

LORETTA LUX
INTERVIEWED BY EDUARDO MUYLEAERT

1. Is childhood and its mystery really your subject, as remarks Francine Prose? Your work is related to the past, the present and/or the future? (*Francine Prose, essay "Imaginary Portraits", Loretta Lux, Aperture, 2005*)

My subject is the forlornness of man in the world, the absurdity of human existence. Children are a sub-subject. My work refers to both past and future; the present is hard to catch. You cannot find yourself in the present, although this is what many people aim for. A human defines himself through his past experiences and his aims for the future. In a child you can see hints of the adult he will become and in the adult you find traces of the child he used to be. Early childhood experiences form a person more than anything. This is what childhood makes so interesting to me. Also, children are great to work with. They don't have fixed expectations and are unconcerned with appearances.

2. If Velásquez, or Goya, or Rubens, were alive, do you suppose they would recognize themselves in your work?

If they were alive today, they would probably do different work.

3. Is it true that your studio is quite uncomplicated, that you don't use many kinds of lighting, that you think that sometimes a little touch is the most effective technique for digital enhancement? So, how do you arrive at such a sophisticated and enchanted portraiture?

Yes, my studio is indeed uncomplicated. For the first few years, I did not even have studio lighting and only used natural light. I still find natural light the most beautiful, but I don't always have the patience to wait for the perfect light situation. That is why I use artificial lighting now. For the digital work, I just take a lot of time. I look at the images in progress and compare different stages. I like taking my time and never rush an image. The reason why a lot of digital photography looks nasty is because it is often overdone, exaggerated, and looks fake from a hundred meters distance. I prefer subtle, well-considered work.

4. Philip Gfelter (*Photography after Franck, 2009*) mentions the "preternatural effects" of your backgrounds. Jonathan Lipkin (*Photography Reborn, 2005*) places your work in the chapter of the "technological sublime", with your "Dorothea, 2000" in the front cover. Do these analyses have some connection with your own feelings? Do they relate to your passage from painting to photography? Is it a one way ticket?

Yes, these are fine analyses. I am very content with them. I moved from painting to photography because the physical process of painting, the handling of the materials, like paint, oil and turpentine, did not suit me well. It is not necessarily a one-way ticket. Henry Cartier-Bresson stopped photographing in the 70's and returned to painting and drawing. He did not get the same recognition for his paintings that he got for his photographs, but he did what he wanted to do, and that is what matters. Personally, I would find it difficult to return to painting. What I like so much about my work process now is that I can make dozens of versions of an image and save, compare and rework them as I please. With painting, you cannot take off layers and layers of paint as easily. Painting is complicated and messy in comparison.

Michael Fried asks in a recent book "*Why photography matters as art as never before*" (Yale, 2008). Do you have an answer to this question?

I don't know if or why photography matters as art as never before; it is just the title of a book. Photography is certainly widely practiced and very popular with collectors. Photographs are much easier to produce than paintings, but it is also more difficult to develop one's own style as a photographer. There is a huge flood of photographs, especially mediocre ones. As for collecting, photographs are easier to look after than paintings or sculptures. They need less space, age better and are usually replaceable. Also they reproduce better in books and magazines.

6. The Time classified you as an "art-world phenom". Before the age of forty, your work was in the most important museums and collections, you had won the most important prizes and you were a superstar in the art-market. Isn't it a little bit scary? How do you deal with fame?

I am delighted by the success and flattered by the fact that so many people respond to and are able to identify with the work. I actually started doing this work in 1999, but for the first couple of years I was not interested in exposing it. I wanted to share the work when I was ready, which was 2003 when I met my dealers Yossi Milo and the now deceased Adriaan van der Have. I am gratified that the reaction to my work has been strong and positive, and I'm flattered by the articles and reviews in the United States, South America, Europe, Australia, New Zealand and elsewhere. However, I am not aiming to please an audience, but to do the work that I enjoy. I don't create work specifically for the marketplace, but mainly for myself.

7. We will surely spoil you in Paraty. For now, do you have some impressions about Brazil, its nature, its people, its photography, its art-world?

I am very excited about travelling to Brazil. I have been to Argentina and Uruguay, which I enjoyed immensely, and I want to see more of South America. I imagine Brazil to be beautiful.