

CREATIVE BRIEF

UPFRONT



BRIEF 00

Jill Greenberg Uses Light, Emotion and a Little Photoshop to Make Marketing Magic

By Shanna Green

If you've picked up a magazine or glanced at a TV show poster anytime in the last few years, you've seen Jill Greenberg's work. Even if you don't immediately recognize her name, with her oft-used grey-blue backgrounds and distinctive ethereal backlighting, Greenberg's celebrity portraits are unmistakable.

Greenberg who counts NBC, Fox, GSN and Lifetime among her many TV network clients, is highly praised in the business for what Steph Sebbag, creative director of Los Angeles creative agency bpg, says is her spearheading of a new style in photography.

"Like LaChapelle and Avedon, Jill has pioneered a new style of photography, and her impact can be seen throughout the entertainment industry," said Sebbag, who was worked with Greenberg on of key art campaigns including Lifetime's One Born Every Minute.

Adam Stotsky, president of NBC Entertainment Marketing, has hired Greenberg a number of times because as he says "Jill has such a distinct and innovative aesthetic. Her photography pulls provocative personalities from our talent that allows us to create very impactful key art. Given how innovative Jill's signature style is, it's no wonder we are seeing many other photographers follow her lead."

Shanna Green recently spoke with Greenberg to discuss photography, workaholics and how she may helped President Obama win the 2008 election.

On your website, you've termed yourself "The Manipulator." Where does that name come from?

I was an early adopter of digital imaging. I have been doing Photoshop since 1.0 in 1990. I also used to do other kinds of manipulations like slide projections and old school painting on prints. I thought it was a fun name because there is this German Culture magazine called, *The Manipulator*. I used to read it when I was in high school. I sort of stole their name for my own website, and it stuck. Every so often, I wonder if I am too old to call myself "The Manipulator." But it is still a brand, and it still sort of works. At the same time I think people assume that a lot of my stuff is done in post, maybe because of the name. It's really not. It basically looks just like that; I really try for the lighting to be perfect in camera. And then I just sort of add flourishes, like adding the icing on the cake in post. →

“You have to be a workaholic... and it's going to be hard to balance the rest of your life.”

How would you describe your photography style?

I come from a background where I really love graphic design, and I want everything to line up. Not that I want just everyone to line up; I want emotion; I want color; I want the lighting to be perfect, and I want angles and everything to gel perfectly. Not every single picture is like that, but when you do get the best picture out of a shoot and everything is totally working, then it is just sort of singing. I try to take the actual image to another level. I have been into photography for my whole life, so I am a perfectionist.

What does your brand stand for?

I do not think of myself as a straight photographer, hence the name, “The Manipulator.” I just try to bring some fun and energy into the image. I try to keep it fresh. I think people can tell that I have a background in drawing and painting. They can tell that I have a lot of ideas.

You've experienced some high-profile controversies with your *Crying Children* series (Greenberg was publicly criticized for taking candy away from some of the young subjects to make them cry for the portraits) and John McCain images (Greenberg posted digitally altered images of the Republican presidential candidate on her site after photographing him for *The Atlantic*). Do you think those controversies hurt or help your brand?

When controversy creates a lot of press it can be good, but it can be bad too. The crying kids thing came and went. With McCain, I think I sort of forgot there are actually Republican people working in the entertainment or advertising world. I think people took it the wrong way, but a lot of clients loved it. They credit me with Obama winning. Whatever works.

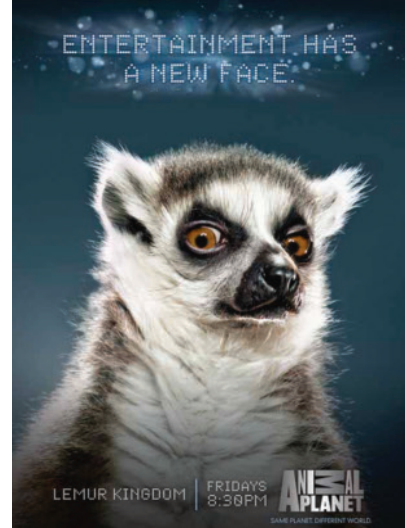
With all of these political cartoons out there, why aren't I allowed to make a political cartoon as well? People rip off my images all the time for their own political agenda. They steal my *Crying Children* all over. In my mind, it was like the artist Jill Greenberg was appropriating the photographer Jill Greenberg's work. I didn't expect the reaction. I didn't fully sit back and consider the possible ramifications of my actions. It probably wasn't the smartest thing to do, especially in a recession. But it is all fine now.

What makes a strong brand?

Consistency of vision. For a photographer it's a fine vision really, even if there are different variations on the vision. Sometimes people think that [*Crying Children*] look is all I do, and I have to sort of fight against that. I don't want to only do that. I like doing black and white pictures on location. I look doing different kinds of things. But I do think that having a point of view in the image.

What's the best piece of advice you would offer someone who wants to work for entertainment promotion?

You have to be a workaholic. You have to work all the time, and it's going to be hard to balance the rest of your life. I hear that from a lot of people actually in entertainment marketing. It is just really all encompassing. But we all love what we do, so that's the tradeoff. ■



From top: Key art for Animal Planet, Lifetime and Syfy

DREW CAREY'S IMPROV-A-GANZA

on GSN



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