



STANLEY KUBRICK WAS NO  
STRANGER TO CONTROVERSY  
JILL GREENBERG CAN RELATE

BY COLIN METCALF WITH KEVIN GRADY  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JILL GREENBERG

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**J**ill Greenberg is a manipulator. Her web site, [manipulator.com](http://manipulator.com), even proclaims it. But the moniker's not what it seems. It may be a thumb of the nose to the loudmouth critics of her incredible *End Times* series who suggest that a handful of tearful toddlers somehow evidence a wicked case of showbiz abuse. Please. You'll see more trauma unwittingly dispensed this Christmas on the knee of any of a thousand shopping mall Santas. Jill's a photographer. She captures emotion in her subjects. Genuine humanity. Even in animals. But she does manipulate her subjects. And her viewers. Sometimes subtly — always to great effect.

In photography, as with most mediums, there are purists, and Jill's not one of them. She shoots artfully composed, deftly lit portraits using traditional gear and techniques, and then like most commercial photographers, she adds her finishing touches digitally. What makes her different is the result. Jill's images often register first as paintings, with a color, luminance and perfection both subtle and impossible in real life. Only when you stop to focus do you recognize that your brain's been fooled. It actually *is* a photograph... but with something extra. Trained as a painter at the Rhode Island School of Design, she's melded an artist's sensibility, a photographer's skill and a subtle palette of post-effects to create what

most artists strives for, a thoroughly individual style that is totally in synch with the moment.

By starting with images that most would consider finished and manipulating some of the pixels to just the right degree, she's also coaxed our perception of what photographs can be. And if our senses happen to be manipulated in the process, well then, we're good with it.

**LEMON: The first time I ever saw your work it was online, and the images were fairly small, and I thought, "Wow, those are really amazing paintings," until I blew them up and saw that they were photographs. Were you ever a painter or is there a painterly influence?**

JG: Yeah. I've been drawing and painting my whole life. I was going to be an illustration major at school, but then I ended up deciding to be a photo major instead... Now I think about needing Photo-shop in order to continue drawing and painting.

**LEMON: So you're not a purist in that regard. Is that where "Manipulator" comes from?**

JG: Yeah. I'm definitely not a purist. There was also a really cool German magazine called *The Manipulator* that I used to read when I was in high school, and I thought it was a cool name. So that's where I got it. Not because I manipulate people.

**LEMON: You shoot everything from babies and pop stars to pigs and bears and monkeys. Who's more difficult to work with, the animals, the children or the celebrities?**

JG: Celebrities can be difficult, but they are definitely easier than children or animals. (Laughing)

**LEMON: How did you stage the whole bear thing? I mean, they're kind of dangerous.**

JG: One of the animal agencies here in L.A. found me a place in Calgary where they have these "close contact" bears. So you can get about five feet away from them.

**LEMON: Before they rip your arm off.**

JG: (Laughing) No, they are totally safe, but it was weird because they are trained and raised by this woman, Ruth, and they think that she's their mom. So they're really mellow. They are trained not to eat you. They're working bears — actors. One of them, Bonkers, was in *Brokeback Mountain*. I was watching that movie just a couple weeks ago because I had never seen it and I was like, "Hey, that's Bonkers!" In my pictures of him I call him "Brokeback Bear." It's funny because in the picture of him, he's looking down. He looks like really sad. He looks like his back has been broken.

**LEMON: You have been a successful commercial photographer for quite a while. Is pursuing**



ROBERT BUNDY TALKS TO  
EYES WIDE SHUT STAR AND  
FUTURE QUEEN OF POLAND  
LEELEE SOBIESKI

PHOTOGRAPH BY JILL GREENBERG

# SOBIESKI

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**L**eelee Sobieski is one of our very favorite actresses. She's gifted, brainy, charming, drop-dead gorgeous and best of all, she's willing to speak to us. What's not to love? After drawing a ton of critical praise, and multiple award nominations for her early film work, she has made a seamless transition to more adult roles. No mean feat for a former child star, but then her work has always been noted for a startling maturity beyond her years. We spoke with Leelee by phone and discussed her retaking the Polish throne, invading Slovakia and mud wrestling with Milla Jovovich. Oh, right – and her acting career.

