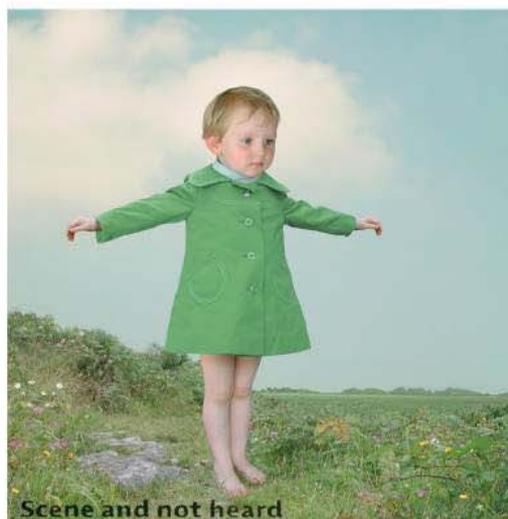


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LITTLE GIRL LOST

32 The cult German artist and photographer Loretta Lux creates strangely unsettling images of children. By Kate Salter





Are they paintings or photographs? Real or fantasy? In Loretta Lux's gently surreal portraits of children, nothing is quite what it seems. By Kate Salter

Little girl lost



This page, clockwise from top: *The Wanderer* (2003); *Isabella* (2000); *The Fish* (2003); *The Blue Dress* (2001). Left: *The Rose Garden* (2001)

The pouty little redhead striking a moody pose, the pensive schoolgirl daydreaming in a field, the angelic blonde gazing out of a celestial sky and the other wistful pictures on these pages are the work of Loretta Lux, a German photographer who describes her pictures as 'imaginary portraits dealing with the idea of childhood'. Lux, 34, whose work is currently on show in New York, is quickly gaining a reputation as one of the most exciting photographers around. Her images are created using photography, painting and digital tinkering. She photographs the child then places the resulting image on a backdrop that she has painted or photographed separately. On most of Lux's images the colours, and sometimes the children's features, are digitally altered. 'The background of *The Wanderer* [left, top] is a photograph I took somewhere in the Pyrenees,' she explains. 'In *Isabella* [above] I had in mind that turquoise sky you see in medieval paintings, so I used the computer to recreate it.'

Lux trained at the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich and says she still feels more like a painter than a photographer. 'I use different media, but I still think as a painter. I organise my forms and colours on a screen like a painter does on a canvas.' ►



The Boy (2001)

Lux was born and grew up in Dresden where she lived with her grandparents (her father left when she was very young and her mother worked full-time). 'I had my first encounter with art at a very early stage. My grandparents took me to all the museums and galleries in Dresden and we looked at the old masters

together. There wasn't much contemporary art in the old Eastern Bloc except Socialist Realism propaganda and my grandparents hated that. I clearly remember the reproductions I had hanging in my room of Velázquez's *Infanta Maria Theresa*, a beautiful sketch by Rubens of his baby son and Raeburn's *Boy with a Rabbit*.'

She started experimenting with photography in 1999. She began with a self-portrait (in which she looks rather like a 21st-century Louise Brooks, with her sleek black bob and cool stare) but shortly afterwards decided to concentrate on children. 'Children are good subjects because they are very genuine,' she says. 'They are not as concerned with how they want to come across, in the way adults are.' Nearly all her subjects – ranging from two to 12 years old – are the children of friends (Lux does not have any herself). She takes hundreds of pictures of a child during at least one session. She usually asks the child to wear clothes she has chosen, but contends with surprisingly few tantrums. 'Most of the girls love dressing up and posing but some of the boys have to be persuaded. The girl in *The Fish* [bottom of previous page] didn't like having to hold the fish at all. She found it so disgusting she kept dropping it. Finally I had to add it with the computer. Hopefully I won't

have caused her trauma in later life – her mother did tell me that she had a bad dream afterwards.' She says her young subjects are always pleased with the final image. 'Even if they look very different in the picture,

'The girl found the fish so disgusting she kept dropping it, so I added it by computer'

they always seem to like it. And I always invite them to my openings.'

Lux says the feeling of isolation and displacement in the pictures is deliberate. 'They look lost because that is how I see life. I think we are all a bit lost, lost in a world we can't understand.' It may also have something to do with Lux's own situation. In December last year she and her husband moved from Munich to live in a tiny fishing village near Dublin. She says she is still getting used to it but thinks she has made the right choice. 'I love Germany but it's a miserable place. I read a survey about where in the world people are unhappiest: Germany came second.' ●

Loretta Lux is at the *Yossi Milo Gallery*, 552 West 24th Street, New York (001 212 414 0370; www.yossimilogallery.com) until 6 March