



Hellen van Meene, Untitled 200, 2004, c-print, 39x39cm

## HELLEN VAN MEENE

Cours de Nassim Daghighian



0001 Meene Hellen van\_Untitled 001.jpg



0016 Meene Hellen van\_Untitled 016.jpg



0030 Meene Hellen van\_Untitled 030.jpg



0063 Meene Hellen van\_Untitled 063.jpg



0064 Meene Hellen van\_Untitled 064.jpg



0068 Meene Hellen van\_Untitled 068\_1999\_c-print\_39x39cm.jpg



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0100 Meene Hellen van\_Untitled 100\_Japan\_2000\_c-print\_30.5x30.5cm.jpg



0101 Meene Hellen van\_Untitled 101.jpg



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0117 Meene Hellen van\_Untitled 117\_2000\_c-print\_38.1x38.1cm.jpg



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0197 Meene Hellen van\_Untitled 197.jpg



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0204 Meene Hellen van\_Untitled 204.jpg



0205 Meene Hellen van\_Untitled 205\_Tokyo, Japon\_2005\_c-print\_30.5x30.5cm.jpg



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0224 Meene Hellen van\_Untitled 224.jpg



0232 Meene Hellen van\_Untitled 232.jpg



0234 Meene Hellen van\_Untitled 243\_Londres, GB\_2005\_c-print\_49.6x49.6cm.jpg



0244 Meene Hellen van\_Untitled 244.jpg



0252 Meene Hellen van\_Untitled 251.jpg



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0265 Meene Hellen van\_Untitled 265.jpg



0271 Meene Hellen van\_Untitled 271\_Netherlands\_2008\_c-print\_29.5x29.2cm.jpg



0277 Meene Hellen van\_Untitled 277\_2007\_c-print\_40x80cm.jpg





0279 Meene Hellen van\_Untitled 279\_2007\_c-print\_39x39cm.jpg



0288 Meene Hellen van\_Untitled 288\_American\_2007\_c-print\_40.6x40.6cm.jpg



0289 Meene Hellen van\_Untitled\_2007\_American series.jpg



0290 Meene Hellen van\_Untitled\_2007\_American trailers.jpg



0300 Meene Hellen van\_Untitled\_Pool of Tears\_2008\_c-print\_40.6x40.6cm\_Jerite.jpg



0301 Meene Hellen van\_Untitled 301\_Pool of Tears\_2008\_c-print\_40.6x40.6cm.jpg



0302 Meene Hellen van\_Untitled 302\_Pool of Tears\_2008\_c-print\_40.6x40.6cm\_iss.jpg



0303 Meene Hellen van\_Untitled 303\_Pool of Tears\_2008\_c-print\_40.6x40.6cm\_Merel.jpg



0304 Meene Hellen van\_Untitled 304\_Pool of Tears\_2008\_c-print\_40.6x40.6cm.jpg



0305 Meene Hellen van\_Untitled 305\_Pool of Tears\_2008\_c-print\_40.6x40.6cm\_still life.jpg



0308 Meene Hellen van\_Untitled 308\_Pool of Tears\_2008\_c-print\_40.6x40.6cm\_Jerrie nigh...



0309 Meene Hellen van\_Untitled 309\_Pool of Tears\_2008\_c-print\_40.6x40.6cm\_Jerrie Cha...



0315 Meene Hellen van\_Untitled\_St. Petersburg\_2008\_c-print\_40.6x40.6cm.jpg



0316 Meene Hellen van\_Untitled 316\_St. Petersburg\_2008\_c-print\_40.6x40.6cm.jpg



0317 Meene Hellen van\_Untitled\_St. Petersburg\_2008\_boy.jpg



0318 Meene Hellen van\_Untitled\_St. Petersburg\_2008\_c-print\_40.6x40.6cm.jpg



0319 Meene Hellen van\_Untitled\_St. Petersburg\_2008\_window.jpg



0320 Meene Hellen van\_Untitled\_St. Petersburg\_2008\_c-print\_40.6x40.6cm.jpg



0321 Meene Hellen van\_Untitled 321\_St. Petersburg\_2008\_c-print\_40.6x40.6cm.jpg



0328 Meene Hellen van\_Untitled 328\_St. Petersburg\_2008\_c-print\_40.6x40.6cm.jpg



0331 Meene Hellen van\_Untitled 331\_St. Petersburg\_2008\_c-print\_40.6x40.6cm.jpg



0332 Meene Hellen van\_Untitled\_St. Petersburg\_2008\_c-print\_russia couch.jpg



Hellen van Meene, Untitled, St. Petersburg, 2008 (stairs)

