

Claudine Doury

Introduce yourself.

My name is Claudine Doury. I was born in Blois and I live in Paris now. Before being a photographer, I used to be a picture editor for photo agencies (Gamma and Contact Press Images) and for the newspaper Liberation. Then I decided to become a photographer.

Tell me about the project 'Loulan Beauty'.

This is a story of a slow disappearance, into the sand and in time, the end of a world, a trip through post soviet Central Asia and Xinjiang province in China. I had read 'Djamilia' by the kyrgyz poet Tchinguiz Aitmatov, and it made me dream of the kolkhozes lost in the steppes and of its peoples: Uzbeks, Kazakhs, Kyrgyzs, Karakalpaks... From 2002 to 2005, I managed to travel to the Aral region, in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, on the banks of the Issyk Kul in Kyrgyzstan and in Xinjiang.

'Loulan Beauty' is the story of these peoples from the middle of the world, heirs of sunken kingdoms, of fishermen without a sea, of children who dance to bring back their parents who work far away, of Lola who dreams of America, of men who listen to the sands singing, of girls with a thousand braids, just like those found on Loulan, their four thousand year old ancestor.

What led you to the project? What's your connection to Kazakhstan?

I used to work in former Soviet Union, especially in Siberia and Ukraine, the subjects of my first two books. More and more I got interested in a place called "Central Asia, its people, and the relation between these new republics and the Soviet Union.

A lot of changes were happening to those places around 2002, so I wanted to be there at that particular time of mutations, searching for tracks of a vanishing empire.





Soviet Union was a sort of an alphabet for me to understand those vast ancestral places. Like in my Siberian project I wanted to know about the different people who lived there, where they came from and how they had been separated from each other, as the country was split into new regions and finally into states. When I found the existence of the 4000 years old mummy named "Loulan Beauty" it was like I suddenly found the key for my research : with her long hair breaded like a lot of young girls around, she appeared to me as the mother of them all.

How do you take your photographs? Is it a carefully managed process or do you rely on chance?

For all my projects, the ambiguity between reality and fiction, staged photography and pure documentary is at the center of my process.

Let's talk about your recent photographic series 'Sasha'. You captured your daughter Sasha through camera's viewfinder for the series.

My last series 'Sasha' is a work about the loss of childhood. For a long time I was interested in teenage girls ritual parties such as "sweet sixteen" in the US, "Quinceanera" in Cuba, new "Proms" in Russia...

In the meantime my daughter Sasha was gently leaving her childhood. It became then obvious to me that I should photograph no longer the socially integrated rituals but rather the hidden side of this state of transition: its games, its intimacy and its silences.

A photographic tale revealed itself: the end of my daughter Sasha's childhood in which mine is hinted. In this tale boredom, terror and enchantment are playing and replaying. "Adolescence is a kingdom of fallen or still falling angels, but it is yet a kingdom..." said James Agee. 'Sasha' is my vision, from the threshold of this kingdom.

What is photography for you?

Photography is a tool to meet people and express myself.

What are you working on at the moment?

I am working now on my next project 'Les princes charmants'.

