

women (a damnation, too, of the ‘insecure, approval-seeking, pandering male-females’ and ‘Daddy’s Girls’). Solanas’s manifesto for the Society for Cutting Up Men concludes that the only reasonable action to take is to kill all men. Perhaps leave some for ‘breeding in a cow pasture’, but only until such a time as they can be replaced by machines.

After rereading this radical feminist text, photographer Justine Kurland took to her own library of photobooks, pulled out each one published by a male photographer, and proceeded to snip, slice and cut away at the photos. She recompiled these into a series of 116 collages, each arranged on either the inside or the outside of the now-empty, splayed-open book covers, many of which sport severed binding materials and other evidence of the violence done to them. Accompanying the photos are five texts (including one by Kurland), ranging in style from literary prose (Renee Gladman’s ‘We Were Cuts Cutting’) to more straightforward essays on the history and development of collages made by women (Marina Chao’s ‘Cunts with the Kitchen Knife: Notes on Feminist Collage and Torn Paper’).



A page from *SCUMB MANIFESTO*. Courtesy the artist and MACK

None of the male photographers’ names are mentioned; the only clues are in some of the collages’ titles (*Los Alamos Revisited*, *America by Car*, *The Animals*). Some of the sources are more instantly recognisable: the images of daily meals and monotony of wood-panelled rooms and tabletops indicates *American Surfaces*, while a row of Victorian portraits of young girls, each with their face cut out, is reminiscent of *Reflections in a Looking Glass*. But those photographers are cut out of *SCUMB*, like their photos are cut out, and then mashed back together into a nameless reconstituted mass of body parts, signs, landscapes, bits of ‘everyday life’. This is a work of catharsis, an exhale before the real work begins. But what is the real work? Solanas put it best: ‘Dropping out is not the answer; fucking-up is.’

SCUMB MANIFESTO: Society for Cutting Up Men’s Books by Justine Kurland. Mack, £60 (softcover)

Photography

What does our obsession with taking pictures say about humanity?

Exhilarating New York exhibition 'A Trillion Sunsets' interrogates image overload

Ariella Budick FEBRUARY 24 2022

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'Album (Scrapbook)' (1933) by Hannah Höch © Berlinische Galerie, Landesmuseum für Moderne Kunst, Fotografie und Architektur

A Trillion Sunsets, a disorienting, exhilarating, often delightful exhibition at the International Center of Photography in New York, opens with an image of image overload: a boy sprawled out amid hills and vales of glossy snapshots. In 2011, Erik Kessels printed out one entire day's worth of Flickr uploads, 350,000 photographs in all, and mounted them in an Amsterdam gallery. The project would have been inconceivably vaster had it also mined the rest of the social media universe. Kessel celebrates — or mourns? — the unabsorbable flood of colours, shapes, pets, faces, foods and landscapes that form our mediated visual experience.

Anxiety about this photo-cornucopia feels distinctly contemporary, but curator David Company reminds us that it has been with us for generations. With the advent of the Kodak Brownie in 1900, the masses gained the magical power to freeze time. Within a couple of decades, publications were crammed with news, fashion, advertising and celebrity photos, and commentators wondered whether civilisation could survive the flood. This show summons 100 years' worth of keen-eyed artists who have clipped magazines and scoured the internet looking for subliminal echoes and witty juxtapositions, finding meanings that lurk in patterns. This is not a show about the decisive moment, but about the revelatory repetition.

Among those who thrived on this muchness was the Berlin Dadaist, collagist and connoisseur of the grotesque Hannah Höch, best known for the barbarous bodies she built out of found imagery and finished with a glaze of bitter wit. Here, we see her private scrapbooks, in which she collected photos that struck her, organising them according to her idiosyncratic rules.



'Eleanor' (2021) by Justine Kurland © Higher Pictures Generation

On one page from 1933, she leads the eye clockwise from a team of wrestlers standing like a mountain range to a similarly geological-looking group of figures entirely swathed in burkas. We move on to a dozen women in bathing suits stretched out in a circle on the beach to form a human clock face. Flesh and veil, exhibitionism and reticence, timelessness and ticking seconds — these themes flicker across the page, linking images in a set of loose associations.

Strands of sense, even argument, start to emerge. Her eye was drawn to photos of bodies lying, dancing or swimming in fabulous collective geometries. She finds a resemblance between those formal assemblages of naked limbs and the structures of seed and root, but also an aerial view of Manhattan, with its tendril-like streets and modular blocks. Höch perceived a phenomenon that mathematicians later codified: complex patterns repeat at every scale, from the microscopic to the galactic — and humans are primed to see them. “I would like to show the world today as an ant sees it and tomorrow as the moon sees it,” she said.

Höch endowed these ant- and moon-eye views with a very human political cast. Troupes of identically clad dancers keep cropping up in her collection, a leitmotif that her fellow Berlin leftist, the critic Siegfried Kracauer, picked up on, too. Dancing girls, he wrote, were cogs in the gearworks of capitalism. “When they formed an undulating snake, they radiantly illustrated the virtues of the conveyor belt; when they tapped their feet in fast tempo, it sounded like business, business,” he wrote in 1931.



'Penny Picture Display, Savannah, Georgia' (1936) by Walker Evans © Walker Evans Archive, The Metropolitan Museum of Art
Political subtexts run through *A Trillion Sunsets*, sometimes in disguise, sometimes only quasi-intentional. In 1936, Walker Evans walked past a photographer's studio in Savannah, Georgia, and noticed a grid of tiny portraits in the shop window. It's not clear what Evans saw in the display: a humanistic portrait of Depression-era America, a celebration of democracy, a wry comment on conformity or maybe all of the above. But, whether he meant it this way or not, it's also a record of how the Jim Crow south classified respectable society: clean-shaven white men with white shirt collars, put-together white women with white shawl collars, nice white children with sailor collars.

Evan's work, called "Penny Picture Display, Savannah", may well have been rattling around Robert Frank's mind in 1958 when he took his own photograph of photographs at Hubert's Dime Museum and Flea Circus on Times Square. Evans had been intrigued by a rigid matrix of sameness; Frank reacted to a more slapdash arrangement of people who made a living putting themselves on display, including the fire eater Leona Young, the armless guitarist Joan Whisnant and Alzoria "Turtle Girl" Green. Photo historians will pick out the portrait of Hezekiah Trambles (a black man who grimaced and grunted his way through his act as the "Jungle Creep") taken by Diane Arbus, another Hubert's habituée.



'Tattoo Parlor, 8th Avenue, New York City' (1958) by Robert Frank © Andrea Frank Foundation

Arbus grasped the kinship between these marginal folks and the kind of shiny conformists that Evans noticed. “Most people go through life dreading they’ll have a traumatic experience. Freaks were born with their trauma,” she said. “They’ve already passed their test in life. They’re aristocrats.” Within a few years, individualism and eccentricity ruled the zeitgeist. It’s both fitting and ironic that Frank’s photo appeared on the cover of the Rolling Stones’ 1972 album *Exile on Main Street*, because by then rock ‘n’ roll was selling nonconformity to the masses.

The exhibition’s most exciting find is a selection of pages from the British magazine *Lilliput*. Founded in 1937 by the German refugee Stefan Lorant, *Lilliput* published playful pairings of photos that seemed to express something weirdly profound, if cryptic. A periwigged judge pouts across from an elaborately coiffed poodle, and it’s hard to say which one makes the other look more ridiculous. In another spread, a flock of uniformed schoolgirls is performing synchronised push-ups; on the opposite page, a mirroring flotilla of geese looks on encouragingly.



Lilliput magazine spreads in the exhibition 'A Trillion Sunsets: A Century of Image Overload' © John Halpern

There's a Kracauer-esque critique lurking in there somewhere: humans tend to think of themselves as irreproducible individuals, with private cravings and secret dreams, yet we willingly fall into the same anonymous formations as electrons, starlings and clouds. Maybe that's the exhibition's underlying credo: the world's photographic glut is really a record of patterned behaviour and it's all just data for corporations to monetise. Whatever you've thought, done or seen has already been thought, done or seen a billion times before, and will be a trillion times more.

To May 2, International Center of Photography, New York, icp.org

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ArtSeen

Justine Kurland: *SCUMB Manifesto*

APRIL 2021

By Robert Slifkin



Justine Kurland, *Los Alamos* (3 volumes), 2021. Collage (hardcover), 26 x 12 3/4 inches each. Courtesy Higher Pictures Generation.

On View

Higher Pictures Generation

SCUMB Manifesto

March 13 – May 1, 2021

Brooklyn

What is to be done with histories that are marked and marred by systems of oppression? While there is a growing movement for the removal of public monuments that have long served as emblems of white and male supremacy, the question of how to approach and appreciate what those old things textbooks once called “monuments of art history” is more problematic. Inside the museums, recontextualization rather than removal seems to be the order of the day, but it is not entirely clear if new juxtapositions are enough to engender new values from a canon that is fundamentally predicated on the objectification and the marginalization of women and people of color. Can artists who reject such values work their way out of these traditions without drawing upon institutions, innovations, and iconography of the past which, to a certain extent, serve as indispensable conventions that ground an object’s very identity as art?

This question runs through the 65 photocollages in Justine Kurland’s show *SCUMB Manifesto*. Riffing on Valerie Solanas’s 1967 feminist broadside announcing “the society for cutting up men” (SCUM), Kurland’s project adds a silent B to indicate that, here, it is men’s books that are being cut up. Kurland’s collages can be seen as summoning the feminist utopia Solanas imagined, one in which the elimination of men would augur a more peaceful, creative, and empathic society. The untidy and oftentimes humorous world pictured in the works captures both the emancipatory madness and violent stridency of Solanas’s radical vision, which notoriously led her to shoot Andy Warhol in 1968.



Justine Kurland, *Hustlers*, 2019. Collage (hardcover), 17 1/2 x 27 1/4 inches. Courtesy Higher Pictures Generation.