**Hellen van Meene (1972, Alkmaar, Pays-Bas ; vit à Alkmaar, NL)**

<http://hellenvanmeene.com/>

**Formation**

1996 Gerrit Rietveld Academie, Photography, Amsterdam

1995 College of Art, Edinburgh, Scotland

**Interview Vidéo 12 minutes sur Amadelio, Interview Channel**

Source au 09 01 27 : <http://www.amadelio.com/vlog/2007/09/21/vlog-videoblog-hellen-van-meene-global-photographer/>

**Hellen van Meene**

I M ART Gallery, Seoul, South Korea, 03 06 - 04 26 2008

I M ART presents the first solo exhibition of Dutch woman photographer Hellen van Meene from March 6 through 26, 2008. Nominated for The Citibank Private Bank Photography Prize 2001, Hellen van Meene began exhibiting her work at the Photographers Gallery in 1999. Her work features adolescent girls and boys, concentrating on the completion of a specific atmosphere.

Androgynous boys and girls emerge in her work. Viewers are captivated by their cryptic, profound look and behavior. Hellen van Meene, however, explains that her work is neither psychological, sociological recordings, nor mere portraits. The boys and girls are just a vehicle for expressing her feelings, and a medium to generate a specific atmosphere. This is why she entitled her all pieces as Untitled, rather than conferring any specific title. The boys and girls who are on the way of growing from puberty to adult unveil disquieting, incomplete psychological state and subtle beauty derived from their physical imbalance. On closer scrutiny, pale skin tone, downy hair on the skin, and glossy nail show her interest in details. Space in accord with figures emphasizes the model's spiritual solitude. The model's hypnotic eye avoiding the camera, or eyes closed draw the viewer's attention. Hellen van Meene's work is particularly marked by its color sensation. She completes a sensuous, painterly atmosphere by adding cyan to evoke a cool feeling. Her outdoor photographing of objects and figures under natural light lead viewers to concentrate on models and their surroundings. It is closely associated with her view of photography focusing exclusively on models. The exhibition is of significance in that it presents her new form, away from her previous work. Hellen van Meene's pieces have been collected by a number of prestigious galleries and museums, including Art Institute of Chicago, Guggenheim Museum, Museum of Modern Art, as well as Victoria and Albert Museum, Frans Hals Museum and Fried Museum in the Netherlands, and Folkwang Museum Essen in Germany. In spring full of subtle light, we have a chance to be captivated by her work's moderate beauty.

Source au 09 01 05 : <http://www.imartgallery.com/index2.htm>

**PHOTOGRAPHY: Hellen van Meene**

Catherine Grant, *Contemporary Magazine*, Issue 84

In Hellen van Meene's recent portraits of teenage mothers, commissioned by the Pump House Gallery, the adolescent dreamers that populated her earlier images are re-imagined through the transformations of motherhood. The idea for the series was formulated when a number of van Meene's earlier models became pregnant, interesting the artist in the situation of these young women entering motherhood at a time when they themselves had barely passed through childhood. Although the parameters of this project appear to be those of social documentary – the young mothers were contacted through various agencies in Lambeth, with many portraits shot in short, impromptu photographic sessions – the resulting images are elaborate, painterly and often very beautiful. The portraits show a range of young women in poses that recall states of reverie and inner contemplation, with van Meene's attention to detail of pose, costume and setting providing visual resonances within and between images in the series.

