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Lynn Goldsmith... In the Looking Glass

By Lou Jacobs Jr.

Since the 1970s, photographer and former rock singer Lynn Goldsmith has built a successful career photographing rock stars such as the Rolling Stones, Bob Dylan, Patti Smith and Sting. She has also shot portraits for album covers as well as magazine covers, including Richard Gere for *Newsweek*, and covers for *Elle* and *Sports Illustrated*. Her portfolio includes a number of *Life* magazine stories, and book jacket portraits of people ranging from Woody Allen to former vice president Dan Quayle to business icon Michael Eisner. She has even covered hard news, from earthquakes to space shuttle exploration.

In the past six years, Lynn has been working on a large and complex project evolving from her investigation into personal identity. She was motivated by lack of interest in doing any more celebrity portraits and the desire "to take a closer look at who I am," she says.

Intrigued and inspired by viewer interest in department store window displays near her New York studio, Lynn conceived a remarkable photographic series titled *In the Looking Glass*. Already complete are 42 separate pseudo-store-window fantasies that illustrate how a well focused imagination can warp and weave fabrics, furniture and props into fascinating images. Amazingly, the star of each spectacle is Lynn herself. *In the Looking Glass* is a unique twist on self-portraiture that combines Lynn's experiences in set decoration, art direction and photography into tableaux seen in large digital prints at selected gallery exhibitions.

Originally, while observing window displays, Lynn wondered, "Do people project themselves into such imaginary places, into



the clothes they see? What do they see that's different than what I see?" She explains, "I watched people to see if they were attracted into the stores, especially the women, particularly those whose body image was far from that of the mannequins.

"With the *In the Looking Glass* series, I investigate the role of identity. I am fascinated by the distinctions between what we see, what we imagine and how the two can blur. By creating different hair and makeup for each of my self portraits, I become various personae, often in the same image. Sometimes I am male as well as female. Of the many 'identity' artists, I am the only one who places herself inside the vacant world of the mannequin. I also turn myself into characters who are not mannequins, but who share a fictional reality with them."

Lynn continues, "I am influenced by myth, religion, fairy tales, diverse cultures, historical moments and mass media. My work combines art history, Hollywood cinema and fashion ideals. By creating different looks for myself, I am saying that we all inevitably adopt multiple roles. I want to make viewers recognize something of themselves rather than just me.

"In the studio, the self-portraits evolve with the help of my assistant, Thomas O'Brien. Under my direction, we make the images of me that I want to later add to the mannequins' headless bodies. Most of the other photographs are those I make on location and not in the studio. Thomas creates a library of images for this purpose.

"About 10 years ago, when making celebrity portraits, I felt I had lost much of the elation our magic medium offers. With the



coming of digital capture, I reveled in seeing images immediately on the camera or the computer screen. Working digitally jarred me out of my photo habits and opened my eyes to limitless possibilities.

"Adobe Photoshop CS2 gave me the tools to create a new kind of reality. This program opens the door for anyone who wants to manifest their vision for others to see. The tools give me a greater ability to investigate the role of identity by assuming multiple guises in greatly varying self-portraits; I insert myself in compositions within varying environments I create for *In the Looking Glass* photographs. Enjoying the inherent theatricality of photography, I swing into the past and to the future, catering to illusion and reality."

Lynn's fine art images evolve the way a painting evolves on canvas. After she photographs a window, she removes elements from it and begins to create a fictional narrative. Then new photographs are shot and added, telling her stories with layers of humor, social commentary and satire.

Lynn Goldsmith grew up mostly in Detroit and went to Miami Beach High School. "I always took pictures," she says, "because my father was a serious amateur, and I loved working in the dark-room with him. I also wrote songs, played guitar, had bands and performed as an actress.

"I think my main influence has been my mother, who taught me that anything is possible and I should have fun trying whatever interests me. There is no failure if you have a good time trying. She supported my putting on shows in the neighborhood to earn money, and she helped me understand what it meant to earn a living by having me make holiday candles, which I sold door-to-door

when I was about eight. My other important influences were films and television."