Solanas reportedly told the police officer who she turned herself into that Warhol “had too much control in my life.” It is likewise possible to see the male artists whose photobooks serve as both the source imagery and material support for Kurland’s collages as similarly domineering forces that the artist seeks to subvert through an equally destructive, albeit aesthetically circumscribed, act. Kurland ransacked her collection of photobooks to create these collages, using the bindings of each volume as the surface upon which to glue various fragments, so that the dimension of each collage (with the exception of the floral vortex of pussies and leggy asses made from one of Lee Friedlander’s books of nudes) are determined by the contours of the book from which the sources imagery is taken. In certain cases, the color of the boards and endpapers becomes a crucial aesthetic component, as in the triptych of collages made from William Eggleston’s *Los Alamos*, in which the exposed edges of each volume set the tone for the pieces constructed from the photographer’s much-admired color images. In many of Kurland’s collages, the book’s spine, with its torn nubs of paper, takes on the corporeal connotations of its name, underscoring the numerous disjointed and damaged bodies that populate these works.



Justine Kurland, *American Monuments*, 2020. Collage (hardcover) 12 x 34 7/8 inches. Courtesy Higher Pictures Generation.

Not surprisingly, women's bodies are a frequent subject and along with Friedlander, Edward Weston, Guy Bourdin, and, perhaps most expectedly, Helmut Newton all get the razor's treatment, pinpointing their apparent fascination with breasts, genitals, and female flesh more generally. Drawing upon the cut-up technique's capacity to reveal subterranean messages, Kurland exposes the manic fetishization of Alfred Stieglitz's focus on Georgia O'Keeffe's hands, and even less sexually charged material, like Chauncey Hare's, for example, shows its author to be something of a leg man. Likewise, many of the collages hit on stylistic clichés associated with each master—Robert Adams's meticulous architecture, Ralph Eugene Meatyard's masks, Stephen Shore's plates of food—and for viewers well versed in the history of the photobook part of the fun is trying to identify the artist through these fragmentary signs of authorial presence. (The titles of the collages only give the book's titles and not the names of their creators).

Turning mass produced books into unique artworks, Kurland's act of iconoclasm doesn't have the same shock value as Jake and Dinos Chapman's puerile amendments to Goya's *Disasters of War*. Yet it is hard to not recognize Kurland's engagement with the escalating market for photobooks as collectable objects in their own right. While it appears that the artist's library tends toward reprints rather than first editions, many of the destroyed books are nonetheless quite expensive. For instance, Philip-Lorca diCorcia's *Hustlers*, of which two copies were plundered by Kurland, goes for around \$450 these days—which it should be noted is only half of the listed price for Kurland's collage!



Justine Kurland, *Georgia O'Keeffe*, 2020. Collage (hardcover), 14 1/4 x 22 1/4 inches. Courtesy Higher Pictures Generation.

From Hannah Höch's jampacked nightmares of Weimar culture to the trenchant exposé of the domestication of militarization in Martha Rosler's series *House Beautiful: Bringing the War Home* (c. 1967–72), photo collage has long served as a formidable means of feminist critique. Kurland's collages, with their cyborgian figures and surreal juxtapositions, invoke these avant-garde precedents as well as more vernacular—and notably female-centered—traditions like Victorian photo collage. In this regard, Kurland's *SCUMB Manifesto* expands upon her previous works that have recalibrated the decidedly masculinist traditions of the photographic road trip, depicting the childcare that figures like Friedlander and Robert Frank rarely showed, despite regularly traveling *en famille*. Likewise, the largely de-masculated world envisioned by these collages can be seen as darker pendants to the artist's earlier pictures of adolescent girls posed in scenes of fantastic wildness.

Coming in the wake of the #MeToo movement, when the scumminess of men can't be denied, Kurland's collages appear as both indictments and salvage attempts. Disposed in wild and allusive accretions, these fragments of past artistic mastery become, when arrayed on the flayed boards of their previous containers, something like an archeological dig, or, as in the case of *Passing Through Eden* (2020, from Tod Papageorge's book), a teetering garbage heap of history. This sense of a past in ruins is perhaps most vividly portrayed in the four grotesque conglomerations assembled out of Friedlander's *The American Monument*. As in so many of Kurland's collages, an animated, anarchic, even at times crude and gimmicky new world is brutally begotten from a past that is shown to be equally obscene and vicious—and, perhaps most crucially, precariously unstable.

Contributor

Robert Slifkin

Robert Slifkin is an Associate Professor of Fine Arts at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University. His most recent book is *The New Monuments and the End of Man: U.S. Sculpture Between War and Peace, 1945-1975* (Princeton University Press, 2019).

MUSÉE

VANGUARD OF PHOTOGRAPHY CULTURE

KURLAND



Gypsies, 2020 © Justine Kurland

By [Emma Elizabeth Mathes](#)

Presented by Higher Pictures Generation at the modest Minus Space in Dumbo, Brooklyn, Justine Kurland's latest exhibition, *SCUMB Manifesto*, endeavors to complete a mission first declared over fifty years ago.

In 1967, writer and radical feminist Valerie Solanas sold her *SCUM Manifesto* on the streets of Greenwich Village for one dollar (two dollars for men). Solanas made her charge clear: "SCUM (Society for Cutting Up Men) [...] will eliminate through sabotage all aspects of society not relevant to women (everything)." As SCUM's founder and sole member, Solanas was literal in her intent — she infamously shot Andy Warhol at his Factory in 1968, rupturing his internal organs and leaving him declared dead. Only by some miracle did he survive.

With the addition of a "B," Justine Kurland's 'Society for Cutting Up Men's Books' is an experiment as much as it is an act of protest. Drawing on her formal education, Kurland took from her impressive personal library of photography books — ninety-nine percent of which honored white men — and created something *new*. Alphabetically, working from Eugène Atget to Edward Weston, Kurland slashed, cut, and pasted visual excerpts from each book onto their respective endpapers, crafting a riff on matriarchal utopia repurposed from artifacts of the male gaze. The work is a "psychic spring cleaning," Kurland asserted. "[I'm] literally clearing space on my shelves and in my brain."



Katherine Avenue, 2019 © Justine Kurland

Back in 1968, when Valerie Solanas turned herself into the police, she reportedly alleged that Warhol had "too much control in [her] life." With *SCUMB*, Kurland rejects the influence of men over her own life and art.

How does one free themselves from the command of institutionalized white male power? The answer for Kurland is a tactile reclamation.

"The point of these collages," she said in a [recent interview](#), "Is to annihilate the influence of these men who were introduced to me through my schooling and reinforced by museums, galleries, and publications."

Parodic, kitschy, and often humorous in nature, Kurland's collages make no allusion to their original sources, not even in the works' captions. They are reclamations, attempts at offsetting the classic narratives of authority. Predictably, women's bodies dominate the collages, but

Kurland repossesses the female form. In "Untitled, (MoMA)," Kurland uses scraps of the photographed bodies--skin, hair, and limbs--to form new female silhouettes. Each face, made from many different faces, lacks eyes — a disclaimer of the objectifying and often impersonal male gaze.



89/90, 2021 © Justine Kurland

Collage has been a staple of feminist protest art since Dadaist Hannah Höch's "Cut the Kitchen Knife". And, in fact, the spirit of Dadaism is evident in *SCUMB Manifesto*. Dada strove to destroy traditional values and create new art to replace the old. But Justine Kurland doesn't want to burn all her bridges. Before making the work available to collectors, Kurland offered to sell the works to the original photographers, as an olive branch.

None of the men have taken the offer.

SCUMB Manifesto is on display until May 1, 2021, a hop, skip, and two jumps from the Brooklyn Bridge. Kurland's latest exhibition is wonderfully intimate, quietly avant-garde, and worth the trip.

MUSÉE

VANGUARD OF PHOTOGRAPHY CULTURE

APR 16 ART OUT : STALEY-WISE, NAN GOLDIN, JUSTIN KURLAND



Justine Kurland, *American Sports, 1970: Or How We Spent the War in Vietnam, 2021*, collage (hardcover)

10 3/4 x 24 1/2 inches (27.3 x 62.2 cm), unique

Justine Kurland, *SCUMB Manifesto*

March 13 – May 1, 2021

Saturday, March 13, 2021 (noon – 6pm)

Address: 16 Main Street, Ground Floor, Brooklyn, NY 11201

Higher Pictures Generation presents an exhibition of new photographic collages by Justine Kurland. This is the artist's second presentation with the gallery.

In 1967 the radical feminist and writer Valerie Solanas sold copies of her newly authored SCUM Manifesto on the streets of New York's Greenwich Village, charging \$1 (\$2 if the buyer was a man). It opens with an incisive description of her project: “[. . .] SCUM (Society for Cutting Up Men), which will eliminate through sabotage all aspects of society not relevant to women (everything), bring about a complete female take-over, eliminate the male sex and begin to create a swinging, groovy, out-of-sight female world.”

Kurland's Society for Cutting Up Men's Books is an object-based, tactile imagining of matriarchal paradise, which she explored in her earliest body of work, *Girl Pictures* (1997–

2002), and again in *Mama Babies* (2004–07). Seeking and picturing freedom, at the core of much of Kurland's work, is located here in the artistic act itself: Kurland is purging her own cherished library of photography books authored by white men. Historical figures who have become the foundation of the history of photography, and their contemporary male heirs by primogeniture, have their pictures chopped up and reauthored by Kurland. The nature of collage—heterogeneous, pulled apart, shape shifting, disrupted, cyborg, fantasy—has long made it a feminist strategy in life and in art. Kurland's is a restorative and loving ritual. Each collage is a reclamation of history; a dismemberment of the patriarchy; a gender inversion of the usual terms of possession; and a modest attempt at offsetting a life of income disparity. Before making the work available to collectors Kurland offered to sell them to the original photographers. None of the men have taken her up on her offer.

An accompanying publication, featuring a text by the artist, is available through the gallery.

PREVIEW

THE GALLERY GUIDE

ALBERTA ■ BRITISH COLUMBIA ■ OREGON ■ WASHINGTON

September/October 2010

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Justine Kurland: This Train is Bound for Glory

ELIZABETH LEACH GALLERY, PORTLAND OR – Sep 2-Oct 2, 2010 Justine Kurland and her young son Casper spend months at a time travelling throughout the American West on photographic road trips that capture as well as become the subjects of her work. The New York-based photographer gained recognition right out of graduate school, and is known for her idyllic photos of adolescent girls, women and their children, often unclothed and set in pristine natural environments. The current body of work, inspired largely by her son's strong interest and fascination with trains, explores the remains of our commercial rail system and the nomadic culture of hobos, street kids and train hoppers who build their lives around riding the rails.