Van Meene has always said her work is not concerned with social or psychological portraiture, but it is hard not to read narratives around the individual characters or attempt to decipher clues in the images. As in her earlier work with girls from her hometown in the Netherlands, the focus of these images is on moments that appear to solidify the fantasies and tensions considered characteristic

of adolescence – an awkwardness in the body, a fetishistic attention to clothes, hair and make-up, an inaccessible interior life. In one image a girl stands in front of what appears to be a shed door, framed on one side by a tangle of garden implements. Her body is placed at an angle to the camera, as if she is about to enter the shed, but her face is turned upwards, her eyes closed, as if she has been caught in a state of rapture. These staged, stilled moments recur across the series. A number of the models are photographed with their eyes shut, so that the theme of pregnancy and motherhood appears to be a metaphor for the gestation of imaginative possibilities too. In van Meene's earlier photographs her models' poses often suggested melancholia or lifelessness. In this new series the subjects seem to be full of dreams, rather than drained of them. Images of reverie contrast with the more straightforward portraits of mothers and babies, often photographed so as to emphasise the bodily transformations that have taken place, and the protective bond between mother and child. In one image the girl's pink tracksuit top is zipped up around herself and her child, hiding the baby from view and revealing the stretch marks on her stomach. Her wary gaze towards the camera is softened by the repetition of pink across the image – from the flesh of the mother and baby, to the tracksuit, to the blossoms in the tree above.

The London portraits are exhibited alongside recent series made in Russia and Tokyo, as well as van Meene's native Netherlands. Over the last couple of years van Meene has moved away from an initial pool of models from her hometown to explore the dynamics of short photographic sessions with young women and men she meets on the streets of the cities she visits. Talking about this new work, van Meene explains how the speed of the encounter in a foreign place appeals to her, as she scouts each day for models, working for only 10 or 15 minutes on an individual portrait. The recent Tokyo series came out of a commission by the New York Times Magazine, and provides a bridge between her earlier work and the London images. The adolescent subjects perform in scenes that often feel slightly surreal, with van Meene working with clothing and hair to create strange, even absurd, dialogues with their surroundings. Details such as lengths of hair pulled through shoulder straps or the framing of a tightly fitting hood continue van Meene's interest in her models as actors, sometimes appearing more as objects within her symbolic, subtle dramas. Other images use the recurring motif of the model surrounded by foliage, with their costume, hair and flowers appearing to have a life of their own, adopting the iconography of a Pre-Raphaelite painting in which the model and setting are re-imagined through mythologies of goddesses, femme fatales and martyrs.

Susie Gray, the curator of the Pump House exhibition, explains that the decision to exhibit the London portraits alongside work from other countries was to emphasise the ongoing nature of van Meene's project, and the difference in her approach to that of traditional documentary. Van Meene herself says that the illusion of a documentary project is broken when works from different contexts are seen together, with visual repetitions and differences provoking readings of individual portraits, rather than a classificatory project of 'Japanese teens' or 'London young mothers'. Looking through the images that van Meene has made over the last couple of years, it appears that the short, intense encounter has provided a way for her to represent a broader cultural range within her work, linking the far-off gazes of south London mothers to those of trendy Tokyo girls. It seems fitting, then, that she will be exhibiting simultaneously in London and Tokyo, with the title of her exhibition in Tokyo seeming to sum up her approach: 'A Sense of You, Created by Me'. While the 'You' of van Meene's photographs is constantly changing, it is the continuing, strongly felt presence of the artist that connects all the images, so that they are 'van Meenes' before they are portraits of individual identities, in the same way that Warhol's portraits are primarily 'Warhols' before they are pictures of Liz Taylor or an anonymous client. This is what continues to make van Meene's work fascinating and difficult to classify: the balance between the genres of photography that attempt to tell a story about the subject depicted – documentary or studio portraiture – and the continuing acknowledgment of the artist's role in creating these stories, captured in these new photographs by a series of small details, from an upturned face, to a baby held to the body, to the colour of a flower blossom. Through these short encounters van Meene creates a symbolic universe in which changing lives and bodies become as weighted as traditional depictions of women as virtues or vices, transforming a south London mother into an allegory that the viewer is left to translate.

Catherine Grant is a writer based in London

THE PUMP HOUSE GALLERY TOURING EXHIBITION TRAVELS TO OPEN EYE GALLERY, LIVERPOOL, 21 JULY - 2 SEPT 2006 AND FOCAL POINT GALLERY, SOUTHEAST-ON-SEA, 16 DEC 2006 - 3 FEB 2007.

Source au 08 02 29 : <http://www.contemporary-magazine.com>

## An interview with Hellen Van Meene

David Toyne, *ePHOTOzine*, 22 February 2007

David Toyne, the editor of ePHOTOzine's professional portfolio section, speaks with Hellen Van Meene.

