

Images of Transition

By Marie-Christine Guyot, translated by Ellen Feldman

Note from photography editor Ellen Feldman: I spent last April and May in Paris as a street photographer/flâneuse. As the photography editor of Women's Review of Books, I also met with two women to learn about current photography by French women: Marie-Christine Guyot, a photography publicist, who introduced me to Martine Robin, head of the business department at l'agence VU', the renowned photography agency in Paris. Along with WRB editor-in-chief Amy Hoffman, I decided to devote this year's photography features to French photographers, beginning with Claudine Doury. Little did we realize that current events would make this decision particularly poignant. We would like to dedicate the 2016 photo features to the victims and survivors of recent terrorist actions in Paris and around the globe, hoping always for peace.

Claudine Doury recently returned to France from Valparaiso, Chile, where she was invited to be a resident for the month of November at FIFV15 (Festival Internacional foto Valparaiso 2015). While there, she would work on a photography project of her choice and lead a workshop. Her choice: the world in transition, which has long been the photographer's passion. She responds to this subject with a depth of emotion that comes from the core of her being.

Since her early photographic explorations of Eastern European countries at the fall of the Iron Curtain, Doury wanted to be present in the moment of societal change. She wanted to witness the collapse and rejuvenation and renewed hope of a society: a true renaissance. The passage from one time or status to another—whether in a society or in an individual—is as much an opportunity for reflection as for photographic exploration. She is equally fascinated by transitions from childhood to adolescence, from maturity to end of life. This is the guiding principle that drives Doury as she embarks on a project and frames her subjects.

In the same way, she links her own life to the lives of her subjects. When she travelled to Siberia to photograph that culture in transition, she took along her young daughter. There are no barriers between her professional and private life. We see that clearly in her exploration of her daughter's adolescence in the project *Sasha*.

Doury observes, captures life, catches emotion, and shows in her images the moment of change from one age to another, one historical moment to another, one geography to another.

Two photographic series illustrate Claudine Doury's very personal work: *Sasha* and *Loulan Beauty*.

In *Sasha*, Doury's daughter becomes the model through whom she charts the transformations of adolescence. As in fairy tales in which children wander through the forest—the poetic universe where you always have the child in you—she captures young girls playing and romping amid trees bathed in a soft mist. She also creates a space for contemplation and wondering in photos of her daughter gazing at her own reflection in a lake or a silver globe.

The title of the series *Loulan* refers to the Loulan Beauty, a well-preserved 4,000-year-old mummy unearthed in the northwest region of China. In photographing in Central Asia, Claudine Doury reveals a kind of paradise lost, a place sunk in desert sand, with traces of ancient humanity. *Loulan* is the terrain where she “plows her field,” looking for traces, for signs—of what, even she might not know. She exploits the sweet golden light, almost supernatural, to create explosions of color and gestures of joy in the harvesting of cotton and to reinforce the look of meditation on the face of the young woman in the car. The photographs printed here were taken in Kokand, Bukhara, and Tashkent, Uzbekistan in 2004.

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This is Sasha, her head leaning forward, strands of hair half hiding her face, her dress of English embroidery brightening the romantic portrait. All is perfect except for the sullen pout and downcast eyes that betray the somber days of adolescence.





Fairouz, daughter of Fatima Boukhara, wearing a traditional Uzbek dress in Khan-Atlas silk, Bukhara, Uzbekistan. Here is a desolate landscape, a desert of sand and stone, and in the distance a dusty village from which emerges two domes of topaz. In the foreground, a svelte young woman seems to conquer all in her path: half turned away, long-limbed, dressed in a fireworks of colors ending in the red flame of her knotted scarf, tying up hair worn proudly like the tail of a horse of the steppes.



Cotton Harvest, Kokand, Uzbekistan.



Lola, Tashkent, Uzbekistan.



Claudine Doury is a French photographer based in Paris, and has been a member of Agence VU' since 1991. She has received numerous awards, including the Niepce Prize, Leica Oscar Barnack Prize, and World Press Award. Her published monographs include *Loulain Beauty* (Éditions du Chêne), *Sasha* (Éditions du Caillou Bleu), *People of Siberia* (Éditions du Seuil), and *Artek, a Crimean Summer* (Éditions de la Martinière).

Her work has been exhibited in France and internationally, and her photographs are in many private and public collections, such as the Fond National d'Art Contemporain, le Musée de l'image de Braga, l'Imagerie Lannion, L'Artothèques de la Rochelle et de la Roche-sur-Yon, and the Agnès B. Collection.

Claudine Doury is represented by *la galerie Particulière Paris et Bruxelles*. Her website is <http://claudinedoury.com>.

Marie-Christine Guyot worked for more than twenty years in public relations for the French subsidiary of the Polaroid Corporation. She collaborated with photography curator Barbara Hitchcock to establish the International Polaroid Collection at the *Maison Européenne de la Photographie* in Paris.

Cotton kolkhoz (collective farm), Kokand, Uzbekistan. An explosion of gaiety surges through this image. In the middle of a battle of pillows made of soft white cotton flakes, young harvesters transform work into play under a colorless sky.