

**An Interview with
Legendary Photographer Anna Fox
Glamor, Disturbance, and Rendering the
Anxiety Ridden Female Experience**



Interview written and conducted by: Cortney Connolly

Linda pregnant and Charlie (the dog) 1998 from the series Pictures of Linda in collaboration with Linda Lunus

Print sizes 20 x 20 inches and 40x40 inches. Digital C-Types.

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An Interview with Legendary Photographer Anna Fox: Glamor, Disturbance, and

Rendering the Anxiety-ridden Female Experience
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At first glance, Anna Fox's work is a presentation of everyday life. However, with a little more time, the eye discovers a deeper narrative. Fox uses the ordinary - a cigarette, cupboard, cockroach, or a pair of high heels - in a manner to trigger curiosity and self reflection. Fox uses the mundane as a subject to create beauty while simultaneously provoking thought and emotion. UK-based image and filmmaker Anna Fox shares personal experiences of fear, humor, and disgust to evoke social commentary. For over 30 years, Fox used her fascination with the mundane to combat gender inequality, the workplace, and Margaret Thatcher's influence on British Politics. Claire Samuel for LensCulture described her documentarian style as "finding the strangeness of everyday life, creating a bridge between the personal and political."¹

Fox emerged as a prominent British image-maker and colorist in the late 20th century among her contemporaries, Paul Seabright, Martin Parr, Paul Graham, and Paul Reas. Her work has been displayed in world renowned institutions including Victoria & Albert Museum, The Museum of Contemporary Photography in Chicago, and The Shanghai Center of Photography. In addition to being an artist and professor at the University for the Creative Arts at Farnham, Fox leads Fast Forward Women in Photography, an organization focused on helping emerging female photographers gain exposure. Through a vibrant, arresting, and, at times, combative style, Fox creates a bridge between beauty and the grotesque.

1 See David Chandler 2005 essay "Vile Bodies"



Untitled from the series Country Girls 1996 - 2001 in collaboration with Alison Goldfrapp
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In *Country Girls* (1996-2001), a photo series in collaboration with Alison Goldfrapp, Fox reclaims the horrific murder of Fanny Adams. The images are dynamic and colorful, while conveying the disturbing fetish of dehumanization and brutalization of the female body. The model, Alison Goldfrapp, lies in a sensualized mannequin performance, which immediately catches the viewer's attention as if one has just stumbled across a recent crime scene. While horrific in nature, there is beauty in the use of color and styling. Fox juxtaposes glamor with disturbance to create an anxiety-ridden female experience. *Country Girls* questions why violence against women is subject to eroticization.

As a female artist how are you redefining the world in terms of a feminine perception of reality?

AF: I suppose that simply by putting my voice into the world, I am adding a female perception of reality. Although I have never been convinced that there is an actual 'female gaze, I am sure that as women photographers we bring things to light in new ways, and bring subjects that have not been considered before. There is something in the fact that women may have very different relationships with their subjects than men. I feel this when I am working, and when I watch men at work photographing, I can see a difference in approach.

What helped you distinguish certain moments of the mundane to be so remarkable?

AF: It was a combination of different things. One, being the work I was introduced to as an undergraduate. We were taught by Martin Parr, Karen Knorr and Paul Graham to name a few. I was very inspired by Sally Eauclaire's books on the new color photography coming out of the US. She came to my school and gave a lecture and showed a lot of photographers portraying the mundane in color, and looking at what was right in front of them instead of traveling miles away from home to make their

work - it was fascinating to see this. I was interested in talking about what exactly society was like at the time. When I was studying, Margaret Thatcher was Prime Minister. She was a really powerful right wing governor who did all sorts of shameful things in her role as a leader that still affect society today. Thatcher destroyed the idea of community and transposed every person was out for themselves. That gave me a lot of material to rail against.

In your series “Country Girls” , there is a sense of female dissociation, and visually jarring tension between the subject and viewer. Coming from a female photographer it is such a feminist piece. What inspired it?

AF: It is an unusual project within my work, because I not only worked in collaboration with Alison Goldfrapp - one of my earliest collaborations, but it was also my first overtly staged work. At the time Alison was primarily a performance artist and a long term friend. It is a common misconception in these photographs that the subject is a dummy, but Alison is the model and she styled herself in the images with both of us selecting locations and poses. Both of us grew up in a small town located in the Hampshire countryside and at the time, there was no internet and public transport was limited. Even though we only lived one and a half hours south of London and 40 minutes north of the beach, it wasn't feasible to move around very easily (independently from one's parents). Goldfrapp and I were small town girls, and like other young women, we were frequently threatened by violence against women.

Alison and I were also both very affected by a story about a girl that originated in our town. Fanny Adams was brutally murdered in 1867, supposedly by a local bank clerk. She was chopped up into pieces and her head was reportedly delivered back to her family.



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Then some years later, the British Royal Navy produced canned meat for their sailors which they named “Sweet Fanny Adams”. The meat very poor quality and sailors changed the name to Sweet Fuck All as in ‘nothing at all’. So this girl’s body has been depreciated to a slang term referring to ‘shit’ and the greater population doesn’t know that. Yet the term Sweet Fuck All is often used to represent the idea of nothingness.

Why do you think artists blend the attractive with the repulsive?

AF: Young women like Alison and I were interested in Fanny Adam’s story. We both have an interest in gothic stories, like Edgar Allen Poe or Frankenstein. We began shooting together in areas of our hometown where we may have not felt comfortable on our own. We created a series that was about the anxiety of the female experience. Looking back now, I can see that we made the pictures in a way that juxtaposes a glamorous look with a sense of danger and horror. I think the aesthetic first attracts the audience. Then the viewer is repelled with the content, and I think this creates a powerful emotion in the viewer and so enables the work to convey the feeling that we wanted to be conveyed - it is almost a sick humor!

Why does society have such a big deal with females having autonomy over their bodies?

AF: We’ve grown up in a patriarchal society, and there’s all sorts of limits for women hidden in that construct. Now and then we think we have erased them, and then they come right back. It doesn’t matter how free minded you are, our children grow up in a society where they are molded in certain ways. This seems unavoidable, women are still second rate citizens. In the UK, many women give up their jobs when they have children, often because their male partner earns more money. This makes it hard for her to get back into the workforce after rais-

ing the children. Until society stops doing this and creates an equal framework to childcare duties, the world won't change. This is the same for other caring duties which so often are left to women.

Because women occupy the position of a second rate citizen, I think it's very hard for society to accept a woman's point of view. I have come across people who have been disgusted by some of my work! In the last five years, there has been improvement for women at a faster rate. I have had more voice in this time than ever before, not just because I am established, but there's been more room for women to speak. I do think often that women artists who become well known are too frequently demonized in one way or another - I don't have the evidence to back this up so it is a generalization - there are also too many dead women artists who were not celebrated in their lifetimes. Women artists need to be allowed the dignified space they deserve, and it is actually starting to happen. I think women experience the same things, in different amounts, across the globe and it's fantastic to see that at last, women are being given more of a voice. Photography is a fabulous medium as one has the freedom to escape the constraints of words, meaning is often implied in more subtle ways. My job is so liberating, however, art is only liberating if the field lets you in. It's much worse for women in film, there are barely any female directors that are properly recognized.

I like to highlight feelings of tension and discomfort, particularly as a woman. There is an uneasiness in much of my work that is both deliberate and powerful.



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