Lise Sarfati’s Facinating Photos of Women on the Edge

By Paul Laster, Friday November 2, 2012

Lise Sarfati sees the world through a cinematic lens. Her saturated photographs of modern women look like Hollywood film stills from the golden era. “I choose people for their energy and aura,” the French photographer told the Guardian in a video interview earlier this year. Whether she’s capturing disillusioned young women in the streets of Los Angeles for her latest On Hollywood series, that was recently on view at Yossi Milo Gallery in New York, or documenting four related women in everyday settings in Oakland, San Francisco, LA, and Phoenix for her series She, which Twin Palms Publishers released as an expansive monograph this past summer, Sarfati constructs visual narratives of the psychological sort.

Young women that were lured to Hollywood by dreams of success now look forlorn, while a family of two youthful sisters, their mother, and her sister strike melancholic poses in mundane surroundings that become ripe with new meaning. Utilizing obsolete Kodachrome 64, the kind of film used for Technicolor movies, the self-taught, Magnum photographer creates a powerful sense of mystery with just a single frame. Click through to see some of our favorite photos from On Hollywood and She.
Lise Sarfati, Gina #34, Oakland, CA, 2009, from the series She.


Lise Sarfati, Heather #03, Lemon Grove Avenue, 2009, from the series On Hollywood.


Lise Sarfati, Sasha #20, Emeryville, CA, 2007, from the series She.


Lise Sarfati, Sloane #62, Oakland, CA, 2005, from the series She.


http://www.flavorwire.com/335746/lise-sarfatis-fascinating-photos-of-women-on-the-edge?all=1
GALLERIES—CHELSEA

Short List

LISE SARFATI: Milo, 245 Tenth Ave., at 24th St. 212-414-0370. Opens Sept. 6.

AFTER THE AUDITIONS STOP We’ve heard the story a million times: Fresh-faced girl ditches her boring hometown for Hollywood, then encounters a far more depressing reality. But how does this cliché translate to real-life women? Lise Sarfati used her last remaining rolls of Kodachrome 64—the film whose supersaturated palette and fine grain evoke the color photographs of the forties—then went searching for subjects. She found them: standing in front of abandoned cinemas, shacked up in dingy motels, puffing away at smokes. Never demeaning or pathetic, these portraits show resilience and a willingness to give up everything to chase a dream, no matter how unlikely it is to come true (opens September 6 at Yossi Milo).

MIRANDA SIEGEL

CHICAGO

LISE SARFATI
Yossi Milo, 245 Tenth Ave., nr. 24th St. (212-414-0370)
Sarfati’s latest series, On Hollywood, focuses on the women who were lured to L.A. with dreams of success but now struggle with harsher realities; 9/6–10/13.
SEPTEMBER 7, 2012

LISE SARFATI ON THE MARGINS OF HOLLYWOOD
POSTED BY SUZANNE SHAHEEN


This week’s issue includes a Lise Sarfati photograph from her exhibition “On Hollywood,” which opened this week at Yossi Milo gallery. The eighteen colored photographs featured in the show explore a subculture of women who moved to Los Angeles with dreams of Hollywood stardom that never came to pass. Sarfati captures her subjects in desolate areas of the city, including parking lots and motels, evoking both a glamorous melancholy and a mundane unease.

All photographs by Lise Sarfati/Courtesy Yossi Milo gallery.

http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/photobooth/2012/09/lise-sarfati-on-hollywood.html#slide_ss_0=1
Heather #03, Lemon Grove Avenue, 2009

Ajibike, La Bajig Avenue, 2010

Brianna, Sunset & Vista, 2009

http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/photobooth/2012/09/lise-sarfati-on-hollywood.html#slide_ss_0=1
Elisabeth, North West Corner Sunset & Poinsettia, 2010

Meghan, Pool #07, 2009

Kelly, South Alvarado Street, 2010

http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/photobooth/2012/09/lise-sarfati-on-hollywood.html#slide_ss_0=1
Zee, Fairfax & Willoughby, 2010

Crisse, 6722 Sunset Blvd, 2010

Malaika #13, North Sunset Blvd, 2010

http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/photobooth/2012/09/lise-sarfati-on-hollywood.html#slide_ss_0=1
"My series 'On Hollywood' shows women who really live in Los Angeles. They probably came to project themselves in the Hollywood landscape and to take advantage of the possibilities of success in this landscape. Hollywood interested me more for the concept of landscape as fantasy."
“They are very real, and in different ways, they seem to be the targets of strange fatality. They shine in a very peculiar way. Like Pier Paolo Pasolini’s fireflies.”

