly, ethereal creatures from another planet inhabited children's bodies. Do you think adulthood is too heavy a burden? Does our society need to escape from the system it created? Is an imaginary sci-fi future more enjoyable than our present?*

LL: I'm not dealing with science fiction at all. The world is absurd, which wouldn't be so bad if it weren't cruel as well. Life is a mystery to me and that is how I treat the creation of my pictures. **WW**

Loretta Lux is represented by Yossi Milo Gallery, NY



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