

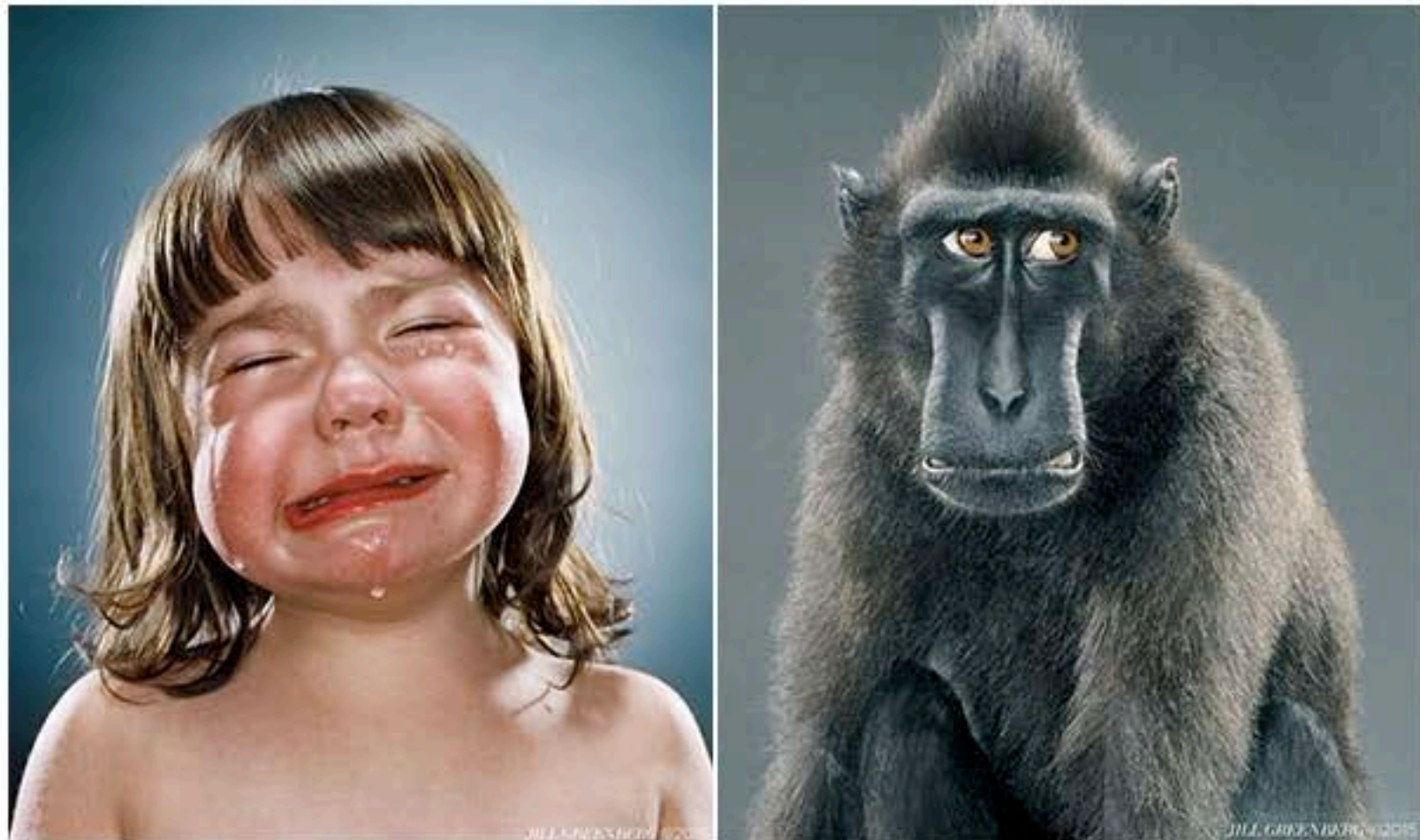
# Profoto blog

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## The Secret Jill Greenberg Filter That Took Her to Where She Is Today

Written by Rebecca Ahremark on Friday, June 5th, 2015. Posted in Portrait photography



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**“People always ask what filter I use, but the filter is me,” says Jill Greenberg. That filter has resulted in some of the most instantly recognisable images of the last two decades.**

Jill Greenberg was born in Montreal, but raised in Detroit and has taken photographs for as long as she can remember.