I first saw Hellen Van Meene's portraits when visiting her exhibition in 2006. She was present at the time speaking about her exhibition. She was a very articulate and interesting figure who, despite quite a difficult audience, gave an engaging and intelligent account of herself. I found myself very interested in the subject matter and by Hellen's approach to her work. This struck me as an excellent counter balance to the dry, objectifying commercial portraiture that we are exposed to on a daily basis. In fact, they seemed the antithesis to this. Her prints often featured young girls dwelling in that transient moment in childhood adolescence on the cusp of adulthood. Her subjects often appeared awkward or vulnerable, sometimes seeming a little uncomfortable in their own skin. Yet, despite this, there is an understated beauty to each image.

In Hellen's photographs there is a strong sense of realism. All of the models' minor imperfections are on show. There are sometimes bruises, goose bumps or blemishes, all proudly on display. All of the photographs are taken in unmodified natural light, with models Hellen carefully chooses to avoid the hum-drum classically beautiful look. The result of this hard-line realist approach works on two fronts. There is an unusual sense of honesty and feeling in the photographs, but there is also an ethereal quality that's hard to quantify. In order to better understand this aspect of Hellen's craft we made arrangements to discuss her thoughts on photography in depth and also to examine how she approaches making photographs.

The unique look and feel of Hellen's work raises the question what are her influences? When we discussed this it was no surprise to learn she did not really feel influenced by any photographers. At least not influenced in the sense that she wanted to emulate them. Though later in her career she was introduced to the work of Diane Arbus which she enjoyed. Hellen also added that in all the books of other photographers work she had seen, the thought *oh that is what I must try to do or be* had never occurred to her. This strong individual streak plays a significant part in her success as an innovative and individual photographer. As an unusual footnote she added that a good filming style or a striking scene in a film could be an indirect influence to her. Perhaps having some bearing on the aesthetic of a particular photograph taken at a later date.

Explaining her route into photography Hellen summed it up by describing the importance of her focus on the creative process as opposed to a technical process. She began laughing and describing getting a pink camera at the age of sixteen. She said this was the only significant piece of equipment as it got her started down the road she is on now. Hellen later described meeting an older man who introduced her to the darkroom and taught her how to colour print. This has turned to have an important influence on her approach to photography and use of colour in images to this day. Once again, the importance of independent thinking was raised and Hellen described her education in the Gerrit Rietveld academy and the importance of being allowed to go her own way. It was then she realized that making portraiture was what she loved. She added *"It's nice to communicate with people, people that are not aware, not professional models. To communicate to them that you see something special and to get it out of them and make a good portrait"*.

Hellen's choice of subject matter is the next part of the enigma. Why the androgynous nature of her models? Why the sense of vulnerability? Why the fascination with beauty in imperfection? Hellen was very forthcoming on this subject, explaining that at first it isn't something she looks for specifically. It's not on a checklist of things that must be in an image. It's something that sometimes appears in the image. She stated that it was not something put in the image the first moment, however when photographing them she described it as being like freezing the time where they are standing. Saying *"The way I ask them to look out of the camera or sometimes into the camera. They are sometimes so relaxed, so comfortable. In a way with me it's like you are getting in a balloon or a vacuum of my energy and theirs. Then it's like you mix it up together and you get this kind of photo sometimes. So it's like lighting."*

We discussed the use of unusual and inexperienced models for her portraits. Hellen explained her choice with an example. She described making a photo of a girl, a very ordinary girl. She was careful to note that being a normal girl is fine. She added with a chuckle *"when I made the picture she stands there like Queen Elizabeth. She's got that kind of air and arrogance in a positive way. That she's there. She's a person. She's got personality. When you see her and approach her nothing that I put in the picture is really visible. She's just a girl who's a bit too chubby, a bit giggly, a bit nervous and insecure. So you would probably walk by easily as there are 1000's of those girls who don't believe in themselves and think they are, too this and too that"*. Hellen felt part of her

talent as a photographer was to draw something more out of her models. Something from within them. She felt sometimes this meant strong direction of her models, which often means having to ask them how to pose or how to look. Guiding them through the process. Her description of this was dramatic referring to it as *"like sculpting on a living soul"* She feels a strong responsibility for her models and the look she gives them as she has chosen them in the first place for qualities they are perhaps unaware they have at this point..She adds after pausing for thought *"I try to get the best things out of them. If it means I have to turn her around or anything else, it's my responsibility and that is a big challenge every time. It's too easy to make a photo of an insecure girl. I mean...there's nothing in it. It's much more of a challenge to take an insecure girl and change her into Queen Elizabeth. That's more difficult"*. Any doubt about Hellen's emotional connection with her models is laid to rest by that remark.