Kurland, who received her MFA from Yale in 1998, still shoots film, trekking a large or medium format camera and tripod to locales that allowed her to capture freight trains moving through incredible vistas. The images consider utopian ideas of freedom while questioning the romanticism of a transient lifestyle.

Kurland's work has been exhibited in numerous galleries and museums throughout the world including the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia. Her work is also part of the collections of the Whitney Museum, New York, the National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, D.C., the Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal, and the Guggenheim Museum, New York. *Allyn Cantor*



Justine Kurland, *Keddie Wye, Keddie* (2007), digital c-print [Elizabeth Leach Gallery, Portland OR, Sep 2-Oct 2]

LIVE SCULPTURES? CONCEPTUAL ENCOUNTERS? TINO SEHGAL MAKES ART THAT LEAVES BEHIND NO TRACE.

BY ARTHUR LUBOW

I first encountered Tino Sehgal's work under ideal conditions: total ignorance. Happening to be in Berlin in 2006 at the time of the city's art biennial, I heard from an art-dealer friend that there was one exhibition not to miss. "I won't tell you anything more," he said, as he walked me to the site and hid me farewell. I trod up a creaking staircase in a building from the turn of the last century and entered a decayed ballroom, its ornate moldings and gilt mirrors testifying to a more glorious past. Lying on the floor, a man and a woman, fully dressed, were embracing languidly. There was no one else in the room. My presence went unacknowledged. In a state of mounting confusion and embarrassment, I stayed until I could stand it no

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JUSTINE KURLAND
Tino Sehgal, foreground, with his associates in Central Park, across from the Guggenheim Museum.



longer, and then I retreated down the staircase. Out on the street, I sighed with relief, because I once again knew where I was.

Had I remained longer, I might have recognized that the two were re-enacting the curved-arm caressing gesture of Rodin's marble statue "The Kiss," as well as poses from other osculatory works, some less widely known but in their own way iconic, like Jeff Koons's ceramic sculpture series "Made in Heaven." And eventually I would have heard one member of the intertwined couple speak these words: "Tino Sehgal. 'Kiss.' 2002." But I didn't need that information for the piece to linger in my memory and arouse my curiosity.

I knew the name of the artist, and I watched for him. Although Sehgal was very busy, thriving in the incubation culture of art fairs and international exhibitions, he did not surface in New York until his inaugural show at the Marian Goodman Gallery in November 2007. This time when I walked into the exhibition space, I had more of an idea of what to expect, but once again I was knocked off-balance. "Welcome to this situation," a group of six people said in unison to greet me, ending with the auditory flourish of a sharp intake of breath; then they slowly backed off, all the while facing me, and froze into unnatural positions. At which point one of the group recited a quotation: "In 1958, somebody said, 'The income that men derive producing things of slight consequence is of great consequence.'" Jumping off from that statement, the conversationalists — Sehgal refers to them as "interpreters" — began a lively back and forth. Occasionally one of the six might turn to a gallery visitor and utter a compliment or say, "Or what do you think?" and then incorporate that person's comment into the exchange of words. Mostly they seemed content to natter at high velocity among themselves. It all continued until the moment when a new visitor arrived, an event that acted as a sort of rewind button. "Welcome to this situation," they chanted again, breathing in and backing off as they had done before and then assuming another stylized stance. A new quotation was dropped and another discussion commenced. Just as in Berlin, I felt a battleground developing in my mind, between a fascinated desire to stay and a disquieted urge to flee.

If you are not a devotee of the cult of contemporary art, especially its Conceptualist cadre, you may feel a whirring sensation beneath your eyelids starting up right about now. Your skepticism isn't, or shouldn't be, a matter of "Is this art?" Almost a century has elapsed since Marcel Duchamp aced that one by attaching titles to everyday objects (a urinal, a bicycle wheel) and demonstrating that anything can be art if the

Arthur Lubow is a contributing writer for the magazine. His last article was about the preservation of modern dance.

artist says it is. Nevertheless, the ineffaceable critical question remains: "Is it *good* art?" Later this month, when Sehgal's one-man show takes over the Guggenheim Museum's rotunda for a six-week run, thousands of noninitiates, many no doubt having come to see the Frank Lloyd Wright building without any advance notification of what art exhibitions are on, will be able to decide for themselves.

If the overall response to "This Situation" at the Marian Goodman Gallery is any guide, even some who expect to hate Sehgal's work will leave enthralled. "I often see shows I don't like, but this was the only show I've ever seen that didn't like me," wrote New York magazine's art critic, Jerry Saltz, judging "This Situation" to be the best exhibition he encountered in 2008. Unlike so much of contemporary art, Sehgal's art evokes passionate reactions among the unschooled as well as the cognoscenti. Anyone who has seen the onlookers trudging passively through an art museum (all too often the Guggenheim ramp resembles the humane cattle slaughterhouses designed by Temple Grandin) can appreciate the achievement. What fascinates me about Sehgal is that working only with human clay, he can call forth thoughtful and visceral responses from people who remain unmoved by more conventional paintings and sculptures. When I expressed this to him, he laughed at me. "I'm more ambitious than that," he said. "That's too little of a game."

A

any time of day, Sehgal, who is 33, looks as if he has just tumbled out of bed. His tousled hair is innocent of exposure to a brush. His overcoat long ago parted company with its lining. In the six months since we first met, I have usually seen him in the same black jeans, black one-button pullover and white sneakers. My initial impression was that this was a man who was completely careless about his appearance, but I eventually concluded that the scrupulous inattention to wardrobe and grooming was of a piece with his refusal to fly on airplanes (visiting America from his home in Berlin, he travels by ship) or to carry a cellphone. More to the point, this conspicuous avoidance of unnecessary consumption conforms to the credo that underlies his work. Sehgal makes art that does not require the transformation of any materials. He refuses to add objects to a society that he says is overly encumbered with them.

It's his rigorous devotion to an art that vanishes instantly that Sehgal and his curators emphasize. "There's a purity to his approach," says Catherine Wood, the curator of contemporary art and performance at the Tate Modern in

London. "There are a few artists who are making live action that is based in sculpture, but what sets him apart is his purist insistence on the immateriality — or ephemeral materiality — of the work, so it crystallizes and disperses again, so there is no trace left at all." Fifty years ago, Yves Klein sold empty spaces in Paris in return for gold; the buyers received a certificate of ownership. In the conceptual art that flowered in the late 1960s and early '70s, artists like Bruce Nauman, Dan Graham, Vito Acconci, Joan Jonas and Lynda Benglis performed before a camera; the videotape documented that action and became a commodity that could be sold by an art dealer. Around the same time, Michael Asher and Daniel Buren were staging interventions in art museums, removing panels from the building facade or paintings from the wall and calling attention to the change; if you are interested, you can check out the installation photographs. Then and now, the gallery that represents Ian Wilson will sell you the right to have a discussion with the artist; once it has occurred, the conversation is commemorated with a certificate that belongs to you. In their flight from the object-based art market, these Conceptualist and post-Minimalist artists left behind them, like bread crumbs, objects that provided a path back in.

In contrast, Sehgal is an absolutist. He does not allow his pieces to be photographed. They are not explained by wall labels or accompanied by catalogs. No press releases herald the openings of his exhibitions; indeed, there are no official openings, just unceremonious start dates. All of this can engender skepticism, but the aspect of Sehgal's work that his detractors find most irritating is the way the art is sold. First of all, there is the fact that it is sold, just as if it were made of, say, cast bronze: in editions of four to six (with Sehgal retaining an additional "artist's proof") at prices between \$85,000 and \$145,000 apiece. Unlike some of his Conceptualist predecessors, Sehgal is totally unapologetic about the fact that his work is commercially traded. "The market is something you can't be outside of and you can't want to be outside of, if you are doing anything specialized," he told an audience last May at the Museum of Modern Art, which bought "Kiss" in 2008 in a transaction that the museum's director, Glenn Lowry, deemed "one of the most elaborate and difficult acquisitions we have ever made."

As far as money goes, at a museum-discount price of \$70,000 it was a minor MoMA purchase; but Lowry was not overstating the cost of time and energy. Since there can be no written contract, the sale of a Sehgal piece must be conducted orally, with a lawyer or a notary public on hand to witness it. The work is described; the right to install it for an unspecified number of times under the supervision of Sehgal or one of his representatives is stipulated; and the price is stated. The buyer agrees to certain restrictions,

perhaps the most important being the ban on future documentation, which extends to any subsequent transfers of ownership. "If the work gets resold, it has to be done in the same way it was acquired originally," says Jan Mot, who is Sehgal's dealer in Brussels. "If it is not done according to the conditions of the first sale, one could debate whether it was an authentic sale. It's like making a false Tino Sehgal, if you start making documentation and a certificate."

The act of going to a logical extreme can have illuminating results. Yasmil Raymond, who worked at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis for five years before becoming a curator at the Dia Art Foundation in New York, says that the Walker's acquisition of a Sehgal work, "This Objective of That Object," was the most contentious in her time there. In the piece, five interpreters surround a visitor, turn their backs to her and declaim, "The objective of this work is to become the object of a discussion." If the visitor says nothing, the interpreters will eventually crumple to the floor; but a response will reanimate them, and one of them will cry, "A comment, a comment, we have a comment!" And at that, with the visitor's comment as a starting point, a conversation begins. What is curious is that the purchase of the work generated its own passionate discussion. "At the Walker, they have six board meetings a year, and this was the most difficult one I ever was at," Raymond says. "It was the only time someone on the acquisitions committee voted against an acquisition. There was a small insurrection. Three people abstained, and one voted against it. It was a polemical reaction. Then all the other board members had to defend and insist on why they were voting for this. They were really articulate on why the Walker had to acquire the work, about supporting unsafe ideas, on the risk of creativity and artistic practice." It was exactly the kind of conversation Sehgal hopes to provoke.

Over the course of a career barely a decade long, Sehgal has produced two kinds of art. The earliest works, like "Kiss," are silent and sculptural: a viewer encounters a piece in a museum or gallery just as if it were a marble statue. Sehgal is adamant that he is producing a work of art, not theater: unlike a performance, a Sehgal is on display for the entire time the institution is open, and the human actors are identified no more precisely than as if they were bronze or marble. (They are, however, paid.) But because the piece is formed of people, not of metal or stone, the viewer is aware that, regardless of how absorbed the models seem to be in their activity, at any moment they have the capability of turning their gaze on him — as, indeed, they periodically do in "Kiss." That potential for interaction is explored extensively in Sehgal's second line of work, the "constructed situa-

tions" (like "This Situation"), in which the visitor is drawn in and becomes a participant.