“I started making photographs as a “shortcut” to drawings and paintings,” replies Jill when asked why she decided to become a photographer. “My work has always been concerned with the image itself, the surface. Of course the meaning and concept too, but never really in a documentary way. All of my drawings are from my head – funny, mannered characters with lots of color. Not from life, so my photographs are from my head too... if that makes any sense.”

When attending high school, Jill always thought she wanted to become a fashion illustrator, and later even a fashion photographer.

“I went to school with the intention of majoring in illustration and I even spent the previous summer at RISD in their Illustration summer session. Then the summer before RISD I attended Parson in Paris for Photography on a scholarship. I somehow did not feel like I could break into fashion but it has always been my interest. But I do bring that interest to surface, if you will, with my portraiture and advertising assignments.”



JILL GREENBERG ©2015

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### **How did you learn about photography and lighting?**

"RISD provided a very conceptual, intellectual and fine art foundation for my work. They taught very little of the equipment – the studio lighting. Instead they focused on everything about the deconstruction of the image, the meaning of the image. In any case, I took a few studio lighting classes, learned sound mixing and made a short 8mm film. But I was very hungry to learn when I arrived and worked very hard the entire time. However, much of what I know is from experimentation and self taught. When I graduated in 1989, Photoshop was not even available to the public. There was a camera store that offered a Mac workstation that you could rent by the hour and I was immediately in love with the possibilities. It was the perfect combination of bringing together my drawing with my photography.

"I enrolled in a Photoshop class at SVA and bought a MacIIfx and have been retouching ever since. With Photoshop 1.0. I remember one year I got ram for my birthday from my parents – 64MB! I think it was my 25th birthday. So crazy."

### **What is the most fascinating thing about being a photographer?**

"I think it's fascinating that you can tell who is behind the camera when you look at an image, or at least you should be able to. I think it's fascinating that if you try really hard you can still invent something that is your own."