An interesting aspect of Hellen's images is her unusual use of colour. There is often an altogether cooler feel to her photographs. Hellen described using more cyan when making images. The resulting coolness has strange effects, like creating very pale, almost porcelain skin. The use of colour was a deliberate choice after learning and experimenting with colour in the darkroom. Hellen felt that while a warm image may sometimes create a more immediately pleasing image, a cooler, bluer image, produces the more painterly effect that she prefers. She also feels that in film the colours are of a better quality than digital images. *"Film has more layers with digital lacking warmth"*. Her final words on that subject spoken with a laugh and a flourish where *"It doesn't have magic!"*

When asked about her fixation on using only natural light and the total lack of studio lighting in her photographs, Hellen made another very interesting point. In fact, it's a point critical to making a successful portrait. *"Natural light forces you to concentrate totally on your surroundings and on your model. Conversely if you try to create an atmosphere of natural light in a studio it requires great focus and concentration on the lighting itself. This takes attention away from the model and affects your creative concentration"*. She emphasised this saying *"what you have to do is look really closely to the model. See how the light approaches her. Is it soft on her skin? Or does it make things really harsh as if she's got false shadows on her face? I ask what I have to do make the lighting perfect. The only thing is 110% concentration on the model"*.

Wondering at this point how one goes about approaching these total strangers we shifted the topic to this conundrum. It provoked an immediate chuckle from Hellen as she began to describe the process as being *"like a loving attack..."* an image I found rather delightful. An example of such an attack was immediately forthcoming as Hellen described a recent print she had made. The image is of a girl in strange clothes with long curly hair. The print was displayed at one of her UK exhibitions recently. The girl had some acne on her face and was looking outside of the camera. Her hands are in her lap. Hellen related that this was a girl she saw when passing the bus station. She was looking for new faces. She saw her sitting. And saw her potential. She had a hard time convincing her that she was a suitable model. Hellen knew she was insecure and shy. Hellen pointed out to me that a professional model would be heavily made up by a makeup team to get the spots away. The result would also be heavily retouched. This kind of image holds no interest for Hellen. She saw her as special, but also a bit normal. Referring to a girl you would walk by thinking that's not really a beautiful girl actually. However after photographing her when Hellen got in the darkroom and made a print she felt the result was beautiful. *"The lighting made her radiant. You look beyond the imperfections"*. She adds *"You just see the picture and see that she is still special. She's got a little bit of Venus inside her. You see I just want to show that photos with a little bit of discomfort in your face are not things that will kill or break a photograph. It's just there. It does not make you less beautiful."*

This is an interesting statement when trying to understand the work of Hellen Van Meene. Possibly it shows why a photograph of a stranger transcends being just a snapshot, an image with no meaning for the viewer. This same point was closed as eloquently as it was begun when she added *"I look at her and those spots and she's still a Venus. She's beautiful in that picture. So there is discomfort and beauty in harmony there. I want people to look further into it than freckles. So in most cases imperfection though there is not seen anymore."* I did also wonder what it was like to be refused by a potential model. The answer was to the point and made with humour. Hellen simply said *"Very rarely it's a no. Perhaps it's good it was a no. As maybe that person wasn't really interesting anyway at that moment..."*

We continued our discussion on printing and colour and gained more insight into how Hellen works. She expressed a most interesting view on digital photography versus film photography. Under normal circumstances this can induce a state akin to a deep coma in all the debates participants.