**LEMON:** I understand you're in L.A. now for the Oscars?

LS: I went to the *Vanity Fair* party afterwards.

**LEMON:** Who were you rooting for most of all?

LS: Well, I knew he would win, but I am so glad that Forrest won. He just gave such an amazing performance.

**LEMON:** I understand that your great, great, great, great uncle was Jan III Sobieski, King of Poland?

LS: Yes, he was a very distant relation. It was a nice story to be told when you were a very young girl.

**LEMON:** Does your family have any plans for

retaking the throne? I'd really appreciate the exclusive.

LS: (Laughs) No.

**LEMON:** By "no," you really mean "yes," right?

LS: No.

**LEMON:** I'll just say that you said "yes," okay?

LS: Nol (Laughs) Oh my God, you're putting all these words in my mouth.

**LEMON:** It'll be great, trust me.

LS: He was actually a mercenary that was elected to the throne.

**LEMON:** Elected?

LS: Elected. He didn't take the throne by force.

**LEMON:** But he could've, right? As future Queen of Poland, what neighboring countries would you most enjoy attacking? Like, for example, the Czech Republic seems like it'd be easy, don't you think?

LS: I was in the Czech Republic for a few months.

**LEMON:** Casing the place? Laying the groundwork? Sizing it up?

LS: Oh yeah. I'd actually start with Slovakia.

**LEMON:** Excellent, start with Slovakia, lull the Czechs into a false sense of security, and then really catch them napping, eh?

LS: Exactly.

**LEMON:** Could we please stop talking about

your plans for world domination for just a minute, and talk instead about your film career?

LS: That would be good.

**LEMON:** What was your experience like working with Kubrick in *Eyes Wide Shut*?

LS: It was wonderful.

**LEMON:** Tell us something about Mr. Kubrick that would surprise our readers.

LS: Hmmm.

**LEMON:** It doesn't have to be true just so long as it surprises them. Like for example, while filming *Eyes Wide Shut* he always kept a real human head in the minifridge of his trailer.

LS: (Laughs)

**LEMON:** Do you feel uncomfortable confirming that publicly? I can just say that you don't really want that getting out.

LS: Something surprising... I think it would surprise a lot of people... one of the ways in which he was able to maintain such secrecy while working on his projects was that so many of the people involved with the production were members of his family.

**LEMON:** Really?

LS: You would meet people on the set, or as part of the support for the production, and learn later that they were members of his extended family. It was really nice, but also (CONTINUED ON PAGE NINETY-FOUR)

"I WOULDN'T HAVE DONE *END TIMES* IF I THOUGHT THAT LETTING A CHILD CRY FOR FIVE MINUTES WAS GOING TO SCAR THEM FOR LIFE."



**an art career now a conscious choice of yours or is it just happening?**

JG: No, it is a conscious choice. I mean I always wanted to do both. I went to school at Rhode Island School of Design, which was pretty much straight art school. It wasn't very commercial at all. So I mostly focused on fine art, but after I graduated, I wanted to do both. So I did an internship at Pace/MacGill. I tried to do art some, too, and I applied to the Whitney program but didn't quite get in. Then that same week I got a job with *Sassy* and a few other magazines, so I figured, "Well I guess I should be a commercial photographer for now and then later I'll be an art photographer, too."

**LEMON: Do your commercial work and expressive work feed each other or are they separate?**

JG: They definitely feed each other. I mean, right now I am doing all these pictures that are sort of lit like the monkey portraits – and the kids (*End Times*) are all lit like the monkeys, too – so I call it "monkey lighting." And now people will ask me to light so-and-so celebrity or such-and-such a shot just like the monkeys and the kids. So I have been doing that a lot.