Residing in the ether of spoken instructions and ephemeral enactment, these pieces can misleadingly appear to be slapdash or freely improvisatory. In fact, Sehgal supervises his work with painstaking care, in the unremitting state of anxiety of a control freak who has opted to work in an uncontrollable milieu. "These pieces are very delicate," Raymond observes. "The human being is such an explosive material. You have to treat it delicately and sometimes put pressure on it. We're dealing with the most fragile of all material — the human mind."

In the Guggenheim show, "Kiss" will be on view on the ground floor, but the main work is a constructed situation that dates from 2006 and has been installed twice in Europe. At Sehgal's insistence, and for the sake of allowing a visitor to experience the piece with something like the Edenic innocence in which I fell upon "Kiss," I won't divulge what happens other than to say that on the spiral ramp of the rotunda, each individual or group will be engaged in conversation by several different interpreters of very different ages. To install the work, Sehgal must enlist the interpreters, train them and, finally, cajole them into showing up regularly and keeping up their enthusiasm.

First comes the recruitment. For older candidates, many of whom are college instructors, Sehgal relied on recommendations and then held lengthy personal interviews during the past year. The younger ones he and his team had to find in casting calls. If you regard Sehgal as a 21st-century sculptor who abjures digging stone out of a ravaged earth, then the interviews that he conducted of grade-school children and teenage college students throughout the city were the ecologically informed equivalent of the scouting missions that Michelangelo made to the marble quarries of Carrara. The small children he sought were between ages 8 and 12, while the teenagers were typically college freshmen. Like the older interpreters, the teenagers would be required to converse in an interesting and intelligent way, but the children had to be able chiefly to encapsulate what they were told in a summary form. They also needed to be outgoing enough to chat readily with strangers. In November, I watched Sehgal, accompanied by a Guggenheim assistant curator and professionals from a New York-based casting agency, interview groups of little kids and teenagers, usually eight at a time.

One sample of children came mostly from St. Ann's School, a private school in Brooklyn. "I'm just going to ask what your name is and how old you are and what you like doing, and then after we're going to play a little game," Sehgal announced, as he would say in pretty much precisely those words at every audition of children. An 8-year-old boy with a piping voice and charm-

ing self-possession said, "The last thing I've done is create a litmus solution." An 8-year-old girl favored musical comedy. The others had equally enriching extracurricular activities to report.

Then it was time for the game, which Sehgal explained would begin simply and become more difficult. The game consisted of listening to the answer to a question and then repeating what was said. Taking suggestions for a question from the children, he chose, "What is a stool?"

A young woman from the casting agency said: "A stool is a piece of furniture that has four

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legs and usually is taller than a chair. You can sit on a stool, and sometimes you can climb on a stool to get something."

The children raised their hands to offer their recaps. Like the blind men around the elephant, they would get different parts of it. Sehgal listened. From those who did not volunteer, he tried to coax a response.

The game escalated to "What is a computer?" and then "What is a democracy?"

"A democracy is a system of government where the citizens of the country elect their leader," said another casting agent. "The United States is a democracy. The hope is that in electing a leader, the voice of the people will be heard through that representative. The opposite of a democracy is a dictatorship, where one person has all the say and all the power."

Now we were in deeper waters. Most of the children had trouble pronouncing the word "democracy," and their capacity to recall and regurgitate the disjointed bits of information varied appreciably. With the final question — "What is an abstraction?" — things became more challenging still. Forget about pronunciation or any comprehension of the term. What they came back with was a mixture of things they remembered and things they made up. Those whose recollections outdistanced their imaginations were the preferred ones, so long as they were not incapacitated by shyness.

Afterward Sehgal reviewed the young contestants with his associates, each of whom had

written down ratings. He compared the students with ones they had recently seen at the Thurgood Marshall Academy in Harlem, where he found a higher proportion of promising candidates adept at reciting back what they heard.

"The thing about these St. Ann's kids is they're socially very able," he told me. "The Thurgood Marshall kids are put in the world to receive — they are there to pay attention. It's not that the St. Ann's kids are not intelligent. They are. They are already in the mind-set of 'What can I bring into the world out of myself?'"

For the Guggenheim exhibition, such qualities would be more appropriate in the teenage interpreters. The artist's quarrying continued.

As a youth, Sehgal was attracted to the study of dance (how people move) and political economy (how society works). His father, now retired, was an I.B.M. manager from India, his mother a German native and homemaker. Sehgal was born in London and raised primarily in Dusseldorf, Paris and a town close to Stuttgart; he has a younger sister, who grew up to become a philosopher specializing in Alfred North Whitehead. Their father talked with them in English, their mother in German. Sehgal speaks fluent English with a faint German inflection.

When he was an adolescent, Sehgal says, a direct encounter with the political process disenchanting him permanently from parliamentary politics. Friends asked him to speak at a hearing in favor of a transportation initiative in Stuttgart. "I remember seeing the minister of transportation dive and dodge," he says. "All he could do was administer what the public opinion was, or

ing something that disappeared at the moment it was produced. "My work comes out of my experiment with myself," he says. "As a person in the first world, you're quite heavy as a person in what you use up. Can I actually solve this for myself? Can I have something to do, keep myself interested and not be somebody who is situated outside society, and can I do this without transforming lots of material?" He moved at age 18 to Berlin, where he studied political economy and dance. After a few years he relocated to Essen, again taking classes in both subjects.

Through friends in Berlin, he became friendly with the experimental choreographer Xavier Le Roy and later with another avant-garde dance artist, Jérôme Bel, who were challenging the preconceptions that audiences brought to dance performances. In 1999, he took a job in Ghent, Belgium, at Les Ballets C. de la B. dance collective. At the same time, he was developing his own work. His first noteworthy piece was called "Twenty Minutes for the Twentieth Century," in which he performed by himself, naked, on a stage decorated with only a work light, calling up signature movements in 20 styles: Nijinsky, Balanchine, Merce Cunningham, Trisha Brown, down to Xavier Le Roy. (Notwithstanding its title, the piece was approximately 55 minutes long.)

He presented "Twenty Minutes" in a festival at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm, where one appreciative spectator was a curator of about the same age, Jens Hoffmann. "Afterward I told him it was like a museum of dance," Hoffmann recalls. "He said, 'This is exactly what I was trying to do.'" Sehgal was more of a conceptual artist than a choreographer. "I always felt closer to Marcel Broodthaers than I did to Martha Graham," he says. He loves the intellectual discourse that surrounds contemporary art; it's absent from dance criticism. (He carries these preferences into his private life. His partner, Dorothea von Hantelmann, is an art historian who has written extensively about "performativity" in visual art; they have a 2-year-old son, Nalin.) Hoffmann encouraged him to present his work in art venues, not dance theaters.

As a curator of the Manifesta biennial art exhibition in Frankfurt in 2003, Hoffmann brought "Instead of Allowing Some Thing to Rise Up to Your Face Dancing Bruce and Dan and Other Things" (2000), a piece that Sehgal had devised specifically for a contemporary art museum, the S.M.A.K. in Ghent. As its unwieldy title indicates to those in the know, it is a gloss on pieces of conceptual art of the early '70s by Bruce Nauman and Dan Graham. In those earlier works, the artist or a friend of the artist performs a series of stipulated movements, which are captured on a videotape for display in a gallery or museum. Sehgal selected 16 gestural moments from those videos and asked a per-

former to stitch them together with slowed-down, unaccented motions. He got the S.M.A.K. to agree to show the work nonstop during museum hours for a week; as one performer's shift was ending, a successor would appear and writhe alongside him for about half a minute, and then the first one would depart. In a blatant way, human beings were filling the role that sculptures occupy in a museum.

"When I saw the visitors' reaction, I was clear that this was it," Sehgal says. "Their reactions were so much stronger than I expected. They couldn't believe it was a person. They thought it had to be a robot or a puppet. There was such an expectation that in a museum something must be an object."

Once he decided to transform choreographic material into sculpture, Sehgal needed to find a way to keep a piece going continuously. The silent interpreters in the early works perform in a loop, and the only visible connecting hinge occurs at a shift change, when one actor relieves another. That was relatively simple.

With "This Is Good" (2001), the first of his constructed situations, each new arrival of a visitor triggers an activity of limited duration; it is as if the piece were a kinetic sculpture powered by a push button. When someone enters the gallery, a guard begins windmilling his arms and hopping from one leg to the other and then says: "Tino Sehgal. 'This Is Good.' 2001." Calling attention to the usually unnoticed employees in a museum, the piece plays off Sehgal's mission to make people, not objects, the material of his work. But the payoff is limited. Things got more interesting with "This Is Exchange" (2003), in which the visitor is enlisted as a co-producer of the piece. At the entrance to the museum, a ticket taker asks the visitor to engage in a conversation about the market economy; after five minutes, if a ticket buyer who agreed to the request is still gamely playing along, she receives a partial refund of the admission fee. For many visitors, especially those who argued that they detested the market economy, it came as an unsettling surprise to receive this reminder that whatever their opinion of it, they were nonetheless immersed in it. Which, of course, was one of Sehgal's aims.

Although Sehgal sells pieces to private collectors, his work seems to function best in a museum or a gallery, where its subtraction of a material object is made visible by the institutional surroundings that give shape to his void. "My work definitely needs this framing as art, and the stronger this framing is," he says, "the more works of mine are possible." Because the activity in his work is so close to the routines of everyday life, he has found ways to emphasize its artificiality. One signature device is the removal of all emphases in movement; his interpreters proceed in a slow trancelike state. "The most important

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else he would be voted out in the next election." If electoral politics could not produce fundamental change, why bother with it? "It's much more interesting to change the values," he says. "I was never interested again in parliamentary politics. I became interested in culture."

This political awakening strengthened his attraction to dance. Aside from its physical appeal, dance, in his eyes, had the virtue of creat-



As he does with all of his exhibitions, Tino Sehgal begins a six-week run at the Guggenheim this month with no official opening and no fanfare.

thing is you don't see an accent," he said at a "Kiss" rehearsal I attended. "In everyday life, basically, in whatever we do there is an accent. Here, there is a continuous flow."

