

A woman with voluminous red hair styled in a bun, wearing dark sunglasses and a bright pink jumpsuit, stands in a desert landscape. She is holding several colorful toys, including a yellow and blue toy figure and a red toy figure. The background shows a sandy desert with sparse green bushes and distant mountains under a clear sky.

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STEPHANIE SCHNEIDER







AN INTERVIEW:
STEPHANIE SCHNEIDER
BY ALISON WEAVER

Stephanie Schneider is a German photographer living in Berlin and Los Angeles. She is known for using expired Polaroid instant film material to create an effect of washed-out colors. The photographs are often blurred and dream-like, and the blemishes caused by the degenerated film stock are included in the composition in a painterly way. Her preferred choice of location is the American West. Schneider's work is internationally exhibited in galleries and private collections and released in books and exhibition catalogs. Schneider holds a MFA in photography from the Folkwang Schule in Essen, Germany.

Alison Weaver: What artists have influenced you? I know a lot of people have compared your photographs to David Lynch's films; were you influenced by him? If so, how?

Stephanie Schneider: I am influenced by film, music, and books like *Days of Heaven*, *Badlands*, *2046*, *The Last Picture Show*, *The Flounder* by Günter Grass, [and] the songs of Hildegard Knef and Serge Gainsbourg or Coco Rosie. David Lynch did not really influence me, though there is the swinging tulips scene in the beginning of *Blue Velvet* which after I shot *Suburbia* I realized had a similar feeling as the whole series.

AW: What prompted you to begin using Polaroid instant film material?

SS: A coincidence. I stumbled over a large and cheap quantity of outdated captive film in 1997 at an L.A. photo store. I bought all 180 packages for 50 cents each. Next day I bought the camera. Next day I went to the beach with my sister. When I saw the results I realized that [it was] the medium which perfectly shows the world in my head. And from then on, I just kept on buying all outdated material I could find, [and] all the cameras I came across cheaply.

AW: Have you ever shot in black and white?

SS: Yes, black and white Polaroids [have been] part of my work since 2003.

AW: It has been mentioned that your series *Suburbia* depicts people in predicaments similar to the characters in Raymond Carver's short stories. Would you agree?

SS: I would have to research that since I have to admit that I don't know Raymond Carver.

AW: Can you tell me about the 29 Palms, CA project?

SS: Once a year my artist friends and I drive to 29 Palms, California. We take with us some scripts and production concepts, as well as some costumes and props. I usually have a basic idea of how I want to stage the photo sequences, which are extended and brought to life through improvisation in cooperation with my actors. I choose the locations on-site and then build my sets there.

29 Palms, CA is about a small community in the California desert, in which the different characters meet. They are united through a radio show for lonely hearts, which they all listen to, and in which they discover their own stories and fates. The story is about love, pain, loneliness, alienation and rediscovery, the fulfillment of dreams, and the living-out of emotions. The artists who play the characters develop them in collaboration with me and Radha Mitchell, who is writing the screenplay. Some of the participating artists also contribute songs and music or other forms of art to the project. The development of the project takes place via the project website and can partly be witnessed by the audience.

AW: If you had to create a mission statement for your work, what would it be?

SS: Love, lost and unrequited, leaves its mark in our lives as a senseless pain that has no place in the present. The ex-lover experiences the residues of love as an amputee experiences the sensation of a ghost limb. It is the tangible experience of "absence" that has inspired this piece. It is using the nuances of memory and imagination to explore relationships as we all have experienced them, to reflect about the (im)possibilities of the simultaneousness (of love)—a simple harmonic motion.

AW: Who do you think should be the next President of the United States and why?

SS: Sean Penn with Anthony Kiedes as vice president (for what they support, like Paul Watson, the sea shepherd).

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*An Interview:
Stephanie Schneider*

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*Front & Back Cover
Photos by Stephanie
Schneider*

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