

SUBLIME MEETS LOTTIE DAVIES,
BRIGHT STAR OF PHOTOGRAPHIC
ART, WHOSE INTERESTS ARE
TAKING HER FAR AND WIDE

PERFECT SHOT

Words Lucy Purdy
Photographs Lottie Davies

Quints

At a time when anyone and everyone can take photographs with a mere tap of their phone, award-winning image-maker Lottie Davies reminds us that the art of capturing moments on camera is also a true craft, requiring skill, dedication and a unique eye.

The London-based photographer rose to prominence in 2008, when she scooped the prestigious Taylor Wessing Photographic Portrait Prize with *Quints*, a striking image inspired by her friend's dream of giving birth to quintuplets.

The sumptuous, Madonna-like image was part of a series called *Memories and Nightmares*, in which Lottie asked friends to pen accounts of childhood experiences and nightmares from which she conceived 12 beautifully detailed photographs.

She continues to work this rich vein of dreams and personal stories in her latest fine-art project, but instead of drawing on dark monsters of the mind, this time Lottie has turned to the altogether more rose-hued themes of romance and relationships.



Viola As Twins

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Love Stories will lead eventually to a book, exhibition and, Lottie hopes, a permanent online project of photographs based on couples' recollections of the first time they met. She is asking people in long-term relationships to send her their memories of the moment they met – without conferring – and will select several stories from which to create photographs.

'It's a similar kind of idea to *Memories and Nightmares*, taking stories and making history from those internal experiences – the things nobody else can see,' Lottie explains. 'Telling stories is something all of us do as human beings. We often ask our parents: "Where did you meet?" These are our beginning myths, our own records of our lives and so, so important.'

So much is poured into Lottie's photographs before she even reaches the point of snapping the shutter. She takes inspiration from a huge range of sources including classical and modern painting, cinema and theatre as well as the absorbing, imaginary worlds of literature. 'I make life really difficult for myself when sourcing props,' she says with a smile. 'I get really picky, because it is important to me to get things exactly right. Plus it's fun buying weird stuff. I get to go on eBay and search for kudu horns.'



The Day My Brother Was Born

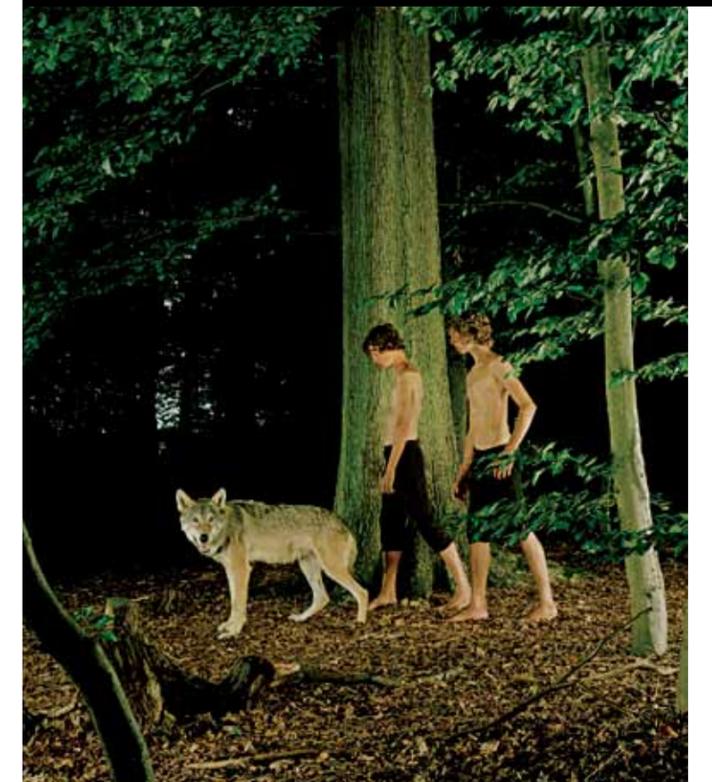
Lottie uses actors for her shoots, with each shoot becoming an extended improvisation session, and many are deliberately evocative of scenes from a film, a particular historical period or time of year. 'One of my photographs, *The Blue Bedroom*, is supposed to be reminiscent of a scene in *North by Northwest*,' explains Lottie. 'There is a big shadow of the father falling over the back wall and the little boy in the corner. It's clearly not from the light in the room but from a really big footlight, because I wanted the image to feel like a film set. That photo is about being a child, looking in on the adult world your parents inhabit. I remembered being three or four and watching my dad through a crack in the door putting on his tie as he got ready for work.'