JILL GREENBERG ©2015



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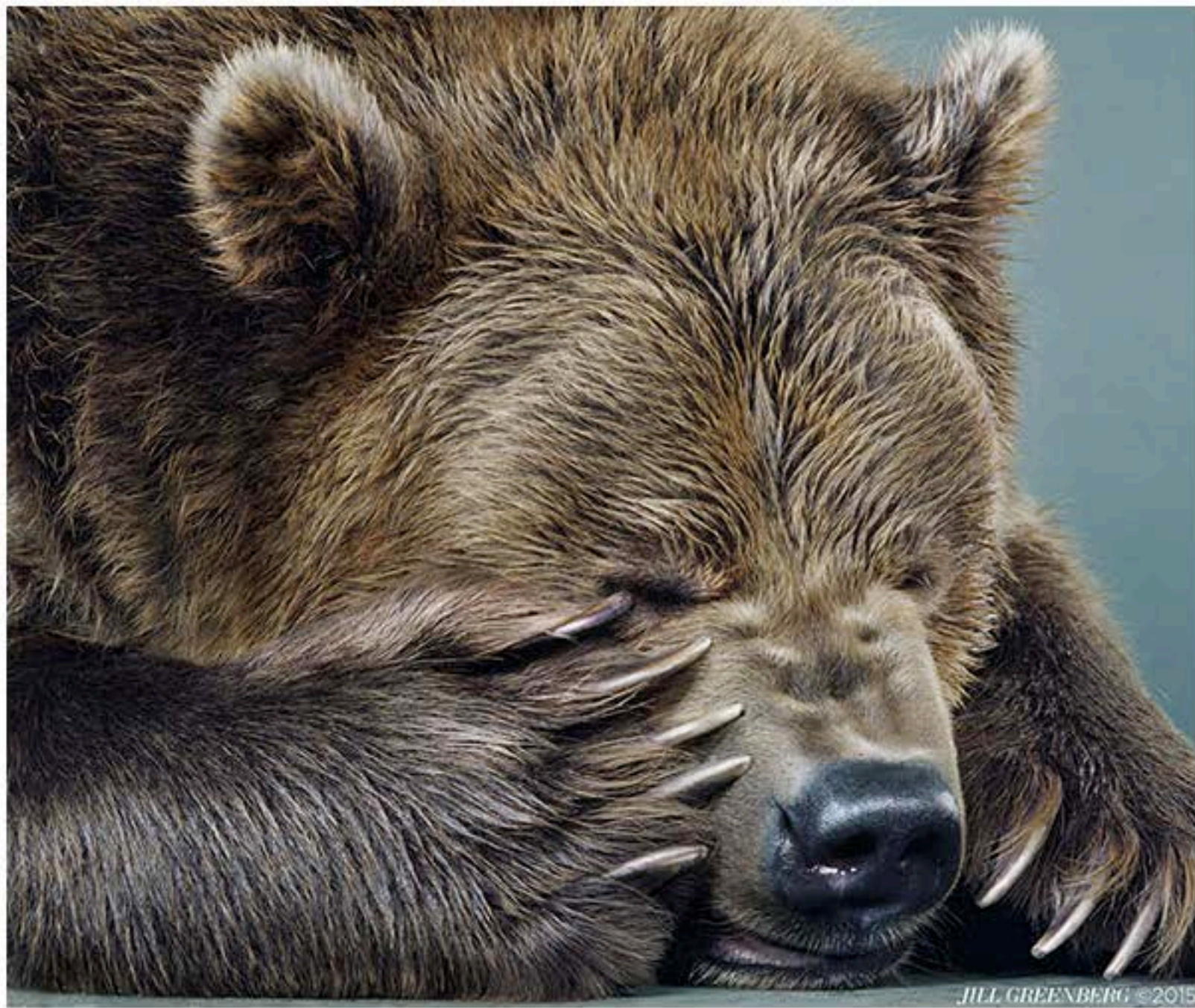
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**You certainly have a unique style. Your images are instantly recognisable as a “Jill Greenberg”-image. How would you describe that style? How did you develop that style?**

“Which style are you referring to? I have many. I was on the cover of PDN in 1998 for a completely different style. The one I am guessing you are referring to is from over 10 years ago. It developed just after that time – I was using edge lighting in 1998 and it became most synthesized when I began shooting my Monkey series. It was a combination of many things I had seen – including male pin ups from the 50s, Karsh, etc. I shot it on film with a Mamiya camera, drum scanned the negatives, and then retouched it myself. People always ask what filter I use, but the filter is me.”

**You have done a lot of covers and photographed really famous people. Is there one shot in particular that stands out?**

“I like almost all my shoots. I don’t think in terms of favourites.”



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**You seem to work a lot with animals. What's the most challenging thing when it comes to shooting them?**

"Communication and defecating on the seamless."

**People might think there's a lot of Photoshop behind your images. How much is really lighting and how much is post production?**

"People would be mistaken. The vast majority of my images are achieved 95% in-camera, which is why I regularly post my raws to [my Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#). I am not sure how this notion came about, considering I am very, very picky about my lighting ratios and the images I take look like they are already retouched. In fact, this always shocks clients. I was shooting Gwen Stefani and everyone on set said the images looked like they had already been retouched. So it could not be further from the truth."

**How do you think lighting wise? Do you know what you want from the start or do you try to change if it doesn't work?**

"Yes. Both."

**What's the one piece of lighting gear that you couldn't live without? Why?**

"My [Profoto Softbox RFi 1x4'](#). It's so simple and versatile. I can use it alone or with a bunch of other lights, for a portrait."

