

CONCEPT TO CAMPAIGN: HOW TO SEIZE THE MOMENT

# PRO<sup>®</sup>

## PHOTOGRAPHER

INSPIRATION FOR IMAGING PROFESSIONALS

**Don McCullin**  
50 years on  
the front line  
PG.52

**Nic Staveley**  
Seeking  
fortune in  
an Indian  
barbershop  
PG.62

**Christophe  
Jacrot**  
Photographing  
cities in foul  
weather  
PG.70

# FROM ART TO ADVERTISING

Why people are captivated by the  
surreal images of Cig Harvey



\$11.95



## NEW GEAR

PANASONIC LUMIX GM5 » FUJIFILM X30 » CALMAN RGB » MANFROTTO 755XB



N O T H I N G   L E F T

T O

# chance

Cig Harvey's deceptively simple photographs tap into the universal elements of the human experience: love, loss, longing and belonging. She's in demand for editorial and commercial work—as well as her for her fine art prints and books.

WRITTEN BY EDGAR ALLEN BEEM

**WO OF CIG HARVEY'S** most iconic photographs have one thing in common—they depict a young girl staring back at the photographer with an enigmatic expression.

In *Emie in the Truck* (2008), a little girl gazes expectantly out the rear window of an old red pickup truck idling in the snow. In *Devin and the Fireflies* (2011), a different girl in a white dress stands atop a hill at twilight holding a birdhouse as the grass sparks with yellow flashes. The former image, not staged, conjures a sparse, rural life. The latter, carefully planned by Harvey, speaks of innocence in a magical landscape.

Harvey has used Devin in several of her photographs over the years. “She responds to my stare in a way that is confusing,” she says. “I am always searching for the look I don’t understand. I photograph people I know, but I’m interested in the moment when they respond with a look I don’t know.”

Harvey works in the space between scripted drama and pure improvisation, taking a conceptual rather than a documentary approach to the people around her. She uses herself, her family and her friends to embody her own ideas and concerns.

Whereas an artist such as Sally Mann photographs her family in candid documentaries of everyday life, Harvey uses herself as actors in little mystery plays that speak to the human experience of love, loss, longing and belonging. And while Cindy Sherman is famous for photographing herself as well-known people and fictional characters, Cig Harvey became known for photographing herself as Everywoman. Her self-portraits are less about personal identity than about investigating humanity, which is why her face is rarely visible; her art is about her concerns, not about her self.

Bruce Brown, curator emeritus at the Center for Maine Contemporary Art in Rockport, Maine, where Harvey lives and works, says her photographs are “as dramatic and emotionally involving as the best of theatrical productions, including sets, costumes and a cast of characters.

“Most often her camera focuses upon a single young girl or young woman whose face is as often turned away from the viewer as not. Each is an actress purposefully dressed in elegant costumes designed to enhance the staged setting, ready to perform her role as directed by Cig herself. The camera leaves nothing to chance. Only the immediate essentials appear in her images. Ultimately they enhance our own sense of life’s mysteries, solace and disquietude—often mixed with a hint of humour.” >>



