

## **Art Analysis of Bruno Stettler's Photographs by Sascha Serfözö**

### **Lolita-Amazonians in the Surreal Jungle of Consumption**

He has dedicated his creative work to a very special, intoxicating version of hyper realism: Zurich-based photographer Bruno Stettler's images depict strange, penetratingly artificial scenarios populated by erotically manic femininity. Narcissistically in love with themselves albeit posing in ways that clearly demand sexual attention, Lolitas act out futuristic, hyper-urban scenarios in Bruno Stettler's works of art. Presenting their special blend of child-woman and Amazon, these women appear to be exotic beings straight from planet Eros.

In his boldly colorful photographic work, Bruno Stettler covers topics such as teenager aesthetics, consumer fetishism and candy shop design. On the other hand, he always eternalizes moments of undisguised, raw and straight-forward sexuality exuded by his protagonists. The intentionally highly edited images meld a wide variety of approaches representative of the latest art and act photography; reminiscent of the kitch aesthetic of Jeff Koons and of the portraits and act photos taken by Araki in Tokyo's urban environment. Nonetheless, Stettler's photography is ultimately in a category entirely its own, given that the artist purposefully introduces elements of today's video clip aesthetics. Relaxed documentary-style photography of Lolitas at the swimming pool on the roof of high rises mutate into a kind of monitor pop once they have gone through targeted editing on the computer, which at times certainly brings up comparisons to videos of female rappers Fergie or Gwen Stefani.

Unlike for instance Helmut Newton who gave the models in his photographic work a fetish-like modeled look, or Araki who usually depicts women in their vulnerable nudity, Bruno Stettler allows his very sensual protagonists to pose for his camera in gaudily colorful girly clothes. This makes them look uninhibited, playful (which is what they are indeed), despite all of the accessorized armor from teenager boutiques. Their sexual, energetic charisma remains completely natural and unbroken. This occasionally allows viewers to directly comprehend Stettler's photographic work, thanks to the fact that the eroticism of the young women speaks for itself and is not being steered into a certain direction by additional symbolic statements.

Whether they're in Cuba, Bangkok or Rio de Janeiro: Bruno Stettler's models move around – alone or in groups – in love with themselves and narcissistic, driven by their world, which appears to be peculiar, strange and unpopulated. They focus on their own Eros, which allows them to play their games and to stay under quasi eternal erotic tension. This is why these women appear to actually be naked, despite all of their super-sweet packaging. The hyper sexuality they exude makes them look nude in the fantasy world of those who see them. Simply put: Dressed Lolita nudes.

However, Bruno Stettler's photographic work is anything but pornographic in the true sense of the word. The artist simply plays with our – the audience's – expectations and conditioning. In the world of contemporary arts, he is therefore in very good company. Terry Rodger's pictures come to mind in this context.

In his photographic works, Bruno Stettler exaggerates merchandise and consumer aesthetics to the max, only to meld them with universal vacation fantasies and ultimately places it all into a remote futuristic scenario, which

despite all of its colorfulness can at times appear to be surprisingly cold and high-tech. It is precisely this element that is ultimately irritating because it is not completely tangible. It suggests that Bruno Stettler is consciously/subconsciously packaging yet a second statement into his superficially very sensual work. A statement that uses only the stylish tool of image language to turn our increasingly estranged civilization into a theme.

Without assuming any clearly critical or approving role, Bruno Stettler simply illustrates – albeit in an exaggerated manner – how he experiences our modern urbanity, strictly following the motto: >It is simply the way it is.” It goes without saying that Bruno Stettler’s point of view is anything is not objective either, but he does not combine his photographic scenes with judgmental statements. To the contrary. Using what seem to be unconcerned but highly artisan distortion techniques and reflections on his subjects, the artist succeeds in exaggerating what has actually happened while keeping intact references to the respective venues. As a result, these locations appear to be strangely remote – absolutely not from this world. It does not matter whether the destination is Cuba, Rio de Janeiro or Bangkok. Once again, an instant bridge to the images of Terry Rodgers is built. Although the chosen venues and the concrete image structures are entirely different, the playgrounds of Bruno Stettler’s Lolitas are ultimately just as impossible to make out as the interiors of Terry Rodgers’ images appear to be mysterious.

This is precisely why in this desolate strange alien world the unfettered direct sensuality of Bruno Stettler’s protagonists catches the eye with such intensity. It goes without saying that this manufactured area of conflict has long become a classic in our contemporary culture. It is de facto a deeply anchored artistic idea which has been accompanying modern civilization since the early 19th century, especially in film and photographic media. Fritz Lang’s movie Metropolis comes to mind. In this movie the leading actress also finds herself in the area of conflict between sensuality and alienation. In Bruno Stettler’s case this approach is manifested in a modern fashion in his depiction of the Lolita-Amazon in the surreal jungle of consumption. Another fitting title would be >Dressed Lolita Nudes in Futuropolis.

**Sascha Serfözö, December 2006**