

Beginning as oral lore, fairy tales have accompanied generations to adulthood with their moralizing agendas cloaked in otherworldly charm. The stories serve a role in shaping how children open their eyes to the world and still find relevance for many in our contemporary society. Sofie Knijff takes this narrative framework as starting point for her photographic investigation. Working once again with children as subjects, she searches to open a dialogue about contrasts in our current socio-political situation through the world of make-believe.

A Dutch-Belgian photographer based in Amsterdam, Knijff's fascination with the greater allusions of fairy tales has roots in many ways in her own nomadic past. Living between Curaçao, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxemburg and France, Knijff developed early on a strong fascination for different cultures and identities. Originally an elite performer in the Dutch theatre circuit, her desire to create the scenes, rather than enact them pushed her to transition her career and become a photographer 2003, when she entered the Fotoacademie Amsterdam. It is certain this unique background in theatre is reflected in the photographic universe.

Knijff's project *Tales* was inspired by the dark undercurrent tangled in golden arabesques and jewel toned leather bindings of the original European fairy tales—beautiful objects that reveal often less pure truths about the societies that produce them. The societal aspect of these stories was of particular interest to Sofie and she embarked to explore the implications of tales in our contemporary society, looking at the people who they touch most, children. On the surface, her project asks questions such as: why is one tale more popular than another in a certain part of the world? How do two children from different cultures perceive the same story? How are the moral standpoints of the tales interpreted in different contexts of reception? But on another level, the very nature of fairy tales -- categorizing the world into strong and weak, ugly and beautiful, kind and cruel—was identified by the photographer as a fascinating, way to open a dialogue about the present-day situation in Europe.

From actor to director, Knijff invites us to explore a world of her making; steeped in the theatrical. She approaches her subjects from behind the curtain, working with children to help them bring out their fantasy before the camera. In line with a long tradition of classical portrait photography her work stands out for its ability to meld seamlessly in one image the documentary and the fabricated, the real and the imaginary. Although staged, she aspires to maintain the whimsical spontaneity of her models by inviting them to choose a disguise and 'play' their favorite character in her studio. By searching for greater meaning in the masks we choose to put on or contrastingly what happens when you take them off when no one is looking, Knijff acutely applies her mastery of dramaturgy to open a dialogue about the veracity of a contemporary portrait--approaching spaces as scenery and people as characters.