Lisa Sarioti, 2012
François Adragna: What is a photographic series?
Lise Sarfati: It is a set of photographs which are linked to each other and which create a whole. Something which shuts us in and in which we cannot find the exit. It is also a way of thinking. A form.

FA: Is ‘On Hollywood’ a series?
LS: On Hollywood is a series. But each photograph can be looked at individually. It is a series because the images interrelate and reinforce the photographic form.

FA: When did you start this series?
LS: I started it in 2009 and finished it in 2010.

FA: The colors and texture of your photographs have a particular quality. What film did you use?
LS: I worked with Kodachrome 64 transparency film. The rolls were sent to Kansas in the only laboratory which still developed this film. I never saw the results immediately. I realized that this element of not seeing, not knowing, was a determining factor. This situation: where I had to wait and did not know brought me back to the mystery I felt when I discovered photography at the age of 13. A revelation, but after the fact. This Kodachrome film stock is also the one used in Hollywood movies of the 1940s. I wanted to complete the loop and end the story of Kodachrome film on Hollywood. I used this outmoded film stock in the context of Hollywood, which is at the peak of technological advancement and colossal production costs.

I was not part of a huge Hollywood production but on a boulevard where I photographed real women (without paying them, this I insist on in my work) who are considered outsiders. Their weaknesses became their strength, raising them to the rank of anti-heroes.

It is true that film, photography and video have surpassed painting and sculpture and that it may seem odd to return to Kodachrome slides when analog film, photography and video have been overtaken by the digital format. But it is precisely this paradox which interested me.

One often wrongfully compares photographs to paintings. This is nonsense. The image does not refer to painting but to something alive through which passes silence...
FA: Finally, why not a movie?
LS: Because of the silence and stillness, because of the power of the fixed image and its circulation as an object.

FA: ‘On Hollywood’ is the boulevard but it is also movies?
LS: Everything transits through the image. We are shaped by the image. We need to try and have a critical gaze on the image. My series On Hollywood shows women who really live in Los Angeles. They probably came to project themselves in the Hollywood landscape and to take advantage of the possibilities of success in this landscape. But everyone knows this story. It is a current affair. Hollywood interested me more for the concept of landscape as fantasy. These women smoked in general. They are mostly dancers or actresses waiting for a part.

FA: Why smoking?
LS: Because smoking in the United States of America and in California is a revolutionary act. To show that one does not care, that one does what one pleases despite obvious health risks, is already an act of protest. What seems strange is that these women need to be outdoors to smoke whereas smoking, for me, was always something that took place during a romantic or friendly encounter, or we simply smoked as teenagers, sitting around a table talking. To have to be outside, on the boulevard, in the forgotten landscape of Hollywood to smoke seemed astonishing.
Everyone was behind the wheel of their car. These women did not have enough money to buy a car. I met Adjibike at midnight. I was photographing another woman in a parking lot. She came by in a pair of shorts. She was muscular and walked fast. She handed me her card in a decisive way, as if it was something obvious... She also wanted to become an image...
I also remembered that Hollywood actresses in the 1940s and 1950s always smoke in movies.
FA: Who are these women?
LS: These are women who work in Hollywood: saleswomen, dancers, strippers, junkies, fetishists, unknown actresses, out-of-towners, lost... Women at the end of their rope. Many identify themselves with actresses or famous people. In fact I understood that they identified themselves with images. Malaïka was similar to Marilyn Monroe even if she did not say it. She was always expecting us to make the connection though. She had many of Marilyn’s attitudes: her giddiness, mood swings which would go from very sad to artificial joy... Elizabeth wore a tattoo with the date of Queen Elizabeth’s death. Her face, her makeup, the thinness of her eyebrows and her pale skin were reminiscent of the Queen mother and the imagery linked to her representation...

