

Interview

CULTURE

CULTURE

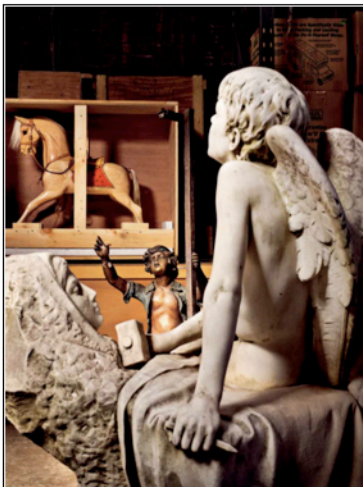
Paging: Henry Leutwyler Got Lost in Neverland

By TRACY DOYLE 04/26/2010 03:00 PM



Imagine exploring some abandoned, over-the-top place, an attic or a cellar filled with relics. Think about all the things you might find—faded photographs, and clothes like costumes, trinkets, toys, and lots of documents, all dusty and packed away. Now imagine that this place you are in is Neverland, the ranch-residence of the late Michael Jackson, and the possibilities are limitless.

In his forthcoming photographic volume *Neverland Lost: A Portrait of Michael Jackson* (June 2010, Steidl), photographer Henry Leutwyler takes on the role of a visual archaeologist with unprecedented access to Michael Jackson's long-vacated Neverland, where Jackson's belongings lay packed and crated, awaiting public auction. What began as an editorial project to document Jackson's iconic white glove quickly evolved into an all-consuming desire to document the castle that became a prison, and then a shrine.



With the release of *Neverland Lost*, timed to the first anniversary of Jackson's death, Leutwyler reveals a softer, more human side of Jackson that has not appeared as overtly in any other photographic body of work featuring the late entertainer. The images in the book, quiet in their composition and poignant by their simplicity, reveal the tragic theme of maintenance in Jackson's life. When the persona is stripped away, the bad PR and the hagiography gone, what remains are the artifacts to Jackson's life, a life that peaked early and then never really stayed up to date: figurines of Mickey Mouse, books on Peter Pan, game pieces of Dorothy, The Tin Man, and the Wizard of Oz. Cherubs of all shapes and sizes are omnipresent, and angel wings fly from the periphery of many of the shots. Bejeweled shoes, sequined socks, singular gloves—red, orange, blue, violet, white—with glitter and glitz, are dazzling like the cheap lights of Las Vegas. They also seem like evidence of a crime scene.

Of course, what put MJ over the top was the grandeur with which he lived. And these images do find a "real throne," with a velvet seat and gilded frame. And to top it off, a crown, with a jewel-encrusted "MJ." Nowadays bling like that would be cause for mass protest—keep fantasies like that in Neverland.