



JUSTINE KURLAND REFLECTS ON GIRL PICTURES

Between 1997 and 2002, Justine Kurland travelled across the North American wilderness, capturing teenage girls in a series of staged images that express freedom and a new kind of utopia. She looks back on the project's significance here

By Rebecca Fulleylove 07/07/2020

“The girls were surrogates for myself, from a time before I had made certain choices and accepted responsibilities. It’s a time when all things are still possible and being wayward is a form of rebellion, even freedom,” explains photographer Justine Kurland on why she focused on young women and teenage girls for her now-iconic series Girl Pictures.

The body of work, which was created between 1997 and 2002 mostly on the road, has just been published in a new book by Aperture. The power in Kurland’s images, even 20 years later, is in the blurring between the perfect and real. The series features seemingly candid shots of teenage girls wandering, playing, living off-grid in rural America, who together create an almost lawless and empowered community. The book publishes the whole series in full, including newly discovered and unpublished images, and while it seems like a body of work Kurland was destined to create, it began almost by chance.

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“I was dating a man during the summer between my two years of grad school. His daughter had been sent to live with him because she had gotten into some minor trouble. The man had air conditioning and I didn’t, so I spent my days with his daughter while he was at work,” Kurland tells CR. “We shared a fantasy of escape, taking off, dropping out. So we staged it.... Her name is Alyssum. We started off with more conventional runaway photographs, around Port Authority Bus Terminal and Times Square. But the only surviving picture shows her in a cherry tree on the West Side Highway. It’s in the book.”



Candy Toss, 2000. All images from Girl Pictures (Aperture, 2020) © Justine Kurland