FA: How would you define the Hollywood landscape?
LS: The Hollywood landscape is elastic. Timeless. The 1930s, the 1950s, the 1970s. A series of locations without end, all real, accumulated next to each other. Or images of locations which stream by you on the boulevards. I was always told that Hollywood was dirty and full of junkies. Maybe this was behind the scenes: a masked landscape where thousands of women with eye-opening stories were hiding.

FA: How was the idea for the series conceived?
LS: In 2003, when I travelled across the United States to create The New Life, I decided to return to Los Angeles to photograph the women I passed by on the boulevard. It was unconscious, just a desire. But the idea took several years to grow and take on a precise form. Although they were photographed in the Hollywood landscape, I wanted the series to give the impression that these women felt at home there, like they were in their bedrooms, lost in thought.
FA: How did this idea evolve and how did you materialize it?
LS: When I spent a year in Aix en Provence, in the southeast of France, I was part of a group of situationists which was very theoretical. The concept of psycho-geographical wandering, created by Guy Debord, was our main activity. Guy Debord defines psycho-geography as the study of the precise effects of geographical surroundings on the emotional behavior of individuals. And wandering is a technique to experience brief sojourns in a variety of atmospheres.
In Los Angeles I wandered through Hollywood. I stayed several months. I did not wander like a director of photography or an artist seeking new locations. I just tried to find places where I felt good physically, places which affected my emotional behavior. These places were street corners, bits of sidewalk and small spaces... I returned ten, twenty, fifty times to the same place.
I stayed for a long time on the corner where we see Elizabeth near a shop where they sell grass and near a tobacco shop. All of a sudden, Elizabeth, whom I did not know, arrived. I asked her if I could photograph her. She told me she would be back. I saw her get into the back seat of a car. Two men were in the front, one of them at the wheel. The car disappeared. I figured she took off with some dealers. She returned and I photographed her. She seemed quite scared. She was thin. She wore a pendant with a small butterfly. She had braces on her teeth that fascinated me because of her age... I took my photograph quickly. I had the feeling she was going to fall over she looked so fragile... Then she said she had to leave, I asked if we could see each other again, she said: “Yes.” We made an appointment on Hollywood Boulevard and she finally never showed up.

FA: Did you encounter any difficulties?
LS: Creating a series is always like standing in front of a chain of mountains of difficulties and overcoming them...

FA: The uniqueness of your work is based on the gaze. It reminds me of Roland Barthes who said: “The gaze, if it insists (if it lasts, if it traverses, with the photograph, Time) the gaze is always potentially crazy: it is at once the effect of truth and the effect of madness.”
LS: Truth and madness. Subjectivity. No, I think I first start with a subjective mental image and I try to make it cross through reality, I project it on the outside world. I expect from the viewer, that they will project their subjectivity into the image as well. Also, I hate explaining my work. It is made to be looked at.

FA: Your rhythm could be defined as an oscillation between the character and the landscape but we never really know which one you choose...
LS: Yes, I try to vacillate from one to the other... It is a construction which resembles me. It is also an idea or a way of life.
I began with the concept of psychogeographical dérive, an approach analyzed by the French writer Guy Debord.

He defined psychogeography as the study of the precise effects of geographical surroundings on the emotions and behavior of individuals.

This dérive is the process I used to experience brief stays in a variety of atmospheres. In Los Angeles I drifted through Hollywood, staying several months. I did not scout locations like a director of photography or an artist hungry for new surroundings. I strove to find places where I would feel good physically, places that would affect me emotionally.

These places were street corners, sidewalk strips, recesses. Nothing extraordinary; on the contrary, very often quite banal.

My series “On Hollywood” shows women who really live in Los Angeles. They probably came to project themselves in the Hollywood landscape and to take advantage of the possibilities of success in this landscape. Hollywood interested me more for the concept of landscape as fantasy.

They are very real, and in different ways they seem to be the targets of a strange fatality. They shine in a very peculiar way. Like Pier Paolo Pasolini’s fireflies.

Lise Sarfati is a French-born photographer who lives in the United States. Her upcoming exhibitions “On Hollywood” and “She” will be at the Rose Gallery in Los Angeles.
Rosegallery, Los Angeles is presenting back to back exhibitions of *On Hollywood* and *She*, confirming Lise Sarfati’s talent and status among the small circle of French artists who have successfully exported their work.