During the 1980s, Lynn became Will Powers, a recording artist who signed with Island Records and wrote songs with such artists as Sting, Steve Winwood and Todd Rundgren. Her debut album, entitled *Dancing for Mental Health*, won critical acclaim, and her single "Kissing With Confidence" reached number three on the British charts.

Lynn says her accomplishments have been backed by two axioms: "Creativity is based on breaking limiting thought patterns," which certainly underlies her versatility, and, "There is no such thing as a fixed identity," deftly illustrated in her unique self-portrait series. When she completes 50 images for *In the Looking Glass*, it will become a book. "That should be in about 2008," she estimates, "as each image takes me about a month to do."

For the series Lynn uses a Mamiya 645AFD with a Leaf Valeo 22Wi digital back. Her lenses include an 80mm, 120mm macro, 35mm macro and a 55–110mm zoom. She has also worked with a variety of Nikons, from the D2X down to Coolpix models. Lighting was provided by Profoto electronic flash units placed carefully to create and sustain moods.

Using an Epson 9800 printer in her Colorado studio near Aspen, Lynn and Thomas carefully turn out 30x40- and 60x40-inch prints on Epson glossy paper. They are mounted to Plexiglas® to give the appearance of fashion store windows.

All the completed pictures from *In the Looking Glass* are included on Lynn's website, www.lynngoldsmith.com, along with a variety of other work. Photographs from Lynn's books include some from *Flower*, a series of elegant flower close-ups that artist Donald Sul-



tan called “beautifully composed and lighted.” A painter known for his own flower images, Sultan described Lynn’s work as “digital eroticism.”

Lynn declares, “Flowers were my time-out from celebrity portraits and all the equipment and help needed to make them. I used just one Nikon F5, one lens and film. None of the images were retouched.” She adds that Georgia O’Keeffe was an inspiration.

There are also excerpts from *Access All Areas*, a collection of Bruce Springsteen images beginning in 1978 that is virtually a backstage pass.

Circus Dreams features wagons and patterns romanticized in still lifes taken at the Circus World Museum in Baraboo, WI, as well as during travels with the circus train throughout Wisconsin.

Lynn’s *Photo Diary* features musicians in various genres to show that “music can motivate something very private... about ourselves... our restlessness. It appears to be a photo book of rock celebrities, but it is in fact my story,” she asserts.

Another book, *Marky Mark*, covers a hot-blooded 20-year-old singer/actor (Mark Wahlberg) who “wanted what his musician brother had—girls, fame and money.”

The Police is one of her earliest books, a result of seven years of intermittent coverage of that group. “I learned to be ready to capture the moments that all their fans wanted to be part of,” Lynn

recalls.

Her 1990 book *New Kids on the Block* was on the *New York Times* best-seller list for three weeks.

Along with these books on the website, there is a celebrity category, where you will find 64 head shots that augment Lynn’s versatility.

Lynn Goldsmith has been engrossed in numerous facets of creativity in her bright career. Her self-portrait series, *In the Looking Glass*, has been an extremely challenging yet satisfying effort. In a review of a recent show of that work, the *Chicago Tribune* compared her work to that of Cecil Beaton. He, too, was an artist with a grand sense of taste.

Visit www.lynngoldsmith.com.



Lynn Goldsmith will be presenting a program at WPPI 2007 entitled “40 Years Behind the Camera.” The program will be held in BALLY’s Platinum Room on Monday, March 26 from 7:30–9:30 P.M. Lynn will also be participating in the “First Ladies of Photography: A Forum” on March 27 from 8:30–11:00 P.M. in BALLY’s Event Center.

Lou Jacobs Jr. is the author of 30 how-to photography books, the latest of which is How to Start and Operate a Digital Portrait Photography Studio (Amherst Media). He has taught at UCLA and Brooks, is a former president of ASMP national, and has also written and illustrated numerous books for children. He enjoys shooting stock during his travels in the U.S. and abroad.