In Hellen's case it gave some food for thought. She is by no means in the 'progress is evil!' camp. As with her images she is more in a camp of her own unique devising. She described digital photographers as often lazy photographers. This was not a random swipe at photography's bright young things. Rather it was the beginning of a thoughtful look at photography as an art. She began by relating how things were done in the 'old days' then burst out laughing at the irony of conversation on the 'old days' when she's enjoying her spritely thirties. One we stopped chuckling she pointed out that in the past you could only take a Polaroid to check your scene. Then you photographed without being able to see what you had captured. You would not know 100% for sure you had the shot you needed at that time.

*"You could make a Polaroid of the setting but not Twenty! Then it would be too expensive. So you only have the film and you don't know what the result will be. What happens is to be really, really sure everything is right. You put in an extra film and make the photos again so you have everything twice".*

She pointed out that with digital it's possible you 'think' you have your shots and you stop making photographs. Her point was that there was advantage with not seeing your result immediately. This advantage is that sometimes when you are not really sure then you can go to a different level of energy and work harder. She added with enthusiasm *"sometimes it can happen that actually a great f\*\*king photo happens because you did an extra film. Believing you have the best result sooner means you are not working as hard".* She said *"If you don't see the result you go further, push it to an edge. With digital you don't have to. You see it. So it makes you in a way lazy, as you think you have it already and you miss a great photo."* She also felt that the moment you think you don't have it you go for it 1000%. Then sometimes in the last shot your best photo comes out.

I felt this is a strong point and one with some real merit. She then continued and added another thought to underscore her argument. She explained that she needs to keep working with the model or may lose the working connection and energy she has with the model. Even in this area Hellen still felt digital was still a hindrance to new photographers. This was despite its well known advantage of hundreds of shots on a memory card. It seemed a contradiction, but there was lucid reasoning behind her thinking. She explained having only twelve photos on each film if she shoots too quickly then by the twelfth shot when the model's finally relaxed she has to stop and change film. This causes her work to proceed with care and focus each shot taken with care. With digital this concentration is not demanded as you can make 100 pictures easily. The result is laziness. A lack of focus on good photos as you have 100 images to choose from. As a digital photographer I had to blush slightly at this moment. As anyone starting with digital knows it's not an argument we can easily refute. Many digital disciples when starting out in photography do occasionally confuse a camera with some form of visual machine gun.

Hellen thoughts on this problem were clear *"I think to have a limitation like only twelve shots and no preview is good. It's like having too many choices. You have eight pastries in front of you so you don't know what to choose anymore, but with three pastries it's easier. You would think with digital it's better, but I feel it's the opposite. Less is better. Of course I'll not say digital cannot be good in some ways, but I think for starting out, new photographers should have the feeling of not being sure."*

It seems to me that what sets apart Hellen Van Meene's work are a few deceptively simple things. A total focus on her work with an attention to a minutiae of detail. Solid understanding of light and colour and most importantly a genuine care and empathy for her models. The result is something that transcends the 'plastic fantastic' of media imagery and presents something altogether more beautiful more far more honest. We parted with the final question. What's next in your creative journey? Hellen paused a moment and said *"I've never made a photo thinking 'oh now I've done it all'. When I walk in the market in my own town I see a great face. I think boy can I make a great photo out of her? And every time I have that feeling that I am not yet finished. Whenever I work I always have that feeling of 'wow good face!'. I think that's always my next step."*

With thanks to Hellen Van Meene for her time and generosity and openness.

## Hellen van Meene. Japan Series

Dutch photographer Hellen van Meene was herself barely out of girlhood when she began to photograph adolescent girls whom she knew, or found, in her home town of Alkmaar in the north of Holland. Invited to photograph in Japan in 2000, she found that while she could not communicate directly with her subjects, her instincts regarding the universality of adolescent experience, and her visual and stylistic approach to it, were translatable. In her square-format, medium-focal-length pictures of unnamed girls, van Meene strives to compose "photographs of adolescent situations and attitudes, which represent the type of 'normality' we don't usually share with others, but keep to ourselves."

### Interview by Karel Schampers with Hellen van Meene, Haarlem, 15 January 2002

"Actually it's the classical story. When I turned fifteen my mother gave me a small camera and immediately I started to photograph my friends. At eighteen I went to the Rietveld Academy in Amsterdam and from my new 'hobby' it followed naturally that I chose the photography department. The advantage of photography is that you achieve your goal much faster, that you have instant result. This fast way of working suits me. I don't have the patience for painting; it takes too long and it is too complicated for me. What I liked at the Academy was the sincerity with which the teachers encouraged you to develop ideas and follow your own track. Their emphasis lay not so much on directing, but much more on supervising the process. They stressed the importance of content and not so much of technique. You had to justify yourself continually, but you had the freedom to do your own thing and there was enough space to experiment.