While *She* is an intimate and complex game of mirrors between four women, two times two sisters, *On Hollywood* focuses on the landscape. The two series follow one another but are not alike. They are part of a puzzle Lise Sarfati is patiently, endlessly creating. The female characters share certain traits: they are both fragile and strong, they live on the fringe of society, they project themselves in a reality only they seem to have the key to. For *On Hollywood* the encounters took place using a precise approach. The women in this series are vulnerable but they are women who are struggling for their survival: dancers, junkies, actresses looking for a part, out-of-towners. Sarfati chose these women for their personalities, their auras, their marginal lifestyles. “They are real and it is their emotional dimension which attracted me to them.” One has the feeling that these women float through life like ghosts. There is never a direct gaze into the lens. “The viewer is the only one watching and letting his or her eye wander on the surface of the image. This gives the image its own autonomy. The women are as essential as the landscape.” She chooses her locations without a camera, only using her eye, returning numerous times to the same place because she feels comfortable there.

The simplicity of the boulevard amazes her.

For this series, Lise Sarfati used Kodachrome 64 film stock which was used in Hollywood movies of the 1940s. It is the last photographic series made with this stock which ceased being produced in June 2009. The last rolls were processed in December 2010.

This series refers as much to the films of David Lynch and Wim Wenders as to the photographs of William Eggleston (for the color) or Harry Callahan (especially his series of street portraits called: *Women Lost in Thought*). But Lise Sarfati has completely assimilated these influences. Her strong visual signature, linked to a feeling of interiority, is both modern and identifiable as her own. And the beauty and accuracy of her work make us follow her willingly.

In France, the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BNF) is preparing a retrospective of her work for 2014. A book on the series *She* is due in the spring or summer of 2012 (Twin Palms Publisher).
Emily, 2860 Sunset Blvd, 2010 © Lise Sarfati, Courtesy Lise Sarfati, ROSEGALLERY, los angeles

Malaika #09, Corner 7th Street & Spring, 2010 © Lise Sarfati, Courtesy Lise Sarfati, ROSEGALLERY, los angeles

Vinny-Ann, Hollywood Blvd, 2010 © Lise Sarfati, Courtesy Lise Sarfati, ROSEGALLERY, los angeles

Kelly, South Alvarado Street, 2010 © Lise Sarfati, Courtesy Lise Sarfati, ROSEGALLERY, los angeles

Heather #03, Lemon Grove Avenue, 2009 © Lise Sarfati, Courtesy Lise Sarfati, ROSEGALLERY, los angeles

Crisse, 6722 Sunset Blvd, 2010 © Lise Sarfati, Courtesy Lise Sarfati, ROSEGALLERY, los angeles

Danna Hollywood Blvd, 2010 © Lise Sarfati, Courtesy Lise Sarfati, ROSEGALLERY, los angeles

http://lejournaldelaphotographie.com/archives/by_date/2012-02-28/5777/lise-sarfati-on-hollywood
Since 2003, Lise Sarfati has been traveling across the United States, particularly on the west coast, photographing adolescents and women against the vernacular of the American landscape. The exhibitions On Hollywood and She, opening Feb. 25 and March 31, respectively, at Rose Gallery in Los Angeles, juxtapose subjects against an allegorical landscape that shifts between the real and the fictional. On Hollywood focuses on Los Angeles, while She explores Oakland, but both touch on the notion of fluidity within feminine identity. “I wanted to represent a woman who is both vulnerable and strong, oscillating between promise and despair,” Sarfati said of her inspirations. “I wanted to give these women a voice, or rather, an image.”

Created from 2009 to 2010, On Hollywood features young women against the backdrop of Hollywood—a fabled place that during its golden era represented the hopes and dreams of aspiring stars. The girls are often pictured in classic Hollywood spaces, dressed casually, but they appear as if caught in an off moment. Sarfati is very precise about who she photographs. The girls juggle multiple jobs—most are dancers. “They are always in motion, and have a particularly difficult life where dependencies on men and drugs merge,” Sarfati says. “[They are] women at the mercy of a strange fate.” The landscape of Hollywood is barren. The women appear lost, unaware of the viewer’s gaze and immersed in their own illusions of the Hollywood myth.