Eliminating the object has opened a seemingly limitless number of possibilities for Sehgal. At the C.C.A. Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts in San Francisco, Jens Hoffmann, who became the director in 2006, has been presenting an ongoing series of Sehgal pieces. Usually visitors to this small contemporary art museum realize fairly soon that they are in the presence of a Sehgal work. But not always. In one piece, a visitor would arrive to find the museum apparently empty of all people. "Once when a person thought there were no guards around, he started stealing catalogs," Hoffmann recalls. "The guard came up and said: 'Would you please put the books back? This is a piece by Tino Sehgal.'"

Is it possible to be both playful and profound? Sehgal is wagering yes. The moral earnestness that underlies his work would be ponderous if unleavened by humor; the games would be just child's sport if they did not illuminate serious matters. The mixture can confuse people. At a meeting that Sehgal, on one of his human-quarrying forays, held last May with the administrators of a Harlem after-school program, he was pressed to explain what he aimed to accomplish in the Guggenheim piece. "The real deal is what happens there," he said. "The real deal is the conversation." For an educator who was trying to wean children from the cycle of poverty, this was palpably an unsatisfactory answer. He asked Sehgal again what was his goal. "It's a structure to have a conversation about people's values," Sehgal said.

A little later in the discussion, the man returned

to his theme. "So I guess you're saying your ambition is to change perception," he said. "Is that correct?" And this time, Sehgal took the bait.

"That's a very simple way of saying what I'm doing," he said. "For the last two or three hundred years in human society, we have been very focused on the earth. We have been transforming the materials of the earth, and the museum has developed also over the last two or three hundred years as a temple of objects made from the earth. I'm the guy who comes in and says: 'I'm bored with that. I don't think it's that interesting, and it's not sustainable.' Inside this temple of objects, I refocus attention to human relations."

This time the man nodded in understanding, with an expression I recognized. He was seeing things from another perspective, as he participated in a conversation within a framework constructed by Tino Sehgal. ♦



JUSTINE KURLAND
 The photographs in Justine Kurland's show "This Train Is Bound for Glory" use trains and train subculture to present the American West in a new light. Above: "Up at Donner Pass, Truckee," 2008.

Rich allusion in the mythic West

BY JOHN MOTLEY
 SPECIAL TO THE OREGONIAN

By now, the American West should be a bankrupt symbol for freedom. Long traditions of landscape painting and photography have ensured that the majesty and sprawl of its wide-open landscapes are all too readily synonymous with utopian possibility. It's no small feat, then, that Justine Kurland's recent body of photographs presents these mythic spaces in a new light, reclaiming the breathtaking awe that the territory would inspire if we weren't so accustomed to clichéd picture-postcard versions of it.

The images in "This Train Is Bound for Glory," many of which debuted in October at Mitchell-Innes & Nash in New York, document the West's sublime vistas, but use trains — and the subculture of hobos and "hoppers" who illegally ride them — to ground these settings in the personal. In fact, Kurland's practice directly mirrors the wanderlust of her subjects: These photographs are the product of months spent on the road with her young son, Casper, living in a van and tracking the commercial rail system.

In many ways, Casper — named for the 19th-century German Romantic landscape painter Caspar David Friedrich — is at the heart of this work. Not only did his boyish obsession with trains help inspire the project, but Kurland frequently includes him in the frame as a didactic presence, urging us to see these spaces with the utterly unspoiled, never-seen-anything-like-it gaze of a child. Clearly, it's an infectious

perspective, because Kurland's viewfinder frames the land in spectacularly estranging ways. The titles tell us these scenes transpired in close-to-home places — the Columbia River Gorge, Northern California — but her portrayals are so otherworldly and beautiful that you can't help but second-guess.

Kurland's previous work often employed actors and models to activate the idyllic potential in the natural settings she photographs; a recent body of work, for instance, featured groups of nude mothers and their children communing in Edenic isolation. The images in "This Train" es-

review

This Train Is Bound for Glory

Where: Elizabeth Leach Gallery, 417 N.W. Ninth Ave., 503-224-0521

Hours: 10:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., Tuesday through Saturday

Closes: Oct. 2

Admission: Free

Website: elizabethleach.com

staging, but many are so layered with art historical and literary allusion that there's no mistaking them for strict documentary.

The forking train track in "Keddie Wye, Keddie," 2007, nestled in mountainous forest and presided over by a ghostly fog-bank, conjures Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken" and the poem's topography-philosophy conceit.

In "Cuervo Astride Mama Burro, Now

Please turn to page 35

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Dead, Doyle," 2007, a shirtless man with a leathery tan and a sheathed knife tucked into his belt steers a procession of pack burros along a track, as a wolf trails the team in the background. The combination of Cuervo's heroism and delusion evokes Don Quixote, who, perhaps like the hoppers Kurland photographs, indulges idealism at the expense of an honest connection with reality.

"My Sleeping Baby," 2005, an achingly sweet portrait of Casper dozing in the back of the van, is packed with a range of painterly references. Cherubic, swaddled in the billowing folds of blankets and illuminated by brilliant sunlight peeking through curtains behind him, he could be the Christ child in a Renaissance portrait. But there is also palpable tenderness in the scene — as his thumb pokes at his lower lip — that calls to mind Mary Cassatt's portraits of children and babies.

These photographs are rich in formal terms, too, as the neat S-curves of tracks breeze through the unruly contours of nature or, as in "UP From Cuervo's Camp, Doyle," 2007, a blank and snowy sky frames a train in generous white space. But it is the allusive images that allow what Kurland captures to transcend mere landscape photography and exposes their deliberate construction. This kind of referential bridge building extends the sense of freedom in her work beyond the literal expanse of the land, connecting it to the liberating spirit in all artistic production.

After all, if the settings in "This Train Is Bound for Glory" are made up of places we have never seen, it is precisely because they are framed in a specific moment, seen from a specific perspective. It's not just that Kurland offers a glimpse of the transitory world of hoppers; she drops us into the thick of her own meandering travels and lets us look through her eyes.

John Motley is a Portland freelance writer. jmotley_john@gmail.com

THE OTHER AMERICANS

Photographer **Justine Kurland** takes her camera on the road across the country to capture communes, hobos, and other subcultures that are often off the radar

BY **BARBARA POLLACK**

‘IT WAS A TOTALLY selfish act on my part,’ says photographer Justine Kurland, shocked that her generous gesture of lending her van to a student at Yale, where she teaches, had backfired. ‘I believe that everything that has happened to me is a matter of good luck, and I believed that lending the student my car would add to my karma.’ It didn’t. The student ran into a deer, and the green Chevy Astro minivan in which Kurland had traveled more than 150,000 miles since 2001 was totaled. It made her nostalgic about the work she had created and the people she had met while riding across the United States in that car.

Kurland, 41, is an inveterate nomad, in no way constrained by having a young son, born in 2004. Named Casper, after the German Romantic painter Caspar David Friedrich, the boy regularly accompanies Kurland on her cross-country trips as she tracks down the subcultures and stories that lurk deep below the surface. When she’s not traveling, she lives in a modest 250-square-foot walk-up on the Lower East Side, near her son’s father, artist Corey McCorkle, with whom she shares custody. By contrast, the van was luxurious—fully outfitted with a bed, curtains her mother had made for her, and, on the dashboard, toy trains and clothes, along with dried butterflies she and Casper had caught. That van appeared for the first time in photographs at Mitchell-Innes & Nash in New York last October,

Barbara Pollack is a contributing editor of ARTnews. Her book The Wild, Wild East: An American Art Critic’s Adventures in China was released in April.



ABOVE Kurland with her son, Casper, at two years old.

OPPOSITE *Forest*, 1998 (top), and, from Kurland’s New Zealand series, *Sheep Wranglers*, 2001.





Buses on the Farm, 2003,
homes in on women in
commune settings.

in a show of images from Kurland's exploration of present-day hobos and train vagabonds. The photographs, produced in editions of six or eight, range in price from \$4,500 to \$12,000.

'ONE OF THE THINGS that is so interesting about Justine is that she seems like she could be a quick study, but the work is so much richer and smarter and deeper than that," says Brian Wallis, chief curator at the International Center of Photography in New York. "Her art is a combination of her personal subjective vision and this rich understanding of history and politics that's embedded in the work in a very subtle way," he says. "The recent series is a kind of historical panorama, not just a road trip across the country."

It was actually Casper who sparked Kurland's interest in trains, tracks, rail yards, and the people who catch rides on empty boxcars. "About two years ago, my child got very obsessed with trains," she recalls. "Once I got into it, I realized that trains are probably the most photographed American icon in the world, so I would have to try to figure out my own connection to the subject matter." The images

Kurland took of young people and of veteran vagabonds, known among themselves as "train catchers," who were living in illegal rail-yard encampments, turned out to be arresting and disturbing, even though the subjects are often set in bucolic landscapes.

Kurland traveled to train yards throughout the western United States, studied a train catchers' guidebook to find spots where hobos gather, and tracked down subjects over the Internet, discovering that even the most remote and rebellious vagabonds have cell phones. She was able to get an amazing array of homeless individuals to pose for her, and she secured access to sites that are generally off the radar.

In many ways, this was an ideal project for Kurland, who has been a traveler almost her whole life. Born in 1969 in Warsaw, New York, a small town near Buffalo, the artist grew up with a hippie single mom who dragged her children along as she made the rounds of Renaissance Faires, with stops all the way down to Texas.

When she turned 15, Kurland decided she wanted to attend the highly competitive Stuyvesant High School in New York, and she moved in with an aunt. For a few years after graduating from high school, she worked as a waitress while



***Mama Baby, Ocean View, 2006*, reflects Kurland's fascination with women and children in idyllic landscapes.**

taking photography workshops at the 92nd Street Y and making rudimentary efforts at street photography. At 21, she returned to school, studying photography at the School of Visual Arts. During that time, she met Gregory Crewdson, who proved to be a major influence on her development as an artist. She earned her B.F.A. in 1998 and that same year entered the M.F.A. program in photography at Yale, where Crewdson was, by then, a full professor, inspiring students to engage with staged narratives. At the time, this was a new form of image making, whereby the photographer orchestrates every aspect of the pictures.