The central theme in my work is photographing girls who are at the point of budding into maturity. Girls who are in that stage of their lives in which they become a woman. This theme actually came about quite spontaneously and almost intuitively. It stays close to myself. I can relate to them, I understand them better, I see in them what I once was. Their attitude is still open; they are not really committed yet, they are still playful and open-minded, they still have this touching susceptibility, they are still themselves.

The photographs are not meant to be portraits, which is why they have no titles. It is not my intention to give expression to their personality or state of mind. Nor do I want to sketch a sociological image of contemporary youth or girls at the moment of puberty. I look for a certain mood in the pictures, in which the girls almost figure as actors. As a matter of fact I treat my models as objects which you can direct and guide. They are simply material for me.

I am mainly concerned with things such as the lightfall on a white skin, bruises on an arm, hands which disfigure in water, and starting goose-pimples in frosty weather. Only then you see the texture of the skin so beautifully. It is exciting to see what happens when you put a leg over a horizontal bar or when you hang a person's hair in a bush. Besides this I pay a lot of attention to the right position, to the mise-en-scene, to matching clothes as well as their colour, to the gaze and posture of the model. I arrange everything, to the smallest detail, such as the nail polish on their fingers.

It is not that I work from a clearly defined idea, to which I will stick exactly. Of course I have something in mind, but the execution of it can go either way. Often it is something I happen to see, which I then translate into my own image and which I transform into my own world. While photographing, chance plays an important role, because all kind of things happen that cannot be foreseen. Things just come about and do not always let themselves be directed.

Usually I work with a regular group of models from my neighbourhood. I have, as it were, my own model agency. Because I know them, I know exactly which girl matches the situation. They know me and that is why I don't really have to explain or excuse myself anymore. They vary from a Korean girl to a blushing red head. The advantage is that you know each other and that they can be called up immediately. I am far too impatient to spend a lot of time looking for the right model. I must be able to react at once.

In 2000 I left these familiar surroundings, when I was invited by the Japan Foundation to contribute to the Japanese pavilion at the Architectural Biennial in Venice. In the line of the central theme 'City of Girls', they asked me to take photographs of Japanese girls. Amongst others I went to Tokyo, Atami, Osaka and Kyoto, and in three weeks' time I took thirty-one photographs. Spontaneously I would ask girls in the street, whom I found interesting, to pose for me. Sometimes it was a bit awkward and difficult to win their confidence, or that of their parents, but most of the time it all ran very smoothly and they were very co-operative. At times I did already have a certain location in mind, such as the small wooden house that I could see from my hotel window, but often the location was pure coincidence. Mostly the girls would bring their own clothes, but it also happened that I quickly bought something. You are forced to improvise in such a situation. It is a matter of looking and reacting instantly."

## Tokyo Girls

*The New York Times*, Portfolio, April 3, 2005

Hellen van Meene is one of a handful of Dutch photographers who are currently enjoying something of an international vogue for their portrait work. From the glamorous and theatrical celebrity photographs of Inez van Lamsweerde and Vinoodh Matadin (seen in the Great Performers portfolio in our Feb. 27 issue) to the stark, intently observed subjects of Rineke Dijkstra's pictures (one of which, as it happens, appears in this issue), there is no single Dutch style; there is only a shared taste for original portraiture. Van Meene, for her part, has developed a characteristically small, square and intimately composed portrait shot -- most often of pubescent girls, soft and languorous and at times, she observes, innocently erotic.

When the magazine decided to commission a portfolio of photographs of young Japanese women, van Meene's work immediately came to mind. In today's Japanese youth culture -- or at least in the forms of it that have international cachet -- innocence is pulled in multiple directions: exaggerated into mere cuteness in the kitsch of Hello Kitty; mock-heroically ennobled by the child heroes of manga (comic books); even distorted and sexualized in the submissive schoolgirls of the country's anime, or cartoon, pornography. Lost in these extremes but captured in van Meene's work is the less stylized (but still stylish) vernacular of everyday Japanese girlhood. It is a look at once fashionable and ingenuous, tender but not without the occasional flush of teenage allure.

