

Big picture

Memories And Nightmares, by Lottie Davies

Vincent van Gogh famously said, “I dream my painting, and then I paint my dream.” Lottie Davies has taken this process a step farther, attempting to photograph scenes from dreams and early memories - her own and other people’s.

After drawing on her first memory for a photograph entitled *The Day My Brother Was Born*, Davies set about asking friends to share their stories. She would then reconstruct the scenarios described.

“One friend said, ‘My first memory’s really boring - I’m going to send you a nightmare instead.’ I read it and it was this really cool, bonkers story.” In the nightmare, the friend in question was expecting quintuplets and panicking about their imminent arrival. The resulting photograph, *Quints*, won the National Portrait Gallery’s Taylor Wessing Photographic Portrait prize in 2008.

The photograph shown here, *Viola As Twins*, was inspired by one of the many nightmares about children described to Davies by a parent, a friend of her mother’s. Viola’s mother is distressed to find that, in the narrative of her nightmare, her daughter suddenly appears as twins, leaving her with no way of knowing which was the “real” Viola. She has also just discovered that she is pregnant, and knits in a 1930s doctor’s waiting room. The doll’s house in the corner is Davies’ own; she likes to include something of herself.

“I can’t know what these scenes actually looked like,” Davies says, “[but] I try to preserve the sensation or the feeling that I had when I first heard about them.”

For Davies, who grew up in Surrey, memories play an important role in the way we define ourselves and construct our own personal myths. Yet she has also taken ownership of these narratives to some extent: it’s no coincidence that, like Davies, the protagonists all have red hair.

Leah Harper

For more images from Memories And Nightmares, go to theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/series/in-pictures.



