

# UN NOUVEAU PAYSAGE HUMAIN

Rencontres Internationales de la Photographie, Arles

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## Interview

Claudio Guenzani talks with Laura Owens, Jennifer Bornstein, Sharon Lockhart, Ruby Neri, Kristin Oppenheim, Frances Stark.\*

**Claudio Guenzani:** Having lived and/or studied in L.A. you probably have developed a certain relation with the city. Would you think of L.A. as a context that has influenced your work? Are there peculiar narratives that spring out of this city?

**Laura Owens:** I absolutely hated Los Angeles the first year I was here, which no doubt was partially caused by the horrors of graduate school. Then suddenly, when I wasn't paying attention I caught myself telling friends how much I loved it and that they should move out to L.A. I don't know what happened, I think I finally memorized all the freeways. As far as a context that influences my work, well yes, but it's not so much the architecture and the sunshine as it is my friends and peers. L.A. is notorious for creating melodramatic narratives.

**Jennifer Bornstein:** The permissive nature of the city has provided the freedom to break away from my own previous conventions of working, and to develop a very different, personal vocabulary.

**Sharon Lockhart:** Of course the most obvious and talked about influence or narrative living in L.A. is that of the film industry. Although I don't find this to be the most important one, it's hard to escape the influence of it. There is the presence of production crews on the street all the time. There are all the production facilities and I've found that people in the industry are very supportive both in assisting production and research of new work. Aside from the studios there are also quite a few independent and experimental film-makers living and working here. Film-makers like James Benning, and Morgan Fisher have influenced my work. ●●●

**Claudio Guenzani:** What is your relation to the photographic medium? Do you see it as an essential tool?

**Kristin Oppenheim:** When I was ten years old, I went to Aspen Colorado for the summer, and took my first photography class. My daily routine was to first of all go swimming. Next, I would go horseback riding, and then I would walk downtown with my camera to set up my bead-selling shop on some corner sidewalk. This was 1971. We were all into beads.

I remember my brother and I spending a lot of time on those sidewalk streets that summer. My first few photos I took were scenes from my sidewalk corner. Hippies mostly. I remember that soon, however, I decided I was more interested in having my brother take the photos of me instead. So at this point, I would have him follow me through the streets, etc., doing my thing.

I remember having him shoot a series of portraits for me. Head on face shots, very serious expression! And other poses, like hanging from trees, pretending to be a tree...etc. Kid stuff..., but none the less, self-expression!

Photography was a big thing that summer for all of us in my family. My father was busy with his new use your children for art series, and all of us were surrounded by his staged activities. Photos of my step-mother and father slapping each other in the face. My brother and I being asked to strip naked, and then put on each other's clothes (boy - girl - girl - boy deal). My father spelling various words on my bare back with his finger tip (press, and guess what I'm spelling? type of thing).

Words like F.U.C.K. And finally, there was the sack race between my brother and I, where my father asked us to wear these giant potato sacks and jump like hell down these marked race lines in the dirt.

Photography was a big part of my life that summer, and I remember telling my mother back home, that I wanted to become a violin player, and could she please sign me up for lessons.

**Sharon Lockhart:** I do see it as a tool. I don't see myself as completely within the tradition of photography. I think I work in the medium because it was familiar. I was never one of those technically prone people whose attachment to the medium is through the technology.

**Jennifer Bornstein:** It's complicated. I don't consider myself a photographer; I'm someone who makes pictures, among other things. Photography is something I've always hated but for some reason have never been able to escape. Every time I finish a project I think, "that's the LAST time I use photography; I have now exhausted my relationship with the medium for ever." And then, a month later, I'm making more pictures. This has been going on for over ten years now.

**Ruby Neri:** I like the photographic medium. I constantly use snap shots, polaroids and video as an extension of my sketchbooks, preliminary drawings and documents. In the larger context my interest in photography intersects with my interest in contemporary graphics, computer generated imagery and mass media. ●●●

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