LOTTIE FIRST BECAME INTERESTED IN PHOTOGRAPHY AT 14, WHEN HER FATHER bought a basic darkroom kit for her brother. Being 'completely competitive' she was compelled to try it out for herself, and so began a lifelong passion for creating images of one sort or another.

At university, Lottie was heavily involved in the student theatre scene, becoming the go-to girl for taking production stills and set design, and then made London her home, cutting her teeth by assisting other photographers while she soaked up the skills of the trade. After becoming successful in food photography, Lottie opted for a change of direction and took a trip with charity Survival International to visit the Bushmen of the Central Kalahari – the first of several overseas journeys made with camera in hand.

The photographs she took perfectly captured the interminably dusty, hot and dry villages and the intense passion and pride with which thousands of Bushmen were resisting their forceful eviction by the Botswana government. 'I wanted to make a difference of some kind through photography,' she says. 'I sought out charities and offered to help them. It is very hard to get access to people in a difficult situation like the Bushmen's, because the more vulnerable people are, the less likely they are to want to speak to a complete stranger. You have to travel in a 4WD for three days to get introduced, and you gradually build up trust.'

LOTTIE USES ACTORS FOR HER SHOTS, WITH EACH SHOOT BECOMING AN EXTENDED IMPROVISATION SESSION, AND MANY ARE DELIBERATELY EVOCATIVE OF SCENES FROM A FILM



Romulus and Remus



'I MAKE LIFE REALLY DIFFICULT FOR MYSELF WHEN SOURCING PROPS. I GET REALLY PICKY ... PLUS IT'S FUN BUYING WEIRD STUFF. I GET TO GO ON EBAY AND SEARCH FOR KUDU HORNS'

What Is The Future?



The Red Devil



The River

Next, she went to Guatemala, after hearing on the radio about three generations of families living on the streets. 'There are just so many pressures on the people living there. People get held up at gunpoint on their way to work. The street is run by two rival gangs who shoot at each other all the time. Going to places like that made me feel ridiculously lucky to have been born in this country.'

Lottie feels passionately that there is still a role for professional photographers and trained journalists in the current media age, in which 'citizen journalism' and contributed copy and photos are becoming ever more relied upon by cash-strapped editors. 'There is a difference between good and bad photography and, in the recession, some publications that would have paid for good stuff are now taking the bad for free.'

'The industry is really suffering as a result, because those of us who need to charge for our work are unable to compete with people offering it for free. It is also forcing photographers to up their game, which is no bad thing, but the response that "anyone can take a picture" worries me.'

Lottie also warned against an over-reliance on social media. 'Blogs and social media are a good way for people to get to know

about issues, but clicking "Like" on Facebook is a way of salving our conscience and making us feel better, rather than doing something.'

Whether it is in her fine art or her photojournalistic work, Lottie is brimming with ideas for future projects, and is a perfect ambassador for the passion and creativity that is alive in the industry.

She has already started shooting for *Love Stories*, and hopes people from all over the world will continue to get in touch with their own stories, from the highly romantic to the seemingly banal. 'Hopefully, seeing the photos will be like watching a good film – but with real people,' she enthuses. 'Reading the stories that have come in already has been really uplifting – an antidote to all those miserable relationship stories about people being lonely. It is a happy thing, and happiness brings about progress.' ■

Memories and Nightmares, an exhibition, will be at La Chambre in Strasbourg, France from 2 February to 11 March, and at Galeria Cero in Madrid, Spain from 22 March to 25 May. Visit la-chambre.org and galeriacero.com to find out more

lottedavies.com