As a student, Kurland made pictures of teenage girls. "Yale was really hard when I was there, and I never had an easy time of it. I was the kid who ran out of cribs crying," she recalls, adding that all of her art is rooted in personal experience. "I was working through the idea of the directorial mode when one summer I was dumped by a boyfriend, and I ended up hanging out with this 15-year-old girl who was visiting her father. I had nothing to do, and she had no friends around, and that's how the whole teenage-girl thing began."

Right after getting her degree from Yale, Kurland moved

to Massachusetts with her then boyfriend, Will Wendt; both worked as assistants to Crewdson on his "Twilight" series. But, she admits, she was a terrible assistant, constantly fighting with her boyfriend and then running away for two or three days at a time. "That's when I really learned about the consistency between her work and who she was," says Crewdson, who observed a parallel between Kurland's behavior and her images of runaway teenage girls.

When Crewdson and gallerist Jeanne Greenberg Rohatyn organized the exhibition "Another Girl, Another Planet" at Greenberg Van Doren Gallery in New York, in 1999, Kurland was the first artist they selected for the show, which featured 12 women photographers and one male. Examining female adolescence and girl culture through staged photography, the show inspired fashion spreads in magazines like *W*, as well as one in the Style section of the *New York Times*, in which the photographers were dressed in Prada—except for Kurland, who rarely dons upscale attire. In addition to Kurland's, the exhibition launched the careers of Malerie Marder, Katy Grannan, Dana Hoey, and Jenny Gage, most of them former students of Crewdson's at Yale.



Astride Mama Burro, Now Dead,
2007, captures the romance of
hobos by the rail tracks.

Kurland's images in that show, of young girls posed in nature, sometimes in school uniforms, attracted widespread attention. Crewdson says, "Justine's pictures always were more mythological and dealt more directly with the landscape" than those of the other photographers. "They have a romantic quality, but they very much came out of a real place—her rootlessness and her restlessness."

"The girls in the fields and the girls in uniforms is the work that took hold and made people pay attention to her," says Sylvia Wolf, director of the Henry Art Gallery in Seattle and formerly the Sondra Gilman Curator of Photography at the Whitney Museum. Wolf links Kurland's imagery to that of the 17th-century French painter Nicolas Poussin, who depicted shepherds in a pastoral setting surrounding a tomb. "Even in the glories of beautiful nature and exquisite light, there's something lurking in her work," Wolf says.

Once Kurland began receiving acclaim, she was ready to move on to a new project: photographing the communes that remain scattered across upstate New York, Virginia (her mother now lives in Floyd), Tennessee, and California. She undertook the project in 2001, partly as an opportunity to reflect on her upbringing. But it was also a way to

explore the endurance of utopian communities, even after the trauma of the terrorist attacks of September 11.

Kurland found that the communes were surprisingly easy to locate on the Internet. "The farms that are income sharing and communal all have things to sell to support their community," she says, noting that at certain places, like the Farm in Summertown, Tennessee, she would stay several weeks and then find the atmosphere claustrophobic rather than liberating. Her impressions come through in the resulting images, in which commune members, often nude, are posed in ways that are not at all documentary.

SHE WORKED ON A variety of projects in the last decade—turning her lens on Renaissance Faire participants and schoolgirls in New Zealand—before the birth of her son inspired her to focus on mothers and children in wilderness settings. She set out for the West with Casper, still an infant, looking for young mothers who would pose nude for her pictures. She recruited subjects at health-food stores and playgrounds. The series that ensued, "Of Woman Born," was exhibited at Mitchell-Innes & Nash in 2007. Troupes of Madonnas and Eves with their children



Kurland's son and sidekick takes a break in *Casper on the Back Porch*, 2008.

were depicted in Edenic settings, evoking Pre-Raphaelite paintings with all-female casts. As is her usual practice, she paid her models by giving them prints, which, given the way prices have risen for her work, turned out to be a generous form of compensation.

Within a year after the show, Kurland was experiencing her typical wanderlust, ready to hit the road again. By then, trains were Casper's love. She also felt a certain kinship with the subject of hobos and saw the irony of reinvestigating one of the great subjects of photography of the Depression era.

"This was probably the first time I've done a project where I didn't just become part of the subculture," she admits. "I always remained on the outside." Concerned for Casper's safety, she never jumped a train herself and never stayed at the illegal campsites. Still, she did find a number of subjects who were willing to meet with her repeatedly. One man, who goes by the name Train Dog, published a Xeroxed zine called *Crew Change*, which detailed state by state where the trains stop, as well as the best place to jump on board, better known by the hobos as "catching out."

But Kurland met resistance from many young people who

lived in squats and punk houses; they were suspicious of her project. "I'd pay them or buy them beers," she says. "I had a lot of discussions with them about the practice of photography and explained that if you are going to create an alternative existence, it needs to be documented so other people can recognize the work that you've done." Sometimes she was able to win them over; other times she was given the cold shoulder. "There was one group that, when I first met them, were really nice to me, but as they got to know me, I became 'the Man,'" Kurland says. "It was hard to be the enemy. I was in tears often." Then, she says, after a year and a half of running into them, she encountered them at a tramp fest in Denver. "No one would talk to us. It was really horrible."

An inkling of this experience is present in many of Kurland's photographs, which convey the artist's inability to fully mesh with her strange, somewhat illusionary subjects. The works also demonstrate how the hobos and train catchers believe they are living out the American Dream by going west in pursuit of freedom. But as Kurland makes clear, that very goal is an illusion—something she discovered for herself in her numerous road trips. ■

Justine Kurland, “This Train Is Bound for Glory”



The photographer captures a restless America, both mythical and real.

Mitchell-Innes & Nash, through Nov 14

Justine Kurland’s new photographs depict an American West crisscrossed by railroads and peopled by hoboes, hippies and angelic children. *Counting Hoppers*, for instance, shows a blond toddler perched on a boulder, looking across a river at a row of freight cars that stretches along the base of a majestic, rocky cliff. A bearded musician in *Land of the Lost* plays the fiddle in a redwood grove, backpack at the ready. In *Hemp Bracelet for Spanging*, a reclining youth gazes up from a mossy log in the rainforest while his girlfriend braids cords held between her knees.

These reveries suggest narratives of innocence and freedom, as well as particularly American myths of nomadic restlessness and living off the grid. Yet, while they are staged, Kurland’s idylls aren’t entirely fictional: She spent much of her time traveling with her son in the van seen in several shots, searching out the places and people she both idealizes and documents.

For all the quixotic beauty of these images, however, Kurland’s landscapes may even more affectingly envision America. The train in *Magic Hour* passes through wooded hills, half in shadow, half in sunlight, a stream at the lower right reflecting gold. In *Keddie Wye*, two sets of curving tracks on trestles converge at the bottom of the picture, framed by pine boughs that glisten with moisture from the fog rolling in. Limpid and luminous, the scene feels all the more poignant because it is real, and accessible to those who seek it.—*Joseph R. Wolin*

The New Yorker
November 9, 2009
GALLERIES-CHELSEA

NEW YORKER

JUSTINE KURLAND

Kurland, who has always taken pictures of people adrift in the American wilderness, devotes this terrific show to cross-country trains and the free spirits who hitch rides on them. Many of her landscapes recall the West as the pioneering photographers saw it: awe-inspiringly vast and just plain beautiful. But she calls her pictures “portals into the realm of railroad folklore,” because she’s also documented the subculture that’s sprung up around the trains—gray-bearded hobos, young drifters, and her own little boy, obsessed with the endless line of freight cars in the distance. Kurland understands the American impulse to light out for the country, and her pictures capture both its romance and its tough reality. Through Nov. 14. (Mitchell-Innes & Nash, 534 W. 26th St. 212-744-7400.)

NEW YORK

FALL PREVIEW '09

Jerry Saltz's Want-to-Sees



12. Justine Kurland *Mitchell-Innes & Nash*; Oct. 15–Nov. 14.

This photographer's exploration of fictive utopias and the dreams of the itinerant gives us pictures of empty freight trains rolling through mountain landscapes, hobo musicians, and wizened prospectors still looking to strike it rich. A perfect photographic chaser to the Met's Robert Frank show.

NEW YORK ART

Gender Benders
Visionary
twists from a
magnificent
seven.

BY JERRY SALATZ

From left:
Laurie Simmons,
Jenny Holzer,
Jenny Sabin,
Jenny Holzer,
Jenny Holzer,
Jenny Holzer,
and Sylvia Sleigh



Photographs by Andreas Leinhardt

Gender Benders

October 12, 2009



Justine Kurland *"This Train Is Bound for Glory," Mitchell-Innes & Nash, Oct. 15 to Nov. 14* Kurland is known for being a stalker of wild things. Her photographs of young girls in Arcadian glades have a feeling of contemporary fairy paintings. For her latest pictures, she and her 5-year-old son traveled West in a van, capturing fellow nomads—Americans looking for America. The wistfulness and longing within this work resonate beyond the frame, perhaps because they say as much about Kurland's own wanderlust.

Courtesy of the artist and Mitchell-Innes & Nash ("Doyle, CA: Cuervo Saying It Won't Come and to Quit So We Can Drive to The Gas Station and Buy More Wine," 2007).

**Justine Kurland
at Mitchell-Innes & Nash**

There is always something a little too perfect, deliciously so, about Justine Kurland's high-keyed, large-format C-prints. In her most recent series, "Of Woman Born" (2005-06), tribes of nude young mothers and tots, gamboling in light-dappled glades and less hospitable swamps and canyons, are depicted with slightly hyper-real artificiality. In *Mama Baby, Ocean View*, a gaggle of youngish mothers, with attractive but refreshingly imperfect bodies, populate a foggy beach's sand and craggy boulders. Utterly absorbed with their pretty suckling, wading, scampering infants and toddlers, they look a little like Art Nouveau fairy sprites.