**LEMON: Like on Gwen Stefani's album cover for "The Sweet Escape." You withheld lollipops to get the kids to cry, right? Is that how you got Gwen to cry, too?**

JG: Hal Yeah, that's what I did. She wanted to be crying on her album cover. They didn't end up running that shot for the cover, but it did run on the inside. It's a really beautiful picture of her. I was sort of sad that they didn't end up putting it on the cover, but I got a nice shot of her holding a lollipop. She was a good sport. She approached me from the perspective of being a fine artist. I actually had this billboard up for a short time in Los Angeles. A guy who owns a billboard company approached my gallery wanting to buy some of my art and suggested we barter. So I had a billboard up for about a month and that's

how Gwen found out about me.

**LEMON: Wow. Talk about good advertising. How did you evolve the "monkey lighting" and that whole look? Like I said, the first time I saw your stuff, I thought, "Amazing painting technique!" Was it the product of much experimentation?**

JG: Yeah, it's all sort of experimentation. You know, it's fun to play with different lighting techniques and different ways of retouching. You can make the picture really different. And then the choice of shooting film or digitally affects it. I pretty much shoot all of my fine art work on film and then scan it. Lately, I have been shooting my advertising jobs digitally.

**LEMON: But the *End Times* babies are all on film.**

JG: Yeah, the babies are all on film. The monkeys are all on film. Basically, I have to stick to film for all of my artwork because we scan the pictures at about 350 megabytes each. And with digital you can only get your picture up to about 120 megabytes or something. I don't know, it would be interesting to see how a digital file printed big, but I really like how the film looks printed big. I have a big Epson printer. So I just like how that looks.

**LEMON: You have children. How did the controversy around the *End Times* images affect you?**

JG: I have a son who is 17 months old and I have a daughter who is three and a half. And I mean, it was really upsetting, from the beginning. I was trying to decide, "Should I not have done this?" Then I was like, "Did I hear them wrong?" You know, questioning everything. I wouldn't have done it if I'd thought that letting a child cry for five minutes was going to scar them for life, because I just don't believe that.

**LEMON: Getting them not to cry for five minutes is a bigger deal.**

JG: I know! And that's why I think that it's sort of silly and just sort of funny and surprising the way that it became such a big phenomenon.

**LEMON: There's such a climate of calculated outrage running rampant these days. Good art usually causes a bit of a stir – that's what it's for. What does that reaction say to you about the state of discourse in our culture?**

JG: I think people just don't think things through at all. And it's funny because it was *American Photo* that sort of started the controversy by quoting a guy who was blogging negatively about me and giving him a creditable soapbox to stand on. They didn't do any kind of reporting. They just quoted some guy who blogs under a pseudonym who has no expertise or authority or credentials.

**LEMON: Yeah, we've noticed the creeping trend over the past ten years – since the rise of online culture – that emboldens every schmuck with a keyboard to venture his opinion about virtually anything, blidden or not. I think with the *End Times* critics, those people are actually drawing attention to themselves and their own righteousness. I think that's the motive behind it. Whether they even think about it or not, it's just about putting themselves in a favorable light.**

JG: It's interesting because I am trying to figure out what my next series will be. I just felt like that was another reason I wanted to shoot the bears. I thought it was kind of funny that shooting bears was safer than photographing children for me. I'm not sure if the bears will be a full-fledged series or something smaller. I mean, I like the bears because they sort of show elements of humanity.

**LEMON: God, yeah. They honestly look soulful in your photographs.**

JG: Yeah, they show emotion. They look cuddly and ferocious at the same time. They're *misleadingly* cuddly in some of the shots. I am probably going to do another series of children, too. Whether it's just my daughter or my son, I don't know. But I have this crazy idea. ■



ABOVE: A SELECTION OF *END TIMES* PHOTOGRAPHS  
RIGHT: POP LEVI BY JILL GREENBERG (MORE POP ON PAGE FIFTY-EIGHT)