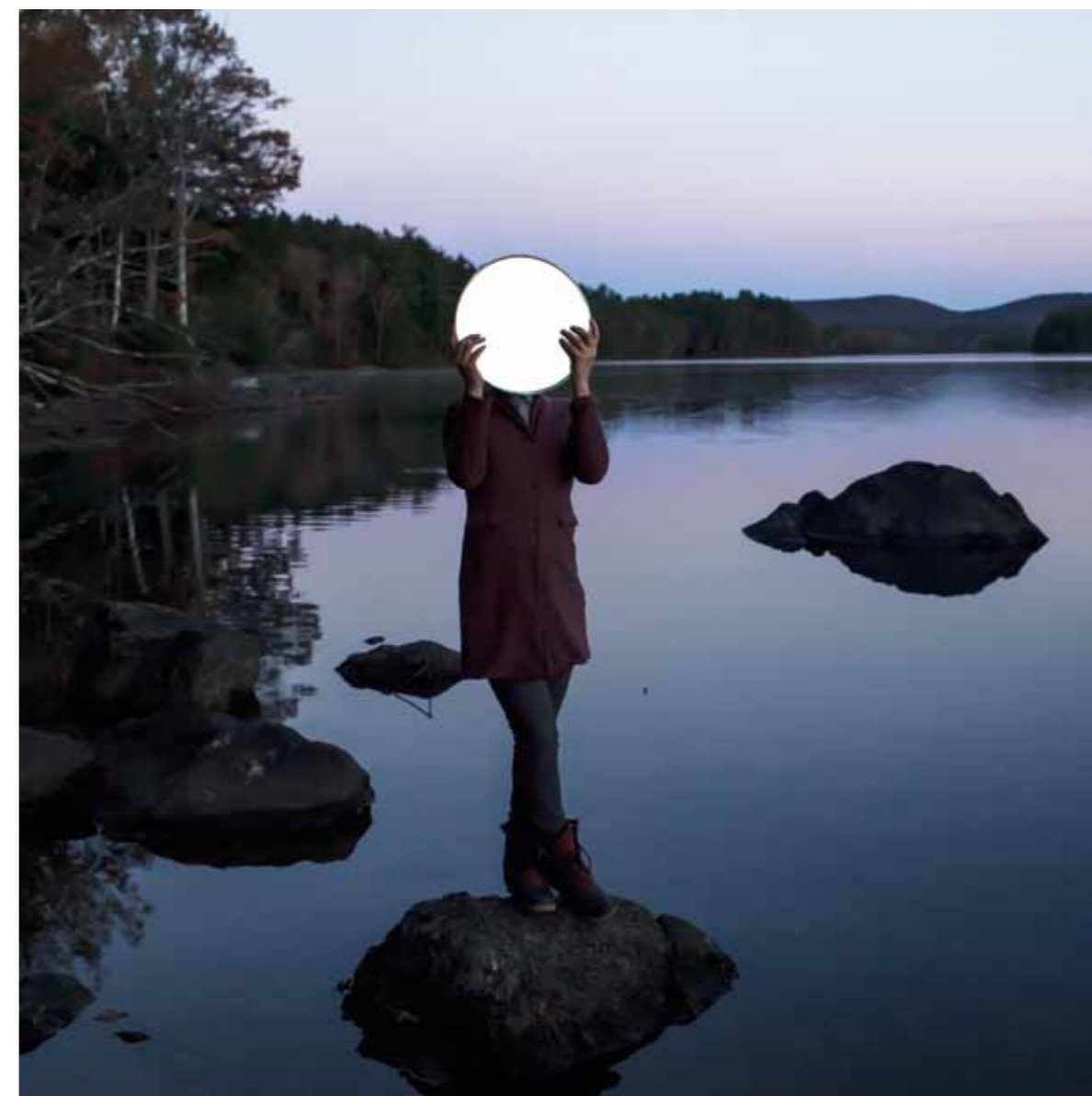
“I PHOTOGRAPH PEOPLE I KNOW, BUT I’M INTERESTED IN THE MOMENT WHEN THEY RESPOND WITH A LOOK I DON’T KNOW.”

*The Honeymoon*. Self Portrait. Grotto Bay, Bermuda (2007). Previous spread: *Devin and the Fireflies*, Rockland, Maine (2011).





*Scout & the Stars* (2014); *Sadie & the Moon*, Lake Meguntacook, Maine (2013)  
Both of these photographs feature in Harvey's upcoming book *Gardening at Night*, to be published in 2015. Harvey describes it as an exploration of home, family, nature and time. The series is represented by New York's Robert Mann Gallery, which introduces it as "carefully curated moments of real-world magic".





WHAT GETTING SERIOUS ABOUT PHOTOGRAPHY MEANT TO HARVEY WAS THAT SHE TRANSITIONED FROM MAKING PICTURES OF THINGS TO MAKING PICTURES ABOUT THINGS.



*White Witch Moth*, Devin, Rockport, Maine (2011),  
*Emie in the Truck*, Rockport, Maine (2008).  
For the year 2010, Harvey was responsible for the covers of *Maine* magazine. *Emie and the Truck* fronted its January edition. Harvey's covers are bold and graphic, and usually feature figures with their faces obscured or partially turned away.



“PHOTOGRAPHY IS MY WAY OF SLOWING THE WORLD DOWN AND CREATING ORDER FROM CHAOS.”