Operating within the "strangely perfect image" school of cinematically posed photography promoted at Yale by her teacher Gregory Crewdson, Kurland had her breakout in the now legendary 1999 exhibition "Another Girl, Another Planet," which included photographs by Katy Grannan, Dana Hoey and Malerie Marder. Kurland began with a striking series of group portraits of female adolescents: bands of tomboys kick-boxing; or hanging out by a swimming hole, as in a Thomas Eakins painting; or vandalizing an abandoned car. Since then, she has made a specialty of sharply detailed color photographs of groups posed, often unclothed, in primordial settings, including nude utopians, male adventurers and costumed Renaissance Fair players. A sociologist at heart, she uses real-life subjects and sites. Yet she crafts polished final images that look fictional, tending toward the kind of nostalgic escapism associated with pre-Raphaelite painting—a quality shared by many of the communities she is drawn to.

In these 15 new Cibachromes, most 30 by 40 inches, it is as if the teenagers populating her first body of work have come of age. The subjects were scouted by Kurland at health-food stores and parks during a cross-country road trip with her one-year-old son. Kurland prints her own pho-



Justine Kurland: *Siskiyou Mountain Tea Party*, 2006, C-print, 30 by 40 inches; at Mitchell-Innes & Nash.

tographs, giving her richly colored tableaux a cool silvery cast and a crisp all-over focus. The nude women and tots in *Mama Baby, View into Gorge* are posed like Renaissance nymphs and cherubs, yet seem all too humanly vulnerable to the sharp-looking rocks and brackish pools around them. In *Siskiyou Mountain Tea Party*, three naked women, looking inappropriately comfortable, are seated with their offspring on a precarious rocky perch, before a Caspar David Friedrich-like series of icy-blue peaks; a sinister-looking hound skulks in front of them.

Indirectly and perhaps unintentionally, Kurland's landscapes, with their vaginal gorges and

amniotic-fluid-like water, sometimes make reference to the physicality of the female body and childbirth. In *Sleeping Mermaids* (a smaller work at 19 3/8 by 22 3/8 inches), two children are curled head to toe in a bed of seaweed, seemingly cast ashore by the tide. The rounded contour of the seaweed makes them look like putti in a tondo, or twins in a womb—a powerfully Arcadian vision. In a darker vein, *Expulsion* shows three nude Amazons, babes in arms, grimly picking their way through the devastation of a clear-cut slope. Though "Of Woman Born" seems to represent a quest for harmonious refuge with nature, the subjects of these compelling, odd images in fact provide reminders that, even within the maternal embrace, there really is no escape from life's harshness. —Carey Lovelace

REVIEWS

NEW YORK

Justine Kurland

MITCHELL-INNES & NASH

The celebration of motherhood hasn't been a favored subject for artists since Impressionism and the early-twentieth-century movements on which its influence is immediately discernible. German Expressionist painter Paula Modersohn-Becker, for example, is renowned for her intimate portraits of mothers and their children (which look back to Renaissance portraits of Mary and the infant Jesus), as well as for her nude self-portraits in nature. What is unique about her art is the visualization of a subjectivity that is decidedly feminine. Indeed, taken at face value, Modersohn-Becker's oeuvre portrays a modern-day cosmology with an entirely female cast of characters. She presents the female body and the experience of motherhood from the inside out, making images that refuse the voyeuristic overtones of those of many of her male counterparts.

Like a latter-day Modersohn-Becker, Justine Kurland goes against the grain by taking up the subject of motherhood without any apparent ambivalence about maternity. Kurland

gives her all to fashioning a female cosmology—a Garden of Eden without Adam—grounded in the fertility of nature and modeled as a communal matriarchal culture. In fifteen color photographs that made up a show titled "Of Woman Born," Kurland weaves a visual fiction of a place beyond time. A tribe of pregnant women, together with their infants and young children, inhabit this unspoiled scenic environment. Traveling from rocky ocean shorelines to sunny mountaintops, from spectacular waterfalls to verdant pine forests, implying a nomadic way of life for her subjects, Kurland directs her cast of mamas and babies in idyllic pursuits that point in the direction of paradise. But one woman's paradise can be another's prison. Remember when feminist debate first erupted over the waning viability of conventional gender roles, and over the problematic of

nature (feminine) versus culture (masculine)? Kurland's audacious photographs revisit that moment but push purely ideological concerns aside in favor of images that satisfy the artist's sensibility without being the least bit self-conscious or defensive about their apparent promotion of the virtues of motherhood or their reveling in a return to nature.

Kurland's interests are partly autobiographical—she's a new mother, grew up on a commune, and has a streak of wanderlust that she satisfies by taking road trips—but she's hardly alone in bringing a renewed focus to bear on motherhood. Dana Hoey, for example, has moved from working with adolescent models to addressing experiences of motherhood, while Pipilotti Rist and Catherine Opie both, in their own ways, revel in the beauty of the female body, and Andrea Zittel explores themes of domesticity.

But what sets Kurland apart from the growing number of women who unequivocally celebrate the most traditional of female roles is not only the pronounced fictional aspects of her pictures, but also the logistics of her practice. As with the work of her colleague Katy Grannan, who has solicited subjects via newspaper ads, you can't look at Kurland's images and not wonder about the backstory. This curiosity persists whether she leads us to contemplate teenage girls in a landscape, living

a dream of independence as reverse-gender Huckleberry Finns; or hippies in communes; or a congregation of nude pregnant women. Notwithstanding their dreamy qualities, Kurland's photographs exist as performance documents. They reflect her abiding interest in the collaborative process and in social networking and are an extended exploration of a "family of woman," as well as of life off the grid.

—Jan Avgikos



Justine Kurland,
The Milk Sucker, 2006,
color photograph,
40 x 30"

JUSTINE KURLAND

Kurland's lovingly staged back-to-nature photographs started out as teen-age escape fantasies—expansive pictures of girls on the run, creating their own brave new world. But now that the thirty-seven-year-old photographer is a mother her concerns have shifted, and her new series, "Of Women Born," focusses on women and their young children in Edenic American landscapes. In Kurland's paradise, everyone is casually, comfortably naked, but with as many as twenty-eight figures gathered on a rocky shore, by a mountain stream, or in a pine forest, the scenes can be a little hectic. Although her best pictures evoke nineteenth-century masters like Timothy O'Sullivan and Albert Bierstadt, mothers and babies are often reduced to tiny, incidental bits of data in magnificent vistas. Through April 7. (Mitchell-Innes & Nash, 534 W. 26th St. 212-744-7400.)

PEOPLE
ARE
TALKING
ABOUT

PHOTOGRAPHY

two for the road

*Justine Kurland, son in tow,
shifts her lens from
girlhood to maternity.*

Photographer **Justine Kurland** first drew notice with her images of fierce, feral girls on the loose in raw landscapes that evoke Church and Cole reveries as easily as they do Victorian fairy paintings. The adolescents were directed with an incantation—"You're running away, you live in trees, you eat nectar, you torture boys, and you're a little bit mean"—that suggested an alternate version of *Peter Pan*, one in which Wendy wasn't the nurturing type. Now, inspired in part by the birth of her son, Casper, with sculptor Corey McCorkle, in 2004, Kurland has turned her attention to those girls' futures. In new works at the Mitchell-Innes & Nash gallery in Chelsea, naked mothers and children roam along blustery coasts and through forests, imbuing the rough settings with an idyllic grace.

"Having a baby has thrown me back to something knowable only to women, a certain immediacy and connectedness to this little being and by extension to many other beings," Kurland explains. "These pictures are not about family—they're more like a secret, knowing glance two women might exchange while

pushing their children in shopping carts past each other in a grocery store."

Kurland spent much of her own childhood on the road and around communes. She settled down long enough to attend art school at Yale, where she studied with the modern master of staged narrative pic-

tures, Gregory Crewdson. She went on to become one of his assistants, and he later selected her work for "Another Girl, Another Planet," the seminal 1999 group show that announced a new generation of young female photographers. These days, Kurland travels the country looking for big landscapes and fellow free spirits. "You always feel like she's on the move, running away or running toward something,"

Crewdson says. "That's the way she always was, even in grad school, and she's able to take that and put it in her work in a very positive way."

Motherhood hasn't changed her artistic methods. McCorkle stays in New York, while mother and son take extended road trips together in a tricked-out minivan that Casper calls the "mama car," showering at truck stops and visiting zoos and playgrounds along the way. "It's the most romantic thing I can imagine, living with my baby in a van," Kurland says. "I am more Gypsy now, more beholden to fate, luck, and the weather."—ANNE STRINGFIELD *puta > 166*

MOTHER AND SON
KURLAND'S
PHOTOGRAPH OF
HERSELF AND
CASPER IN
COVINGTON,
LOUISIANA, 2006.



Vogue
February 2007
p. 164

New York Times
February 25, 2007
By Carol Kino

So They All Get Naked and Play, Like Mom Did

IT'S difficult when you have a kid," the photographer Justine Kurland said. "If they're in a good mood, you can get work done. But if they're in a bad mood, you're at their mercy."

Ms. Kurland is known for photographing people in American wilderness landscapes, but the scene this day was the rent-stabilized apartment she shares with Casper, her 2-year-old son, on the Lower East Side of Manhattan.

Casper, named for the 19th-century German landscape painter Caspar David Friedrich, had just given a textbook example of one of his trickier moods. His father, the sculptor and multimedia artist Corey McCorkle, who lives 10 blocks away, arrived to take him out for breakfast, but he refused to budge. Instead he sat sobbing, rooted to the kitchen floor, a stunt Ms. Kurland said he increasingly liked to pull when she was scouting locations on the extended road trips she takes for her projects.

Casper's influence can also be seen in her latest photographs. Ms. Kurland first became known for a series that depicted teenage girls running wild in nature. In her current show, at Mitchell-Innes & Nash in Chelsea, the landscape is populated by tribes of naked mature women - many of them pregnant or nursing, suggesting wandering fertility goddesses - who are playing with their children in paradisiac settings of forest, meadow and sea.

The series is titled "Of Woman Born," a nod to the 1978 manifesto on motherhood by the feminist poet Adrienne Rich. But Ms. Kurland usually refers to them as "my mama and baby pictures."

"You want even more with a child because you're responsible for someone," she said. "I'm picturing the world I want to be."

Now 37, Ms. Kurland first came to attention when her work appeared in "Another Girl, Another Planet," a famous 1999 group show whose curators included the photographer Gregory Crewdson. It heralded the arrival of the so-called "girl photographers" like Dana Hoey, Malerie Marder and Katy Grannan, many of whom had been students of Mr. Crewdson in the master of fine arts program at Yale.

