

M+B

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Wallpaper*
*BORN IN BRAZIL NASCIDA NO BRASIL

Interview with Robin Schwartz

ART



US-based Robin Schwartz was one of ten photographers chosen to exhibit at the Hyère Festival International de Mode & de Photographie 2010. Her unsettling portraits of her daughter, Amelia, interacting with a range of animals are held in the collections of New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art and Museum of Modern Art, among others, and she has published several books.

Your work has an almost unnatural, fantastical feel to it. Are any of the images staged?

I try to be invisible, rather than have Amelia look at me. I want the photographs to look fantastical but the set-ups, decisions and shooting have a lot of serendipity to them.

Your daughter Amelia is in each of the pictures and seems very comfortable with the animals. Are animals a big part of your life?

Animals are a huge part of our lives and family. Animals are my support system. They help me cope.

You are based in New Jersey. Where are the images set?

I live across the Hudson from New York City. Compared to my 'Primate Portraits' series, I did not travel much for my latest works. The photographs were taken mostly in New York and New Jersey.

How has your daughter responded to playing such a prominent role in your photography?

Up until recently, Amelia has not paid that much attention to my work. My artist husband, Robert Forman, and I both photograph her. He photographs for research for his paintings, which vary in subject matter. I think this project has given Amelia more confidence, in that she is comfortable, natural and strong with animals.

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Does she help direct your work?

Yes, very much so. The older Amelia gets, the more she contributes ideas. The animals are the hook for her to collaborate. I recently did three organised shoots in France. Dogs are our international language. One owner in Hyère, artist Bernard Lacombe, spoke no English, yet we were invited to his home for dinner. We aim to keep in touch and meet again in Paris.

Where did the fascination with these animals originate, and how was the idea conceived to incorporate your child into the imagery?

I have always been drawn to animals. Amelia and

I share the same obsession with rubber-faced, vintage toy monkeys (J.Fred Mugs). One of my earliest memories is of seeing an illustration of a chimp in a plastic or vinyl book and being mesmerized by its face.

The first two images of the series were a fluke - I was actually working on my book 'Like Us: Primate Portraits' at the time.

Photographing Amelia came naturally, as with any parent, but certain events changed my focus. When my mother and mother-in-law died within six months of each other I stopped taking photographs. Months later, I photographed Amelia and one of our animals, and realised, as a mother, I wanted to photograph my daughter, to hold on to her. I wanted Amelia to be my focus in life. I could only accomplish these photographs because Amelia is an active participant and partner in the project.

You've said that Amelia is your muse. Will she continue to be a big part of your work as she grows?

As long as she lets me, I guess.

What's your next photographic step?

I have had a long-time desire to photograph landscapes.

Aside from your daughter, who or what has had the biggest impact or influence on your career so far?

The monograph I did with Tim Barber and the [Aperture Foundation](#) helped me more than anything I have ever experienced. Tim was a really good editor and changed the way I worked. Tim Barber, Aperture, and [M+B Gallery](#) (who represent me) have enabled me to be more positive, work more and take risks.

Being chosen to be one of the ten photographers at the Hyères Festival was one of the very best experiences of my life. Raphaëlle Stopin and Michel Mallard worked so hard to take care of us, talk to us, get our work out there and feed us. I have never experienced that kind of generosity by curators anywhere.

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