In February and March of this year, van Meene approached girls and young women on the street in Tokyo and shot them in casual 10-minute sessions against the backdrops at hand. Van Meene says she does not conceive of her portrait photographs in the traditional documentary way: while she does not exactly "stage" her subjects, neither does she try to capture their true, underlying personality or state of mind. Instead, she chooses to see her subjects as the raw material of her own fictions. "This is not just you, now," she explains. "This is a sense of you, created by me."

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Diaporama

[http://www.nytimes.com/slideshow/2005/03/31/magazine/20050403\\_PORTFOLIO\\_SLIDESHOW\\_1.html](http://www.nytimes.com/slideshow/2005/03/31/magazine/20050403_PORTFOLIO_SLIDESHOW_1.html)

Pour voir d'autres images, dont des plus anciennes :

***Portraits* (Aperture Foundation) by Hellen van Meene, 2004, Reviewed by José M. Gonzalez**

A portrait is a window into the essence of its subject. The whole point of a portrait is to capture an individual and visually represent who they are. Why then, is Hellen van Meene's book *Portraits*, by definition, not a book of portraits? Van Meene takes her own fictional characters and uses models to portray these characters, who she photographs as a portrait of that character. This is why all of van Meene's photographs are untitled.

Hellen van Meene

PORTRAITS



Untitled 1999, *Portraits*, Hellen van Meene, Cover & page 69, (©2004 Hellen van Meene) published by Aperture Foundation

Her models are not the subjects of her pieces, the characters they portray are. She chooses models that purposely lack expression in order to mold them when taking her photographs. That is the reason why she uses such young models. An old wrinkled woman would be too interesting to photograph, and physically would not let van Meene's characters come out. Van Meene calls her models "material" for the photograph.



Untitled 1996, page 05 (©2004 Hellen van Meene)

This lack of visually interesting models doesn't curtail the extreme psychological intensity, or poignancy, of her work. Van Meene's goal is to visually express a feeling, a mood, and an internal sense of space from the outside. She uses her models as she would a piece of fabric strewn across a bed, as one piece of a whole. This is like her use of floral prints to represent femininity and a blooming happening in a girl to woman's life.



Untitled 2001, page 27 (©2004 Hellen van Meene)

Her themes revolve around youth, specifically pubescent girlhood, and the feelings that undergo that change in a girl character's life. Her models are all young girls, though recently she has been working with young boys. Interestingly even the boys seem to have an androgynous quality to them.



Untitled 1995, page 61 (©2004 Hellen van Meene)

Though van Meene's work is extremely gender based in theme and content, and can be viewed as almost erotic; it is less about eroticism than it is about documenting and expressing a point in a young character's life.



Untitled 1996, page 31 (©2004 Hellen van Meene)

Van Meene doesn't attempt to give social or emotional commentary on the lives of adolescence at large, just as far as her characters are concerned. And though eroticism is definitely part of her play, eroticism alone lacks the layered depth that van Meene is portraying in her work.



Untitled 1999, page 67 (©2004 Hellen van Meene)

Egoism, solitude, quiet contemplation, growth, fading innocence, inner tension and turmoil with a sometimes tranquil exterior all encompass her images. In many of her photographs the onlooker sees beauty, but something is wrong. Van Meene invites us to look at what is wrong, and attempt to figure it out.



Untitled 2003, page 39 (©2004 Hellen van Meene)

Another major theme in her work is 'being stuck', or the inability to move. This also is a part of a change that happens in young people, which she uses frequently with her characters. She represents this through metaphor, having a jogger's running suit wrapped around a tree, a girl's head stuck in waste paper basket, a girl inside of a boy's shirt, unable to move, or hair tangled in branches.



Untitled 2000, page 13 (©2004 Hellen van Meene)

Portraits is an interesting book, in that the 55 color images of fiction envelopes the viewer without a lot of essays or opinions on the art to hinder the purity of the experience. The only essay, which appears at the end of the book, is well written by Kate Bush and gives another perspective on van Meene's work.



Untitled 2000, page 71 (©2004 Hellen van Meene)

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