They were all making staged photographs that seemed to address adolescent female identity. Yet Ms. Kurland's girls never appeared passive, or even seductive; instead she put them in nature and assigned them active roles: climbing trees, paddling in swimming holes, carrying a slaughtered deer through the woods. She describes the series as "a Huckleberry Finn narrative, but giving it to girls."

Her lushly colorful twist on the landscape once rendered by American photographers like Timothy O'Sullivan, Mathew Brady and Carleton Watkins proved alluring. From the beginning

the nature Ms. Kurland captured, using only available light, has been evocative and exquisitely detailed.

Her photographs are also clearly grounded in art history.

"One doesn't normally talk about contemporary work in terms of sheer beauty," said Jay Gorney, who directs the contemporary program at Mitchell-Innes & Nash and first encountered Ms. Kurland's work in "Another Girl." "But in terms of its beauty and its composition, and the very careful placement of the figure in nature, her work is almost like 19th-century landscape photography."

Others are drawn to Ms. Kurland's early work because it seems to give a postfeminist spin to the transcendentalist ideal of finding oneself in nature. Claudia Gould, the director of the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia, where Ms. Kurland had a solo exhibition in 2003, mentioned the 1998 photograph "Bathers," which shows half-clothed girls paddling in a verdant green river bed. To Ms. Gould it recalled Thomas Eakins's 1882 oil "The Swimming Hole," which depicts young men skinny-dipping in a lake, "only these were teenage girls and it was a photograph," she said.

The painting made waves in its day, Ms. Gould noted, because of its casually homoerotic undertones. Likewise Ms. Kurland's work "evokes this carefreeness of adolescent girls at play, being free," Ms. Gould said. "And the question is: Are they experimenting with sexuality? Same as with the boys in Eakins. It is a kind of feminist version, without being really heavy about it."

AS Ms. Gould also pointed out, Ms. Kurland's projects often seem to parallel her own life. She began the runaway girls series at Yale, posing local high school students and college freshmen in New Haven's semi-industrial surroundings, a landscape she calls "degraded sublime." After graduation, wanting her own trans-American odyssey, she began venturing out on road trips and pushed her territory toward wilderness.

She was working for Mr. Crewdson as a studio assistant at the time. "Every week or so she'd run away," he recalled, "and then finally she just left. That's when I realized her pictures are autobiographical."

Ms. Kurland may come by her restlessness naturally, for she spent her own childhood on the move. In 1978, when she was 7, her mother began supporting the family by selling hand-sewn clothing at Renaissance Faires around the country; frequently Ms. Kurland and her older sister were taken out of school to tag along.

"It's a great job for a single mom," said Ms. Kurland, who has photographed the carneys who travel with those fairs. "You can work and work and work at home, and then turn over your inventory in eight weeks." Occasionally they would camp in the woods, and the girls would hunt for fairies. Perhaps that's why the sensibility of Victorian fairy painting frequently flickers through her photographs.

Her mother now lives on a Virginia farm in the Blue Ridge Mountains, near several back-to-the-land communes. That setting inspired Ms. Kurland's formal group portraits of legendary utopian communities, like the San Francisco Diggers in California and the Farm in Tennessee.

"My mom just naturally wanders around naked," Ms. Kurland said, explaining what prompted her to photograph nudes in Edenic surroundings.

While the commune photographs look strangely like posed Victorian portraits, the "naked," as she calls them, often suggest Pre-Raphaelite paintings, or scenes from myth. Her titles frequently reinforce that association; a 2001 photograph of three flower-bedecked women walking through shoulder-high grasses, for example, is called "Diana and the Hunters."

Clearly there is a strong push-pull between realism and fantasy in Ms. Kurland's work. Her commune portraits, which she began shortly after 9/11, were a bid to make her work more political. "It felt like the narratives I was making were too cotton candy," she said. "I wanted to find people who were living with this utopian ideal." But in her naked portraits, she presents "the fantasy version" of commune life.

In early 2004 she made a photograph of seven naked pregnant women, all friends of her mother's, gathered like witches or sprites on white-fur rugs around a campfire. A year after Casper's birth that photograph became the basis of her "mamas and babies" project, in which make-believe and advocacy seem to combine.

"There's something political about creating a world that you want to exist," she said. And in a sense these new works also relate to the aesthetic of late 19th-century landscape photography, which "was really about this idea of projecting an idealism onto a landscape," she said. "It was a way of settling the West."

PERSUADING strangers to pose, often without their clothes, has never been a problem for Ms. Kurland. "I can always spot people," she said. "It's, like, really one of my superpowers. I can always tell which teenage girls would love living in the woods with their friends."

Finding mothers was equally easy. "It's like with teenagers," she said. "You find one mom, and you get 10."

She typically spends about three weeks in an area before a shoot, scouting locations and finding the right figures. She usually travels the same route, from New York to the Pacific Northwest and back, so may already have willing collaborators in a location.

If not, "I hang out in health food stores and playgrounds with a box of prints and talk to strangers, try to show them pictures, tell them what it's about," she said. "The ones who believe in the vision are the ones who come."

That's how Ms. Kurland met Amber Roberts, a nomadic political activist, in a vegetarian restaurant near Arcata, in Northern California. "She just walked up to us and said, 'You have this beautiful family, and I'm a photographer,'" said Ms. Roberts, who is in two seaside photographs of women and babies. "It's not posing, really. We all just get naked and go play on the beach. She just says, 'Do you want to just go over by the fire pit, maybe in a circle so I can see everybody?' Then slowly the children follow their mommies."

Meg Hayden, a midwife in Tennessee who has known Ms. Kurland since an early runaways shoot, said: "It's not often that you get the chance to be outside and take your clothes off. In some ways it feels natural, but because it's something you don't get to do all the time, it is liberating. It is kind of a heightened reality."

The locations Ms. Kurland chooses, and the way she frames each shot are part of the experience too. "Sometimes you're going to these locations that you didn't know existed, that are tucked away," said Alice Duffy, a prenatal yoga teacher in Texas who has worked with Ms. Kurland for several years. In "Expectant Women" Ms. Duffy is one of three pregnant women gathered like the Three Graces in a leafless forest, with a child squatting on the ground before them.

"When you're in the setting, it's very normal," she said. "But when you see the pictures, it's like: 'Wow, the way she's framed stuff, it looks even prettier than the environment you were in. Where's that fantasyland?'"

Ms. Kurland says she never lights a scene or retouches a photograph, nor does she really direct her models, either, beyond setting up the stage and telling them where to stand and whether to walk or sit. "Somehow they believe in this vision of themselves," she said. "It's kind of about validating that fantasy."

For several years now Ms. Kurland has spent most of each year on the road, living in a green Chevy Astro minivan that is neatly equipped with a built-in captain's bed and satin damask curtains sewn by her mother. Before Casper's arrival, she traveled with a battery-operated cooler to keep her film fresh; it has been jettisoned to make space for his clothes and toys.

She recently switched cameras, from a large-format 4-by-5 Linhoff to a medium-format Pentax that uses rolled film, because "it was too difficult loading sheet film with Casper," she said. She often finds herself scouting for child care on the road, along with models and locations.

Yet her need to keep traveling means that her relationship with Mr. McCorkle is always in flux. "Corey's always been really supportive of the road trips, but he really misses us," she said. "He makes the sacrifice because he believes in the work."

She added that she can't bring herself to stay put with Casper in New York. "There's this way that photography is always about going out searching," she said. "I'm not the kind of a photographer who can photograph my home."

ARTnews

"Reviews: Justine Kurland"

By Hilarie M. Sheets

November 2004; p.152

Justine Kurland

Gorney Bravin + Lee

In her show "Songs of Experience," Justine Kurland offered a world of enchantment—outside the bounds of time and convention. The setting was a forest, pic-



Justine Kurland, *The Burned Down Forest, Charred Skin*, 2004, C-print, 40" x 50" (unframed). Gorney Bravin + Lee.

tured in dramatic large-scale Cibachrome prints, her first landscapes without people.

These were syncopated with smaller black-and-white images introducing a cast of characters— young knights in full regalia, maidens brimming with anticipation, a pied piper, and even Jesus. The pictures, most interesting when seen as a group, were charged with playfulness, innocence, and sexuality, further

exploring the ideas conveyed in Kurland's earlier series of teenage girls and utopian communities.

The best stand-alone images, though, were of a fire-ravaged forest in which the denuded tree trunks have an unreal-looking black sheen. In *The Burned Down Forest, Charred Skin* (2000), Kurland seems to pull the massive vertical trunks, glinting like mica, to the foreground of the picture, establishing the sense of a stage set. There is an air of anticipation in the hyperfocused image, as if giggling elves might suddenly emerge from hiding.

Kurland is on more familiar ground with people pictures. Two shots here faced off against each other: a pubescent boy outfitted as a Renaissance fencer ready to draw his sword, and a naked girl, arms at her sides, with an alert yet ambiguous expression on her face. Is she fearful or offering herself? Is he savior or aggressor? There was humor in these new works, from the overly chivalrous posturing of several knights in armor to the rock-star-hot Jesus standing in a shallow creek with two awestruck teenage girls gently lifting their white petticoats above the water.

In one image reminiscent of Kurland's earlier commune pictures, seven naked, pregnant women are gathered lakeside around a campfire. Something's clearly in the water. —Hilarie M. Sheets

Village Voice

"Photo: Justine Kurland"

By Vince Aletti

September 25 – October 1, 2002; pp. 74-75

PHOTO

JUSTINE KURLAND Kurland's subtly staged, unabashedly beautiful landscapes with figures have always been suffused with an Edenic yearning, but her new series is the first to make that back-to-the-garden urge its subject. Taken on communes and with the cooperation of their members, Kurland's pictures depict women and a few men gardening in the nude or otherwise getting aggressively back to nature. Though the artificiality of these tableaux is faintly comic at first, there's a sweet earnestness to the work that's finally quite winning, and many of the pictures—like the one of a naked man wielding a scythe in the tall grass beyond a peach tree with a plump young boy cradled in its fork—are just plain wonderful. **THROUGH OCTOBER 12**, Gorney Bravin + Lee, 534 West 26th Street, 352-8372. (Aletti)



REE'S COMPANY JUSTINE KURLAND'S PEACH TREE AT GORNEY BRAVIN + LEE (SEE PHOTO)