

## PORTFOLIO

### Cig Harvey: Gardening at Night

By Jean Dykstra

The small miracles and slowly ripening narratives of the domestic sphere have absorbed photographers from Gertrude Käsebier to Sally Mann. It's a perplexing fact of contemporary art criticism that artists – female artists, in particular – should have to defend that terrain as the subject of their creative practice, but a recent *New York Times* piece asked: "Why Can't Great Artists Be Mothers?" Cig Harvey rejects the premise. Harvey's fanciful, dreamlike photographs are rooted in the natural world, in fantasy, and in her experience as a mother.

As Harvey noted in the *Times* article, "Art, in any form, demands that you turn yourself inside out. You must be obsessed for it to be any good." But, she added, an artist can be obsessed with her art and with her children, and in her case, those twin obsessions have resulted in a series of quietly beautiful, open-ended photographs, *Gardening at Night*. A selection of this work is on view at the Robert Mann Gallery September 10-October 24.

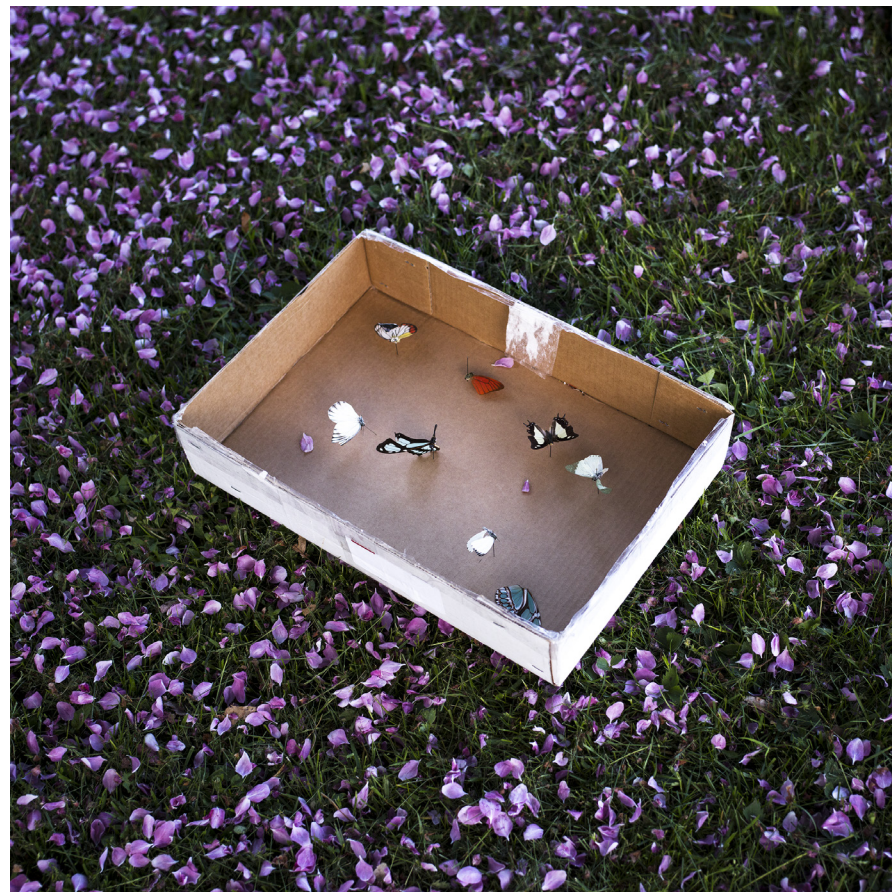
Faces are often concealed in Harvey's photographs, giving her (mostly) young subjects an Everywoman (or Everygirl) quality. A young woman in an apple orchard is glimpsed turning away, half-hidden by tree limbs; a breeze tosses a pink curtain through an open window, hiding a kneeling figure. In *Mum, Rockport, Maine*, 2014, Harvey's mother wears a surreal mask; and in a photograph of her daughter, Scout, the girl's small arm reaches out from beneath a red velvet Little Red Riding Hood cape.

That photograph – red cape, red wall, rose-colored chair – is emblematic of Harvey's use of color: lush, dense, symbolic, even. In *Sisters*, 2014, two blond girls, both in blue, lay on the green grass next to a nest holding three blue eggs – each creature in the picture is pure potential, on the brink of metamorphosis. Harvey grew up in rural Devon, England, and now lives in Rockport, Maine; the natural world is the setting for many of her lyrical images. Eggs, butterflies, birds, and moths make regular appearances in her pictures, harbingers of change – maybe the only constant in the experience of motherhood.





Previous spread: *The Orchard, Warren, Maine, 2013*; Above: *Sisters, Owl's Head, Maine, 2014*  
All images © Cig Harvey. Courtesy Robert Mann Gallery



*Seven Butterfly Specimens, Rockland, Maine, 2015*



*The Magician's Hat, Miramar, Cuba, 2014*



*Little Red Riding Hood, Rockport, Maine, 2015*