



Left, the cover image from Phillips' latest book, *Monika Monster*, featuring Phillips' favourite subject, Monika – a Polish teenager living in Brooklyn. Above, Valerie Phillips



Left, this photograph is a typical example of Grannan's work. Right, a self-portrait



THREE OF A KIND

A trio of talented young female photographers is quietly conquering the male-biased domain of art photography, says Penny Martin

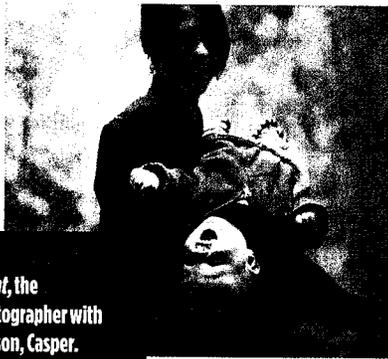
In the predominantly male world of art photography, three young female photographers have been busy making their mark. Two of these, Katy Grannan and Justine Kurland, were included in their Yale tutor Gregory Crewdson's landmark exhibition *Another Girl, Another Planet* in 1999. Since then, however, they have made a conscious effort to move away from the label of "girl photographers". Together with fellow American Valerie Phillips, they have proved that what defines their work is not so much their subjects but their individual approaches to soliciting and working with their models.

Phillips, whose fourth book, *Monika Monster; Future First Woman on Mars*, is published next month (Longer Moon Farther, £15), spends lengthy periods of time with her girl subjects, observing everything about their lives via non-stop documentary shots. A sort of photographic anthropologist, she uses her camera to pore over girls, classifying their teenage experiences. She describes spotting the Polish star of her book, Monika, in a Halloween parade from a window and feeling a "primal, non-intellectual urge" to meet the then teenager. Now 22, Monika remains a constant source of intrigue for the photographer: "I am fascinated by the way she speaks," says Phillips, "the way she looks, the way she sleeps."

Much has also been made of the personal nature of the early work of Justine Kurland (whose exhibition, *New Photographs*, is at London's Emily Tsingou Gallery from November 3-December 17). The utopian, almost bacchanalian visions of naked figures gambolling in the landscape and the reticent hippy girls of the 2003 *Golden Dawn* series (like her *Badlands* fashion shoot for British *Vogue* in August 2002) have been read as references to Kurland's own bohemian

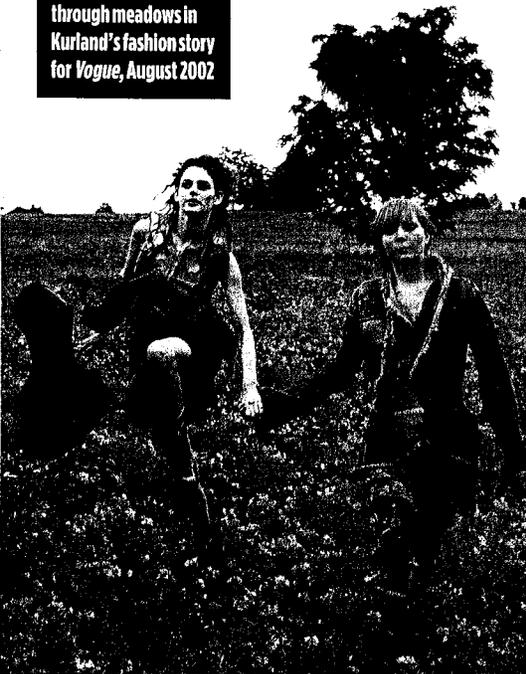
upbringing. The implication is that her peripatetic roam from commune to settlement, consistently photographing people on the fringe of society, is one long cathartic mission. In contrast, her recent body of work reveals an artist at a point of departure, deftly balancing direct experience against emergent, more objective themes of imagined history and nostalgia. Her portraiture concentrates mainly on men: knights in armour. These recreations of nineteenth-century pictorialist traditions are counterbalanced by a striking new shift in Kurland's work. "I've now made my first landscapes devoid of people; this time I've photographed burnt down forests. Where before I was constructing utopia," she says, "now I'm beginning to form dystopia."

"Art models. Artist/photographer (female) seeks people for portraits. No experience necessary. Leave msg," is the advert that Grannan places in local papers to find her models. *Model American*, her first book published this month by Aperture (£22), is an eloquent document of how this strategy has elicited some of the most enthralling records of the photographer/model relationship. Grannan is uneasy about how her initial advert has been interpreted by critics, however, and stresses that there are other motivations at play besides fame. "This is not *American Idol*," she says, "these are people whose marriages suck or who live with an abusive grandmother. Initially, I didn't want to photograph someone I didn't know, alone – I didn't feel as if I could make a generous portrait if I felt at all threatened," she says. "But as time went on, I started to find the woman photographer/male subject dynamic fascinating. It's all right out there." Witness a third female photographer making the rite of passage from girlhood to creative maturity. ■



Right, the photographer with her son, Casper.

Below, models gambol through meadows in Kurland's fashion story for *Vogue*, August 2002



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