

Global conflicts haunt the reflections of dolls' eyes in a powerful new project **By Baldev Duggal**



Lydia Venieri

Lydia Venieri is a Greek visual artist whose current project “War Games” seduces you by the innocence of a children’s doll portrait. But upon closer inspection, the eyes of these dolls convey nothing of the innocence of childhood play. Rather, they communicate the bitter taste of conflict. By creating portraits of children’s dolls and mixing photographs of the wars that permeate today’s news into the eyes of those dolls, Lydia has created a series of images that powerfully document how conflict might by per-

ceived by tomorrow’s generation—today’s children.

Lydia first visited us at Duggal when a client of hers was looking for a frame for one of her 3-D images. “I quickly realized that once I knew what I wanted, I was sure to find it there,” recalls Lydia. “Duggal’s lab inspired me to find the definition to my ideas.”

When we later met and she discussed her project with me, I was eager to learn how she originally conceived of this project. “The image of the reflec-

tion in the eyes dates from my teenage diaries,” she explained. “Back then, I would often finish my day’s entry with a drawing of my forehead and my eyes with a daydreaming expression that reflected my thoughts and images that symbolized my moods. For example, a boat with open sails represented escape, and a snowstorm symbolized my desire to hibernate.”

The power of the imagery in “War Games” is in the eyes of the children. “My eyes become our eyes, and we are

these dolls,” says Lydia. “In between the two subjects, the doll and the war scene, there’s a huge unseen barrier of different dimensions of existence, which is impossible to cross over. I have dreamt what it would feel like to reach across and see the difference between what is reality and what is life. That inability to reach the other side makes me, the artist, feel like a ghost.”

Before I could even begin to fathom how we at Duggal Imaging could help her, I had to have a better understanding of her technique.

“When I initially began thinking about this project, I was looking for a medium that could project a strong feeling of reflection,” says Lydia of the process. “At the same time, I was searching for a material that would allow my digital artwork to last. I acquire my portrait images of the dolls’ eyes by using a Canon G5 digital camera. The war images are acquired from public domain resources. I often try to contact the photographer who took the image of a particular conflict. I then manipulate those images into the eyes of the doll portraits in Photoshop and make prints at sizes ranging from 40x20 inches to 60x30 inches.”

Once I grasped the concept of what Lydia was trying to communicate, I instinctively knew which material would lend itself perfectly for her art: archival inkjet on poly satin.

“I visited Duggal Imaging because I knew that Mr. Duggal would present me with a large variety of materials to choose from,” says Lydia. “I also knew that if there was something new, he’d have it. And when Mr. Duggal showed me the satin material, I immediately knew that this was what I was looking for. In the end, it was the material that helped define my ideas. And Duggal’s studio inspires me with new definitions for my work.”

Everyone at Duggal Imaging treasures the opportunity to help an artist realize his or her creative vision. We like to think that we’re the perfect com-

plement to their design objective. Once Lydia and I realized what material would work best for her, it freed her to focus solely on her creative concepts.

“Having lived with the work for ‘War Games’ on a daily basis, I continually see new reasons for this match between my images and the satin material,” says Lydia. “The satin material not only allows the dolls to communicate the fine expression of the reflection; it also gives it a kind of immateriality. The image of the dolls with the luxurious tender fabric and the silky look of their eyes create a strong conflict when one discovers the war scenes within them. The viewer’s feelings change in an instant. It’s the shock of a candy that turns out to be a bitter pill.”

The titles of her work cover the range of conflicts that have and are affecting the world today: “Baghdad,” “Mogadishu,” “Nagasaki,” “Gaza,” “9-11.”

Lydia Venieri is currently represented by the Stefan Stux Gallery (www.stuxgallery.com/www/index.php?content=page_content_artists_3355086124665a22430906.xml) in New York. They first showed her images at Art Basel and Scope. The first series of her images were printed at 40x20 inches here at Duggal and were shown at FIAC 2006 in Paris (www.fiacparis.com), Art Chicago (www.artchicago.com) and Art Athina (www.art-athina.com). DPP

Baldev Duggal, president and founder of Duggal, has been innovating visual solutions for image-makers for more than 40 years. Credited with building and designing the industry’s first dip-and-dunk processing machine, Duggal has maintained his status as a leader in the imaging business and is heralded for outstanding service by consumer and trade magazines alike. With digital capabilities reaching worldwide, his headquarters covers a block on West 23rd Street in New York City.