Sarfati’s earlier series, She, created between 2005 and 2009, is an exploration of two sets of sisters: Christine and Gina, as well as Christine’s daughters, Sasha and Sloane. The series documents their relationships during a period of transition. At the time, Sasha and Sloane had moved from the conservatism of their grandparents’ home to an alternative lifestyle in their mother’s Oakland loft. In an period of re-invention and under the careful gaze of Sarfati’s lens, the girls try to find their identities—Sloane often changes her appearance and seems to enjoy being photographed whereas Sasha, when pictured, is pensive and almost melancholic. “The sisters are isolated, they are alone,” Sarfati says, “It’s the fusion of these four solitudes that creates the series and the story.”

The two older sisters, Christine and Gina, are also also searching. “The mother, Christine, as she appears in my photographs, is threatening, terrifying, but also mysterious and fascinating. She is no longer protective. She is strong. She is independent,” Sarfati says. The older pair of sisters change their hair styles and jobs. Christine is pictured gazing absently in a wedding dress—all four women are constantly in flux. “The women in She reflect one another until you can no longer tell them apart. The only gaze possible is the gaze of the images between themselves,” Sarfati said. “I don’t particularly like mises en scènes. I prefer the search for truth.”
LISE SARFATI
This Paris-based photographer has been working in the U.S. recently, but her earlier pictures from Russia haven’t been exhibited here before, and they help put the newer material into perspective. Like a number of her contemporaries, Sarfati juxtaposes portraits, interiors, and landscapes to build both a larger picture and a mood—in this case, one of dissolution, isolation, and ennui that edges into desperation. The young men and women in her photographs appear to be both stuck and drifting; the environments, if not outright ruins, are so grimy and makeshift they could be stage sets. This might be mistaken for realism, but it’s something much more complex and compelling. Through Dec. 6. (Milo, 525 W. 25th St. 212-414-0370.)
LISE SARFATI’S PORTRAITS

JOEL STERNFELD AND
ALLAN GURGANUS AT THE BEACH

GODFREY REGGIO’S FILMS:
BALANCE, TRANSITION, WAR

PAOLO VENTURA: WWII RECREATIONS

VINCE ALETTI ON ART DIRECTION
AND PHOTOGRAPHY: SHOW MAGAZINE

CLEAR-CUT FORESTS
BY ROBERT ADAMS
Lise Sarfati

Yossi Milo

The subjects of Lise Sarfati’s series of color photographs “The New Life” share a similarly blank detachment. None of the attractive young women (and a few young men) look at the camera, even when they face it directly. Instead, their gazes are focused slightly away, and judging from their expressions, their thoughts are far removed from the cluttered bedrooms and darkened living rooms in which they were photographed. From the titles of the works, we learn the sitters’ names and where they live: college towns like Berkeley and Portland that are home to a certain class of educated liberals. Most seem to be in their teens or just beyond. Many are photographed in what look to be their parents’ houses.

The subjects arrange themselves sulkily, dressed in clothing ranging from the awkwardly innocent (a heart-covered bathrobe, a full-length dress like a pioneer woman might have worn) to the mildly goth (a fishnet top, a long red wig). Their eccentric outfits suggest they are home alone. Dierdre #20, Oakland, California (2003) rests her chin on a table in a dark wood-paneled dining room, black nail polish on her outstretched fingers. With little revealed about the sitters, the photographs seem somewhat uninteresting at first, but upon close scrutiny they begin to evoke the restlessness that is part of being a teenager, stuck where you are and longing to be somewhere else.

Color is important in these photographs. Sarfati uses blue-grays and patches of pure, intense red to give the series a feeling of coolness and underlying emotion. With their distant stares, her subjects look as if they are listening to something faint and far away. Like the title of the series, the images suggest the emergence of an inner life and the isolation that accompanies it.

