



A Classic Prizewinner

Drawing on the traditional world of art in the National Gallery and the vivid dream of a close friend, Lottie Davies created a photograph that scooped a £12,000 prize

The 2008 Taylor Wessing Photographic Portrait Prize, worth a cool £12,000, has been won by Lottie Davies for a portrait inspired by her friend Caroline's nightmare that she gave birth to quintuplets. Rather than asking Caroline herself to pose, Lottie used a model, Alicia Clarke, to allow 'more freedom to interpret the story, unclouded by the representational aspects of portraiture,' and she drew many of her references from traditional artworks exhibited in the National Gallery.

We asked Lottie to tell us a little more about her striking prize winner.

What's the story behind your winning image?

'Quints' was inspired by Caroline's nightmare. Using her story as the basis for the portrait, I wanted to use different aspects of classical painting, hoping to inspire different emotions - both the calm and serenity of motherhood (Cowper's Madonna and Child was the inspiration for Alicia's hair and makeup), as well as the feeling of imprisonment, being crushed (I used the darkness and colours in much of Caravaggio and Titian's work for the location and lighting) while at the same time, the desire for wildness and abandon (the overflowing fruit bowls, dropping flowers, ripped wallpaper and so on).

How did you set it up?

I searched for the right location, and once I'd settled on the perfect place it was relatively simple really. I arranged for everyone to be there at the right time, after having sourced much of the styling and deciding on how I wanted it all to work. We spent the morning styling and making the set as I had envisaged, and sorted out the lighting (two Bowens flash heads with packs), while Alicia had her hair and makeup done, which took around three hours. And then in the afternoon we worked around Marla - as she was only ten weeks old we needed to let her sleep and feed in between shots. Excepting when she peed on Alicia, she was an exceptionally good baby model!

Can you give me some technical background on the picture please?

I shot the image on 5x4in 160VC Kodak film, using a big old Horsemen rail camera, kindly on semi-permanent loan from my friend Tim. I shot Alicia on her own at first, to be sure I had a perfect image of her without any babies, and then took some 15 sheets of little Marla variously about the set. I then scanned the negatives and created the composite image in Photoshop. In fact I think this is the first composite

image I've created, as I am quite a traditionalist mostly and these large images are something of a new direction for me.

Is this picture part of a series that you are working on?

My ongoing project 'Memories and Nightmares' is concerned with making portraits of people via early childhood memories or nightmares. At the beginning of this year I asked several of my friends to send me written accounts of either an early childhood memory or a nightmare. I have been using the resulting stories as inspiration for a series of images.

What are some of the other ideas that you are exploring within this series?

I now have a collection of various memories and nightmares sent by friends and family and some from complete strangers who have sent me their stories to add to the project, so I have to decide which ones to use to create the rest of the series. Including 'Quints' I've completed six pieces so far, which all look completely different (you can see them on my website under 'M&N') I'm trying to tap into our notions of nostalgia and visual conventions and subconscious 'looking habits' - for instance, many of the images

are cropped to widescreen cinema dimensions, in a desire to evoke the idea of narrative and movement. 'The Blue Bedroom' uses television dimensions as I used sixties television/cinema aesthetic for the lighting as well as period styling. I'm not quite decided which ones to shoot next; ideas include a red devil with kudu horns, a frozen lake, my friend Louise's nightmare about a strange bathroom and an albino spider...

Will future pictures be shot in the style of an old master or are you taking a different approach with some of the other images?

They are all totally different in style, as I take each story I'm given as an individual image. It is of course a series, but I think the pictures are linked by the ideas rather than the visual appearance. Each story suggests a certain aesthetic, which I then work with, using inspiration from painting, cinema, television and theatre. With all the images, I try to shoot as much as possible in camera, using digital technology only to create those things which are logically or physically impossible, and the actors and models bring their own interpretations to the story. ■

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