

looming large: just loomis says...

Posted by Petra Zlatevska on August 17, 2010 0 comments



A Nevada boy at heart, photographer Just Loomis' career has taken him to New York, via Milan. In between photographing shoots for *Harpers Bazaar* and snapping various music icons, including Madonna in the early 80s, he met the man who would take him on as an assistant and, in the process, became a life-long friend: Helmut Newton. Spanning more than thirty years, Just's body of work - ethereal portraits of characters that embody the hopes and broken dreams of the American way of life - are now published for the first time in *As We Are* by Hatje Cantz. In an Australian exclusive, we talked to Just about what inspires him and his work as he shares some of his personal archive with us. Check out the gallery Just hand-picked exclusively for Kluster.

Covered: Working with Helmut Newton, understanding American history and observations of Australia.

Petra Zlatevska: *As We Are* documents more than just 30 years of your career accomplishments – a career producing images that reflect the Zeitgeist of American society. June Newton was quoted as saying, “No one is doing Americana like Just”. Do you consider yourself a photographer naturally drawn to capturing American subjects and themes or an American photographer simply photographing images and people?

Just Loomis: That's a great question, I think the latter. I lived in Europe for four years (during the 80s). Since moving back to the US from Europe, I came back and took a lot of photographs of where I live. So obviously those are American photographs. However, I don't consciously set out to do an 'American photograph' - I don't do that. I am simply drawn to things that I see and that I connect with. I recently took a to Paris and other parts of Europe and I realized that despite the years I lived in Europe and this recent trip, I don't know a lot about living there or about European culture; it is a culture that truly isn't mine. I have a greater understanding of American history, American people and children, how children grow up and the things that they go through. I feel I understand this better than what European adults or children experience. We have a different set of issues we deal with here in America and I am very in tune with that.

PZ: Your photo subjects, whether in fashion, documentary or portraiture, have that sense of timelessness. How do you manage to capture that in a single shot?

JL: I think it has to do with something that I am drawn to and that is a fairly consistent thing that is inside of me. It has to do with many, many years of developing what I want to look at, what I feel is interesting and what touches me emotionally. Certain things really draw me in, these are fairly simple things, I guess that's where the consistency comes from. I am glad that people say timeless, although I don't particularly try to do 'timelessness'.

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PZ: Throughout your collaboration with Helmut and June Newton, there was an indirect connection to Australia. Did you ever travel there?

JL: No. Yet I have always wanted to go to Australia. When I was living in Milan, the next step for many of my friends was to go to Australia and try to work for *Harpers Bazaar* or *Vogue* and hang out at Bondi beach. I never quite made it that far but my friends who went there just loved being there and loved the lifestyle.

PZ: Even so, from what you have seen and heard, what do you think about the photographic talent from Down Under?

JL: I wish I could answer that! I know about Baz Luhrmann's film work and from my friends who were shooting commercials and advertisements down there, I was told that there is a wonderfully vibrant and active creative community. I didn't really have a connection though to what was happening in terms of fine arts photography.

PZ: While you currently live and work in LA, your work has taken you around the world. What is the relevance of roots and home to your work, to giving it shape and identity?

JL: A lot of what I do comes from my childhood experiences and growing up in Nevada. In America, we are so severed from our roots compared with Europeans. Here we are so distant from our lineage that it has shaped our sense of nationality and how we experience adolescence and our 20s. Throughout this time, I guess I have developed an eye for the way people grow up in America and what it means to be 'American'.

PZ: In the *Three boys from Pasadena* exhibition (previously showed in Berlin, currently exhibiting at ActezGalerie Paris), there is a hand written fax from Helmut Newton offering you feedback on your photos. As mentor and teacher, what was Helmut's legacy to you?

JL: That fax is one of my most special and prized pieces of correspondence with Helmut. There were actually two faxes, an earlier one where Helmut said he didn't like the pictures and a later one where he said they were better. There are some very key 'Helmut' things in these pieces of correspondence. One of the things he wrote in them is "Be Daring" and another one is "Find the sexiest girls you can". Those are small jewels of advice and inspiration. The fact that he took the time to do that with me, looked at the pictures, thought about them and got back to me with feedback... Yes, they are cherished items.

PZ: At your level of notoriety, are there still big campaigns or clients that you would like to work with?

JL: It's such a difficult world for photography right now. I spent so long trying to get clients and campaigns, I am very tired of that. So if people, I mean clients, art directors or ad agencies come to me and love what I am doing, then that's great. I would love to do some interesting campaigns that are based around what I am doing right now. I am really however enjoying this - the new book, the exhibitions, the selling of the prints - this is something that I've wanted for many, many years. But as far as pursuing it and going after it, it's a very difficult world, one that takes a lot of time and you need top agents and all of that. If it comes to me, then great, if not then I am more than happy to keep plodding along on this path!

As We Are will be released at the end of September by Hatje Cramz publishers, Hamburg. To buy a signed, limited edition of the book, you can order directly through [Just Loomis' website](#).

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