

Stefanie Schneider

The scorching heat typical to parts of Arizona and California seems to seep in through Stefanie Schnieder's Polaroid camera lens as she finds herself in the midst of the real American dream. In a place where trailer-homes and inflatable backyard swimming pools, Cadillacs and tumble-weeds, cowboy hats and white picket fences are a mundane reality and not just a figment of Hollywood's crazed imagination. In her viewfinder, one of her infamous heroines seduces the camera in a \$2.99 Walmart negligee, in a parody of Faye Dunaway parodying all-American women such as herself. This photographer's trademark back-door beauties often manage to further obscure the already indistinct line between screen icon and trailer park trash.

Schneider's modish snap-shots have, more often than not, been compared or associated with the flashy, outlandish imagery manufactured by the Hollywood film industry and its ill-reputed cousin; commercial media. Already being engrossed in cinematography and the film world, finding herself in the proximity Hollywood, miles from where this spectacle originated, and hold-

ing in her hands a sinister instrument of fiendish Americana; the Polaroid camera, this German artist will naturally be somewhat influenced by her surroundings. Not to say in the least that Schneider doesn't intend for her images to be cinematic. Most of her images are arranged in a series to tell a story, just like in the movies. Her washed-out, overexposed visuals resemble many of Hollywood's endeavours from classic stills of Steve McQueen or Peter Fonda to David Lynch's perverse mirage-like nightmares. One might even expect to encounter Oliver Stone's Mickey and Mallory Knox in one of Schneider's series of images. ... but the resemblance ends there. The difference is that nothing in Hollywood cinema is left to chance. Schneider's photography is chance personified.

Her body of work is defined by her use of out-dated, often discontinued Polaroid film. Through the years, Polaroid has produced many different kinds of film. Many of them stay on the market for about a year and are discontinued and replaced by a newly invented stock. "Like their black and white film; one stock had a newspaper look about it and this one doesn't

exist anymore. None of the black and white stock exists. They just produced it for three years from 1992 to 1995," Schneider informs. The results may vary greatly but all her photos seem to bear a similar signature quality. The images often appear dated, overexposed or deteriorated. The results vary from image to image; from what your view of a man walking on a beach might be if you were sun-stroked to a woman standing in front of a rural home which appears to be haunted by the ghost of an ill-treated cow. What ever the effect, which is always a surprise even to the artist herself, the old, marred film has an eerie tendency to depict the present much like our own imperfect minds recall the past. The aesthetics of both mediums resemble each other in a washed out, inaccurate, sweetly jaded nostalgia that is more beautiful to look at than the real thing ever was.

Schneider's work, spontaneous by nature is not necessarily spontaneous in design and composition. Her scenarios are stylish, her subjects are attractive and the results, however they may vary, always seem to look pretty. Many of the images from one of her





most recent works, "Hitchhikers, 2005" in which her heroine's explore the milieu of trailer-homes, motel-rooms and backseats of convertible cars could be mistaken for torn out pages from a fashion magazine. Her work "29 Palms, 1999" is a series of portraits of inhabitants of the town 29 Palms, California, who also appear in her series "Long way home". Schneider's snap-shots of these down-right sexy chicks, merely cavorting about in their natural habitat clad in camp, multi-coloured wigs, could be mistaken for stills of Jane Fonda's cast members that ended up on the cutting room floor when they edited "Barbarella". In the future, Schneider plans to turn this work into a full-length film in which stills from the original work will be used. It will correspondingly be filmed with Polaroid to continue the original aesthetic.

In the late 90's, Schneider attended film and photography school in LA, it was her professors there who inadvertently propelled her art career by encouraging her to lose interest in photography and nearly drop out of school. "The problem was that my photographs were never really in focus even when I used a normal camera. They were always imperfect in their quality so I had a lot of problems with my professors," Schneider explains. Dropping photography gave Schneider more time to hang out with her

boyfriend, a documentary film maker who taught her techniques of classical film editing and left her with more time for shopping, which on one such expedition, Schneider found herself literally stumbling over a bargain bin full of outdated Polaroid film. Not being able to resist a bargain, Schneider bought a plentiful amount of the long format "Captivo" and the next day, a Polaroid camera followed to justify her original purchase. Experimenting with her new toy, she found the results she'd always wanted. This led Schneider to revive her flat-lined interest in photography and soon after she managed to make a break-through in the art world as an innovative, young photographer. Schneider only managed to snap around twenty Polaroids before inciting the interest of her first gallery. Since then, her work has steadily gaining recognition. "Not like a shooting star or anything, but it gradually goes better every year. Luckily I never had to do all these horrible things artists usually have to do," Schneider explains.

She recently experienced a different kind of introduction to commercial success with her artwork being featured in Mark Forster's new film "Stay". In addition to the typical background wall-adorning scenario, her work actually makes it's way into the storyline as Naomi Watts and Ryan Gosling's characters in the movie are both artists and both claim Schneider's artwork as their own. As the two characters are sup-

posedly painters and not photographers, Stephanie's photos had to be stretched onto canvas and glossed over in order to look like paintings. So both of these weirdoes supposedly produce the same art? According to Schneider, "The movie's got this schizophrenic thing happening." "Stay" premieres in October in the US and January 2006 in Europe.

TEXT BY CLARE STACEY SHABIS

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