**What kind of Profoto gear do you normally use for a photo shoot?**

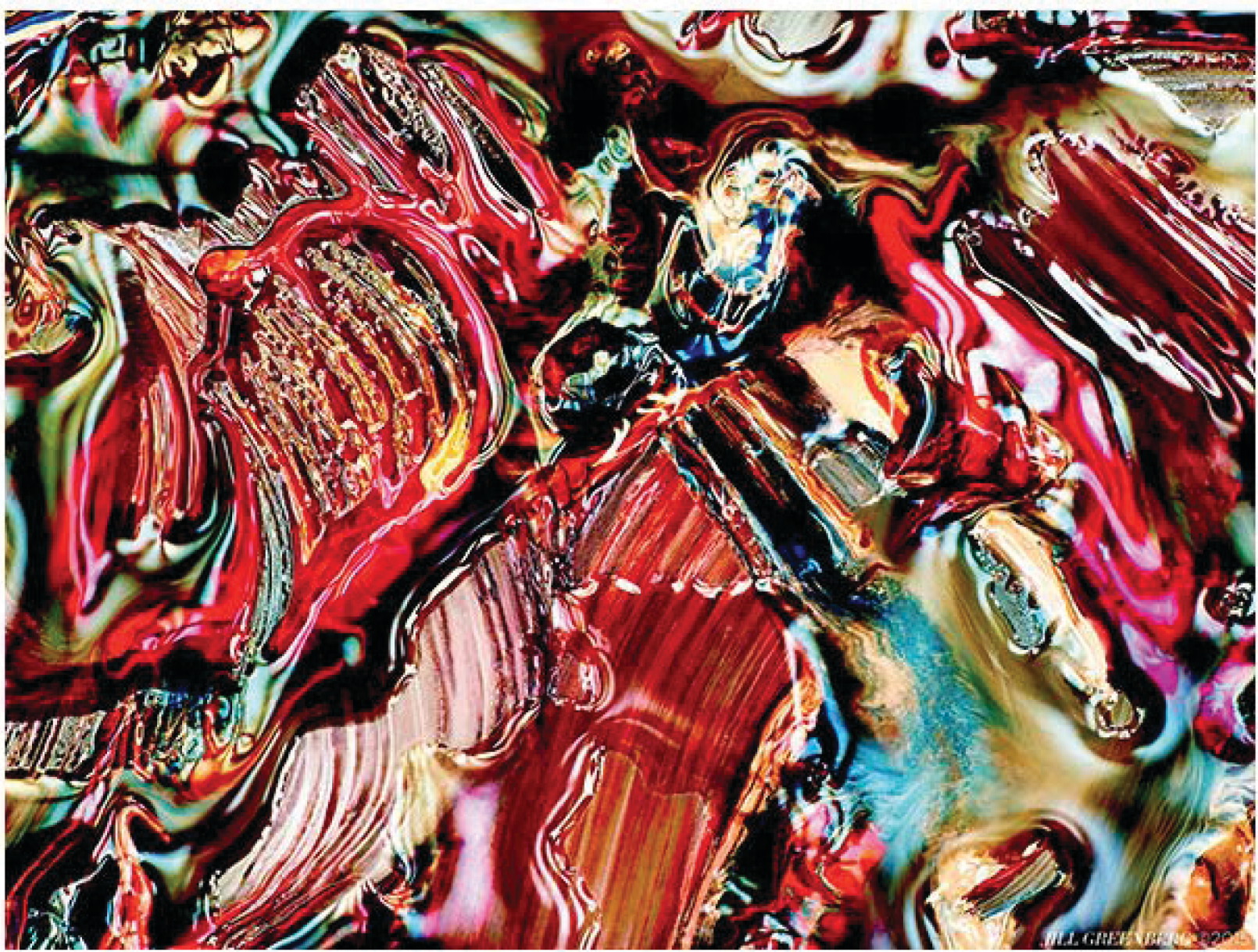
"Lots! I am more concerned with creative things than the equipment itself."

