

# TIME

## Innovators

**Lens Crafters.** Photographs can brood, dance, fool, enchant. A new crop of creators makes them do all that—and much more



*The Waiting Girl, 2006*

### Loretta Lux

With the right models and deft computer work, her images both haunt and intrigue



**HYPNOTIST** Stare into the eyes of a Loretta Lux portrait long enough, and you're bound to feel both completely mesmerized and completely spooked. Lux's starkly pale, prepubescent subjects haunt the viewer from inside the image as if they were hiding some terrible secret. Remarkably captivating yet exceedingly eerie—the formula has turned the German photographer into an art-world phenom, earned her the coveted Infinity Award for Art from the International Center of Photography and made her a millionaire.

A former painter, Lux, 38, brings her images to life with the attention to form, shape and color that she learned at the easel. The artistry begins at the photo shoot, but her signature style—the brushstrokes of her new medium—comes later, at the computer. First she strips out the background and replaces it with a quiet setting—a grassy field, an abandoned building—from her personal stash of paintings and

pictures. Then she erases any object that crowds the picture, like a tree or toy, so the child appears to be part of a dream. "I don't care about traditional photography," Lux says. "I want more control."

Lux started taking children's portraits nearly eight years ago, when she shot a couple of rolls of film of her nephew. It took her only one day with that little boy to realize what comes across so vividly in her work: children are the perfect subjects to photograph. "They have no reservations," she says. "They are the most honest models."

But exactly what her portraits are supposed to mean remains a mystery, and Lux doesn't offer many clues, saying only that the images, which can take up to a year to complete, are less about the subjects than they are a metaphor for the idea of childhood. "I want people to decide what to see," she says. Whatever they do decide, they're not likely to forget it.

—BY CAROLYN SAYRE



## Photography

PHOTOGRAPH: LORETTA LUX



### Loretta Lux's best shot 'Dorothea and the cat are waiting for eternity. The cat cooperated very nicely'

I took this picture last year. It is one of the few pictures I can elaborate on, but I don't really want to tell too much because it would spoil the image. It's a picture about time, and timelessness. The girl and the cat are frozen in time. For me, they are sitting on the sofa as if they are waiting for eternity.

The model is a girl called Dorothea, the daughter of friends of mine. I have worked with her many times, starting when she was only two years old. She has this kind of aristocratic look, like you find in the paintings of Velázquez.

I started with an idea about a girl sitting on a sofa and waiting for nothing in particular, and the cat came into the idea later. I love cats, and I had tried to incorporate cats into my images for a long time and never managed it, but this time it worked extremely well.

I think a professional photographer would find my studio very uncomplicated. I don't use many kinds of lighting, but producing this picture was a long process. From the idea to

the finished image took two months. I took some time photographing the cat; you can't plan exactly how animals will pose, but the cat cooperated very nicely.

However, I did have to repeat the shoot several times, and I retouched it on the computer as well. I need to have control over images, and I take a lot of care with the composition. I take time organising the forms and colours. I also save versions of an image and compare them and analyse why one is better than the other. I spend a great deal of time doing that.

I trained as a painter, and I still love painting, but eventually I became aware that the physical aspect of painting didn't really suit me. I didn't enjoy working in the medium. It's very messy. I prefer to have it clean, with a nice computer.

*Interview by Leo Benedictus*

### Curriculum vitae

**Born:** Dresden, 1969

**Studied:** Academy of Visual Arts, Munich (painting and art) 1990-96

**Career high:** Receiving the Infinity Award for Art from the International Center of Photography in 2005

**Career low:** Not being allowed to go to art school in East Germany

**Inspirations:** August Sander, but I draw my main inspiration from the history of painting, and especially from Bronzino, Velázquez and Runge

**Pet hate:** Carrying a camera

**Ambition:** Creating an amazing cat portrait of art-historical value

**Dream subject:** I don't really have one, because I don't really take pictures – I create them at my leisure