Harvey grew up in Devon in England's southwest. She was 13 years old when, inspired by photo essays in *The Independent on Sunday*, she began learning the art by volunteering in a community darkroom. In 1999, she moved to the United States to study at Rockport College (now Maine Media College) operated by the Maine Media Workshops. “When I came here I got really serious about photography,” she says. “It was like someone had turned the light on.” What getting serious about photography meant to Harvey was that she transitioned from making pictures of things to making picture *about* things.

At Rockport, she developed her conceptual, stylised approach. In her early work, she focused strictly on taking photographs in a single room, spending months with the same subject matter, working with a palette of whites and greys and an abstract vocabulary of light, line and form. For one series of photographs, she filled the room with dry autumn leaves.

Harvey's work brims with symbols and metaphors. In *The Cut Apple and Gingham Dress* (2003), Harvey photographed her own torso with a sliced green apple tucked into the belt of a vintage green checkered dress, an image that's part Eve in the Garden of Eden, part fashion shoot. In *The Channel Marker, Self-Portrait, Eastern Shipping Lanes, Bermuda* (2004), Harvey photographed herself (albeit with help pressing the shutter) in a lilac dress hanging off a red marker buoy, staring down into the water as though contemplating whether to dive into the vast ocean depths. In *Deep Bay, Self-Portrait, North Shore, Bermuda* (2005) she actually takes the plunge, entering the sea with minimal splash.

“In hindsight,” says Harvey, “these were coming-of-age expressions. At the time, I had the feeling that I was always too early or too late for events, but I was really just trying to find my place in the world.”

These and photographs from five portfolios created over ten years became *You Look at Me Like an Emergency* (Schilt Publishing, 2012). The book integrates 74 plates with Harvey's hand-written text, which begins, “Photography is my way of slowing the world down and creating order from chaos.”

*Emergency* chronicles a difficult period in Harvey's personal life, yet the photographs she made in response to personal heartbreak, loss and betrayal are light, bright, upbeat and orderly. “For some people,” she says, “photographs are a mirror of what's going on in their lives. I feel photography is a balance. Now I'm happy-happy and my pictures are much darker.”

One of Harvey's mentors, Brenton Hamilton, says her images “point the viewer toward a great journey”. Harvey is talented at depicting transitional or inbetween states of being, Hamilton adds: her art rests in the space between fact and fiction, real and fantastical, observed and orchestrated.



*The Channel Marker, Self-Portrait, Eastern Shipping Lanes, Bermuda* (2004); *The Cut Apple and Gingham Dress, Self-Portrait, Clark's Island, Maine* (2003).

>>



*Scout and the Bird* (2014). Cig Harvey has moved away from being in front of the camera and from recounting personal stories. In her most recent work, her subjects are her daughter, Scout, or elements of the natural world.

“People typically hire me to make my own work,” says Harvey of her commercial assignments. “I get hired to remake my pictures with particular clothing on.”

Harvey’s clients include designers Kate Spade and Ralph Lauren, department store chain Bloomingdale’s, *New York Magazine*, *O* magazine, *Harper’s Bazaar Japan*, *Domino*, *Surface*, *Real Simple* and book publishers Hachette and Random House.

Harvey’s sharp, graphic style lends itself readily to illustration. Designer Kate Spade based an entire advertising campaign on Harvey’s series *The Impossible Tasks*. Harvey’s original images depicted the artist in a series of droll endeavours—trying to shoot a globe through a basketball hoop, lying flat on her back wearing roller skates on a tennis court, lifting a toy airplane into the sky as though it might fly—whereas the Kate Spade images presented models wearing the designer’s clothes and engaged in such serio-comic undertakings as playing a horn atop a piano, shooting a bow and arrow at a handbag on the beach and knitting an impossibly long scarf.

Whether making fine art or commercial work, Harvey’s creative process remains the same: pre-planning, conceptualising, execution. It usually starts with words: accordion-fold notebooks that combine notes written in pencil with contact sheets. Harvey also constructs elaborate mind maps of words connected by lines, which act as conceptual blueprints for her work. Because she sometimes uses her existing art in commercial projects—*The Cut Apple and the Gingham Dress* was licensed for the cover of a novel, for example—Harvey charges a creative fee rather than a day rate. The economic downturn in 2008 took a toll on her commercial assignments, but her career barely skipped a beat. “Fine art sales took off when the commercial work went down a little bit,” she explains.

