

Weekend FINE ARTS LEISURE

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ART IN REVIEW

Loretta Lux

*Yossi Milo Gallery
552 West 24th Street, Chelsea
Through March 6*

Loretta Lux, a German-born painter living in Ireland who has turned to photography, is making some of the weirdest, most subtly manipulated pictures of our over-digitalized moment. The subjects of her large color photographs are actual children, whose images have been extensively tweaked and inserted almost seamlessly into pieced-together settings, parts of which have been painted and scanned into the computer by the artist.

The children's heads have been slightly enlarged, their skin porcelainized, their eyes given a glasslike vividness. Their outfits are sometimes color coordinated with the surrounding sky or a rose garden. Or they are seen against walls whose unusual tactility may include visible brushstrokes or, in the case of "Study of a Boy 2," handdrawn images. The poses and compositions draw from the history of painting — Ghirlandaio, Bronzino, Goya and Balthus, for example.

Like the set-up photographers of the early 1980's, Ms. Lux is trying to give photographs a different physicality, which is difficult. Initially, her images have a spellbinding gravity: the children are emotionally complicated creatures, at once self-knowing and innocent; the contrasting surfaces and textures almost have real weight. But so far the work fails to evade some glaringly familiar conventions — the cloying preciousness of Victorian children's portraiture and contemporary advertising.

ROBERTA SMITH