**What kind of demands do you have for a lighting equipment?**

"That it recycles fast and that it's dependable and rugged."

**What's your dream project that you still haven't done yet?**

"A lavazza calendar, but of course! The cover of V! A calendar of super hot guys – like I did when I was at art school – it was called *Beautiful Men 1988*"



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**What is your next project?**

"I will be continuing to shoot my *Paintings* series, which I love! All shot with Profoto gear by the way!"

**What is the one word of advice you'd like to give the aspiring photographer reading this?**

"Find another profession. This lifestyle is not ideal for having any kind of life. Only follow this path if you want to give up all your free time, money, and ability to make any future plans. You have to not mind having to reinvent yourself every five years while understanding that being successful at one point in your career means zero 10 years later. There are too many photographers. It's part of the reason I have gone back to painting!"

**What advice would you've given the 20 years younger you?**

"Get a sex change. Or change your name to Jack. Or be a lesbian. Anything except a voluptuous hetero, outspoken happily married lady who people in general have no idea what to do with."



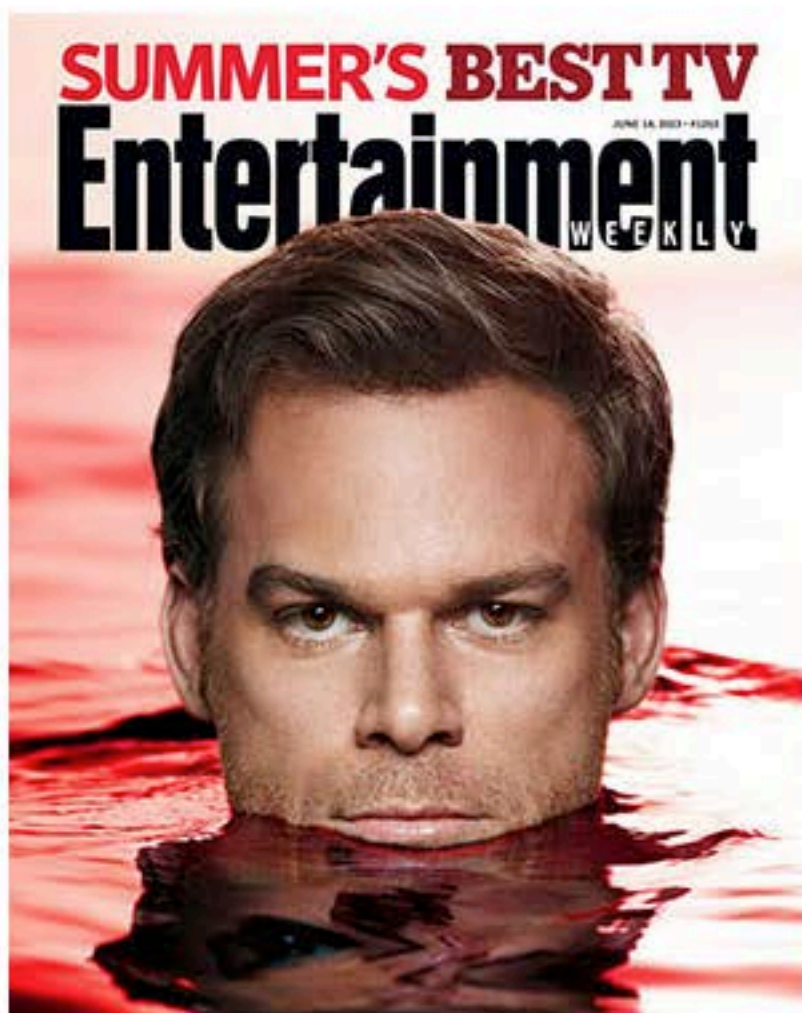
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