—Rebecca Robertson
GALLERIES—CHELSEA

LISE SARFATI

Sarfati, a French photographer well established in Europe, makes her U.S. solo début with modestly scaled color portraits of young Americans, many of whom pose in their homes as well as in public spaces. Although Sarfati has clearly attempted to connect with her solitary sitters, the work has an uneasy, staged quality that recalls Philip-Lorca diCorcia, Katy Grannan, and recent Nan Goldin. But this strain—and the sense that these kids are playing heightened versions of themselves—gives the photos a tension that the photographer further tightens with an unerring eye for composition. Through Nov. 26. (Milo, 525 W. 25th St. 212-414-0370.)
More recently, the French photographer **Lise Sarfati** traveled around the United States with a sensitive eye for beautiful, seemingly disaffected young people — teenage girls and 20-something women, mostly. Her sumptuous color photographs portraying them in their homes and in stores exude feelings of loneliness, ennui and smoldering eroticism. Ms. Sarfati's exhibition, “A New Life,” is on view at Yossi Milo Gallery, 525 West 25th Street, Chelsea, (212) 414-0370, through Nov. 26.
Young And Restless

In 1937, Polish author and playwright Witold Gombrowicz wrote a novel called Ferdydurke, about a 30-year-old man who is transformed into a teenage boy and embarks on a series of humorous and revelatory adventures. One reviewer said of the book, which is now considered a modern masterpiece, “Gombrowicz is interested in identity and the way time and circumstance, history and place impose form on people’s lives.”

Lise Sarfati, whose youth-centered “The American Series” is now on view at New York’s Yossi Milo Gallery, is interested in these things too. Gombrowicz is one of the French photographer’s major influences, as is literature in general. (Sarfati, a Magnum photographer, has a master’s degree in Russian literature and lived and worked in Russia for ten years.) For “The American Series” (alternately titled “The New Life”), the Paris-based Sarfati traveled to a variety of Stateside cities, including Oakland, California, and Hillsboro, Oregon, to make portraits of teenagers that are not specifically about being in your teens but are simply about being. Like Gombrowicz, she experiments with location and circumstance to see how they impose form on her young subjects, using a 35mm camera as she shadows her subjects in and around their homes—at the dining-room table, sitting in the yard, alone in their room—so she can work nimbly and spontaneously.

What these experiments lead the photographer to is a deep commonality; we recognize ourselves in these girls and boys, our superficial differences notwithstanding. Sarfati calls this realization transversal—a line that intersects a series of lines. “I wanted to approach a transversal theme with transversal geographic points and cities all over the States,” Sarfati told PDN by email, explaining her decision to shoot throughout the U.S. “The result is that even if you travel a lot, you are in the same space with the same person, which creates an
interrogation that the viewer has to answer himself.”

The fact that Sarfati’s stirring photographs, a book of which Twin Palms has just published (called La Vie Nouvelle, or The New Life), are esthetically beautiful only heightens their impact. As richly colored as film stills and as astutely composed (or framed, as she does not stage her photos) as an Old Master painting, her portraits exert an irresistible pull. Yossi Milo plans to show roughly 28 of the 16” x 20” C-prints. “I feel so strongly about this work,” says Milo. “I think it is a very, very special body of work—it’s deep and complex, and it’s going to resonate with us for a long time.”

Sarfati has photographed young people before, in Russia (the long-term project, which included landscapes chronicling decay and desolation, was collected in the book Acta Est, published in 2000 by Phaidon) and in Lithuania, and Milo was already an admirer when she approached him last year about showing “The American Series.” But he was busy relocating his gallery to its current location on West 25th Street, so he told her he could spare only ten minutes. They wound up talking and reviewing her photos for four hours.

“I was mesmerized by the extreme emotion in each one of those portraits,” recalls Milo. And it’s true—the photos radiate longing, confusion, dislocation, a vivid ennui and even loss. “There is a great sense of loss. For Lise, the work is about a literary approach. It’s not fictional, though,” he says, because who and what she photographs actually does exist (though she uses pseudonyms in the titles). “But she’s actually able to show it to you in a certain way. The bottom line is that that’s what makes an artist exciting—they can bring you something that is beyond the surface of the picture.”

—Kristina Feliciano

Lise Sarfati’s “The American Series” will be on view at Yossi Milo Gallery, Through Nov. 26. The gallery is located at 525 W. 25th St. in New York City. For more information, call (212) 474-0370 or visit www.yossimilogo.com.