

Jeannie – The Unconscious Eye
by Stefanie Reichelt

'Jeanny', a song recorded by the Austrian musician Falco in 1985, became a controversial number one hit. Several broadcasters banned it because the lyrics, although not overtly explicit in their reference to rape or abduction, strongly hinted at the musings of a stalker. Whatever happened to Jeanny is left to the listener's imagination.

Jeanny, life is not what it seems
Such a lonely little girl in a cold, cold world

Leaving interpretation to the imagination, as with fairy tales, arouses more powerful reactions. This is also the aim of my photographic excursions - to evoke the observer's unconscious fantasies. I seek to depict photographic stories with clues, hints and surprises, so that the perception of what lies within a photograph, elicits potent unconscious desires, impulses, angst and fears in the observer.

Jeannie - The Unconscious Eye, is one such photographic journey that began as a simple idea and grew into a complex project. The name *Jeannie* was also a derivative of the names of my friend who took part in this journey (**Jeannette** Josse) and mine (**Stefanie**).

I was interested in photographing a model in the eerie, redolent shingle fields of Dungeness, a name popular etymology attributes the meaning, 'a dangerous nose'. But the prospect of a model exposing even a small part of the body in the bleak landscape in cold February seemed unkind. So I took a Moxie Girlz toy doll instead.

Moxie Glitz was not merely humanlike, but also sexy with brown, shiny hair and smooth, matt, velvet skin. She wore a little tank top and a teenager's pyjama trouser bottom, underneath which were white low-cut knickers with 'Elle' printed on the backside. The Moxie Girlz slogans exhorted, 'Be true to yourself and live your dreams'.

My idea was to distort this landscape of vast skies and endless pebble fields by placing the little doll in its midst. The beetle perspective made the doll look human and the shingle desert became her habitat. Seakale and little shrubs turned into woods and forests, driftwood into sheds and houses. With the landmarks transformed, the old world, observed close-up, metamorphosed into a new world where fantasy and reality coalesced into single images, leaving the lost viewer looking for fresh meaning.

And something more happened. The doll in the desolate landscape, the little girl lost in nowhere, evoked a profound, terrifying sense of loss. How did she come here, who and what brought her, what had happened to her, why wasn't she cared for, who was looking out for her and where was the girl who owned this doll?

The vulnerability of human existence was made starker by the tiny doll in the über-dimensional landscape. The scene was deserted, boats stranded in the fields and human life and habitation seemingly long gone. With the doll lying about, the boats looked like objects in a violent crime, of a shipwreck maybe. The sense of a 'catastrophe' was heightened by the slight, human-like form, the sole survivor, a memory trace of all humans who had come and gone. Was she a survivor at all?

I worked the photos into a book, showing them in sequence, starting with the arrival at the uninhabited coastline, followed by the unsuspecting presence of the doll in the landscape and ending with Derek Jarman's house.

People's reactions are intriguing when they flip through the book. Many are interested in the landscape without always recognising the doll in the pictures. Others see it straightaway and some are terrified. Once observers find the doll, they keep looking for her, anxiously scrutinizing the photos that have no doll, hoping to find her. And the landscape, which now carries a human stain, has lost its innocence.

Taking photographs of a fragile doll in the cold, drizzly Dungeness fog evoked fear and anguish in me as the photographer and became a journey into my own unconsciousness. If the photos are successful, they should evoke similar fears and anguish in the observer.

There is also a clear sexual context. The doll, very much a young teenager, a developing woman dressed only in pyjamas, is childlike and vulnerable, but also sexy. She has been dragged out in her comfortable, intimate garments of the family bedroom into the cold, rough, menacing surroundings, exposed to the elements as well as to the gaze of onlookers. In some images her legs are wide apart and her hair flows and merges like seaweed with the wild habitat.

It hits at a taboo that children are growing sexual beings, possible objects of desire. The observer is provoked also to wonder if a forbidden barrier has been breached and a hideous crime committed. But seeing 'it is only a doll', its presence becomes a mere tantalizing fantasy. The forbidden thus becomes comfortable and the observer is back in known, safe territory.

Jeannie – The Unconscious Eye is part of a larger collection of photographic projects under the title 'Perception In Photography', including *Come With Me Into The Woods* (to be published in RPS Contemporary Group Journal, 2012), and a series of photographic explorations of fairy tales. The book can be seen online at blurb.com/bookstore/detail/2063064 and a hand-printed version at vimeo.com/36275668

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