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PHOTOGRAPHY

Here is our Editor's Choice for the most controversial photo exhibition of the year: Jill Greenberg's "End Times" at Paul Kopeikin Gallery in Los Angeles. The show, extended through July 8, is made up of portraits of children crying and otherwise in distress. "I love the raw emotion of children, because it comes close to the anger and helplessness I feel about our current political and social situation," Greenberg comments. Others have responded considerably less benignly. "Jill Greenberg is a sick woman who should be arrested and charged with child abuse," reads the headline of an essay by blogger Thomas Hawk, the pen name of

a San Francisco-area "digital media and technology enthusiast."

"She is taking babies, toddlers under three years of age, stripping them of their clothes and then provoking them to various states of emotional distress, anger, rage, etc. [to] illustrate her personal beliefs," writes Hawk.

If one of the jobs of art is to provoke thought and emotion, Greenberg has certainly succeeded. What can't be denied is the raw power of the images, which are bright and saturated with color. Look at this image, titled "Useless." Is this art, or is it evil? To hear from Greenberg herself, see page 18.

CRY BABIES

EXHIBITIONS

JILL GREENBERG ANSWERS THE CRITICS WHO CLAIM SHE ABUSES TODDLERS IN THE NAME OF ART. BY JEFFREY ELBIES

When Jill Greenberg conceived the idea of photographing crying children back in 2004, she didn't anticipate the attention the project would bring to her fledgling art career, or the furor it would raise. Greenberg, who lives in Los Angeles with her husband and two children, is already known as one of the country's most successful commercial photographers, with work for ad clients like Microsoft, Kraft, and Procter & Gamble and magazines like *New York* and *Time*. She has emerged as a potent force in fine art with a series of acutely lit portraits of monkeys and apes, which in turn led to her work with children.

Your images have certainly caused an uproar. What do you say to people who call you a child abuser? I think they're insane. I know the

comment you're talking about. I don't know what the guy's personal problems are. I don't think he's got kids. I have a two-and-a-half-year-old daughter, and she cries for no reason, a hundred times a day. It's normal. Maybe getting kids to cry isn't the nicest thing to do, but I'm not causing anyone permanent psychological damage.

How many kids did you shoot altogether? Around 35. Some were the children of friends, plus my own daughter; others came from the Ford or Jet Set model agencies. Kid models aren't very expensive—not as expensive as monkeys, for example.

How did you get the kids to cry? Mostly we did it by giving them something, a lollipop, and then taking it away. Some would just cry for no reason—my daughter did that; she didn't like standing on the apple box I used for a platform because it was a little wobbly. Some just wouldn't cry at all. For all the kids I worked really fast. We would book 12 or so for one day, and see who we could make cry. At the end of the day I was not in a good mood. I don't like making little kids cry.

The lighting is very dramatic. How did you accomplish that?

It's the same lighting I used for my portraits of monkeys, and I've been using it for some recent magazine cover portraits. It's really flattering frontal light, so the subject doesn't have to have any actual shine on his or her skin to appear shiny. None of the kids had any makeup on. And also I work on that shiny quality in postproduction.

How did you come up with the idea for the project? I saw this little girl who'd come to a party with her mom, and she was beautiful, so I thought it might be interesting to photograph her. When they came to my studio, the mother brought along her toddler son, and I decided to shoot him too. We took off his shirt because it was dirty. He started crying on his own, and I shot that, and when I got the contact sheets back I thought, "This could go with a caption, 'Four More Years,'" like he was appalled at George Bush's reelection.

The images have a real power—they immediately get under your skin. The emotion you see is just so compelling, yet they're beautiful at the same time. That was one of the things that interested me about the project—the strength and beauty of the images as images. I also thought they made a kind of political statement about the current state of anxiety a lot of people are in about the future of the country. Sometimes I just feel like crying about the way things are going. ■