The year 2007 marked major developments in life and work: she married, bought an old farmhouse in Rockport, and shifted the focus of her art from past to present. Much of her pre-2007 work deals with memory, and is largely constructed imagery, while her recent work is more spontaneous and off-hand. The photographs of *You Look at Me Like an Emergency* read like memoir, a visual bildungsroman. The more sedate images of her forthcoming book *Gardening at Night* (Schilt Publishing, 2015) are much less self-absorbed, the work of an artist who is living for others.

“I haven’t made a self-portrait in about seven years,” says Harvey. “The work is much more about the present. I am working very intuitively. I make mind maps and brainstorm so I am aware of what I am looking for, but I make pictures first and listen to what they are telling me.” >>



*Mum and I, Cambridge, Massachusetts (2005)*  
Harvey’s first monograph, *You Look at Me Like an Emergency*, is split up into three acts which broadly depict phases of Harvey’s life. This photograph is from Act III, the most optimistic and upbeat of the sections.

“PEOPLE TYPICALLY HIRE ME TO MAKE MY OWN WORK...I GET HIRED TO REMAKE MY PICTURES WITH PARTICULAR CLOTHING ON.”



Harvey photographed the autumn 2007 campaign for New York-based clothing and accessories brand, Kate Spade. Known for its bright colours and whimsical prints, the brand is a natural partner for Harvey's photographic style.



In 2012, Harvey left the teaching position she'd held for a decade at the Art Institute of Boston in Cambridge, Massachusetts, to devote herself to her art and her daughter, Scout.

"My work is about being a mother now," she says. "Since having a child, I have put down roots and made Maine my home because it feels safe here. But at the same time, being a mother, you know that the worst thing that can happen in life is not something that can happen to you, it's something that can happen to your child."

While happy living in the countryside with her husband, filmmaker Doug Stradley, daughter and dog, Harvey's penchant for using photographs to balance what's going on in her life has led to new work that is full of apprehension and wonder. In many cases, her recent art is literally and figuratively darker than her earlier work, as she shows her young daughter a world at once dazzlingly beautiful and fraught with dangers.

"Many of these new images are moody and instinctual," says Harvey's mentor Brenton Hamilton. "A mysterious possibility, human states of reverie, stillness and rich atmospherics all emerge from the stories that Cig presents."

*White Witch Moth, Devin* (2011), for instance, portrays Devin holding a huge moth in front of her mouth: part mask, part preternatural smile. In *Sadie and the Birdcage* (2013), a pale young woman looms up out of the darkness as though she is holding her own head in a pink cage. *The Pomegranate Seeds, Scout* (2012) is a blood-red picture of the top of Harvey's daughter's head and hand behind a table scattered with pomegranate seeds, the pomegranate being a universal symbol of resurrection and eternal life. *Screen Door* (2013) is a simple photograph of the artist's left hand lightly pressing on mesh, touching the present and reaching for the future.

Harvey is every bit as much in love with words as she is with images—particularly magical realist novels such as Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. Not only do her photographs begin in the words in her notebooks and her books integrate words with pictures, she also creates text-based neon sculptures.

Using photography as a starting point for other forms of expression, Harvey has begun animating some of her photographs, so that snow falls and exhaust rises in *Emie in the Truck*. She also creates embroidered images of commonplace objects such as a cup of tea, a text message or a bottle of laundry detergent, and photographs them: another way of playing the ordinary off against the fantastic.

The beauty and strength of Cig Harvey's photographs is that they use what is familiar and immediate to pursue what is fantastic and timeless. They are like fairy tales of the modern world. In *The Goldfinch* (2014), a small bird takes wing from the artist's hand, freed to a wild and perilous world, while in *The Funeral, Goose River* (2014), the same left hand consigns a dead cormorant to a watery grave. The mysteries of life and death in the blink of a shutter.

"There's a life being lived and I'm in it," says Harvey of her work these days. "Photography has been the most extraordinary way to spend a life." 🌿