



American Society of Media Photographers
Washington DC

COVER ARTIST Jill Greenberg

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Jill Greenberg straddles the line between commercial assignment and personal fine art, creating idealized images with graphic flair and high impact. Early in her career, Greenberg adopted the moniker The Manipulator to call attention to her digital postproduction talents.



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Her success with commercial work and celebrity portraiture funds her personal work, for which she is equally recognized, particularly her expressive portraits of animals in clean graphic settings, which have been internationally exhibited and published as books.

In Greenberg's most recently published book, *End Times*, crying young children are set against her signature backdrop of radiating light. These portraits, made in 2006 as a response to the policies of the Bush administration and right-wing evangelicals, evoke a dramatic response — from controversy and hate mail to imitation and blatant image theft.

Yet there is a silver lining to the infamous nature and viral spread of Greenberg's work — for the past two years, her photographs have been featured on the cover of *American Photo* magazine's Images of the Year issue.



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ASMP: How long have you been an ASMP member?

Jill Greenberg: I joined ASMP in 1998.

ASMP: What's your most valuable professional tool as a photographer?

JG: My brain.

ASMP: In your opinion, what's most unique about your style/approach or sets you and your work apart from other photographers and their work?

JG: That is not for me to say.

ASMP: When and under what conditions did you begin making pictures?

JG: I began as a very young child. I've been obsessed with form, color, light composition and portraiture for as long as I can remember.



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ASMP: Your senior thesis as a student at the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) was titled "The Female Object." Please briefly describe this piece.

JG: it was a multimedia piece with music, sound clips and narration. It had four slide projectors and a multitrack sound recording, mastered by me. The narration consisted of a woman speaking about her plans to fix her body (voiced by me and tweaked to sound like Melanie Griffith in the film "Working Girl"), with various other narrators reading critical theory, plus an Olay commercial, a Dating Game snippet, interviews with friends about their personal histories with body issues, a Jane Fonda workout, Richard Dawkins (of Family Feud) announcing the winner of Miss World 1989, all set to electronica by Chris and Cosey (formerly of the seminal Industrial-techno band Throbbing Gristle).



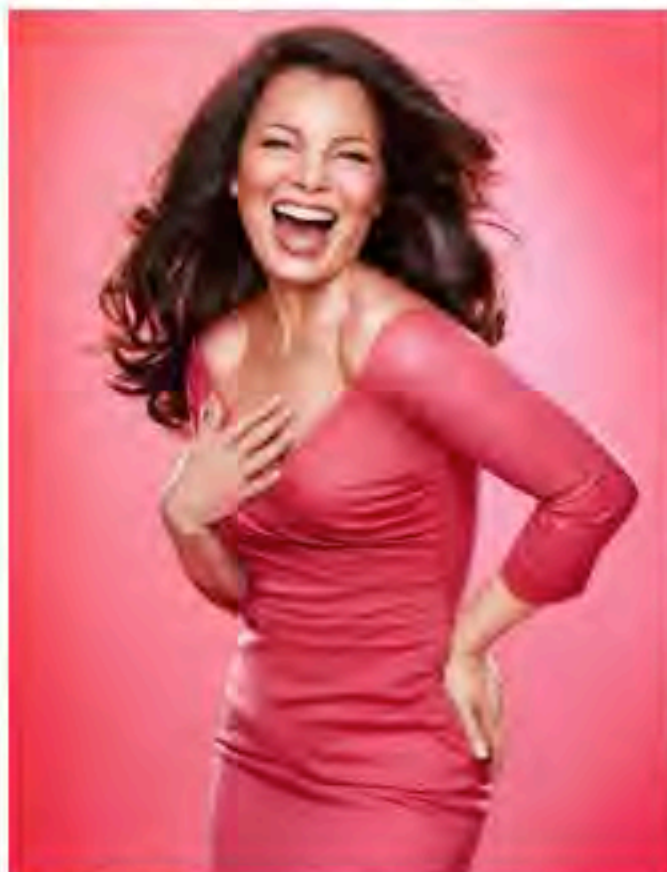
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ASMP: Your current photography output covers a very wide range of markets and media, from assignments for top commercial brands and editorial magazines to fine art projects. All told, do you have a favorite subject to work with, or is this totally project dependent?

JG: I like taking and making pictures of everything. I love the variety in what I get to work on. I love daylight, black-and-white, straight images, collages. I just love it all!

ASMP: Please talk about your general approach to conceiving and executing your images for commercial assignment.

JG: It really depends on how much is outlined for me — if there is a brief. But if given free reign to concept, often the first idea to pop into my head is the one I like, but I also like to think obsessively if given the time.



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ASMP: What piece (or pieces) of gear could you not do without on every shoot?

JG: There's nothing specific. Sometimes I use my Nikon with daylight, or a rented Hasselblad with a Phase 80 MP back and 15 lights. Or my Mamiya RZ67 with film (sadly, only on the very rare occasion).

ASMP: Early in your career you were dubbed The Manipulator. Did you come up with this moniker yourself or did someone else call you that first? What, if any, impact did promoting this nickname have on your career?

JG: In 1995, I initially thought it would be funny to call my Web site "The Manipulator." I had been a fan of the German large-format fashion photo magazine *The Manipulator* in the 80s, and thought the name would be a good homage to my pioneering use of Photoshop. But since Photoshop is now a verb and so very widely used, a few years ago I started using jillgreenberg.com instead of manipulator.com a few years ago. I do so much of my work in-camera that the nickname has seemed to add confusion about my process. I am very, very attentive to detail and lighting ratios. I do my own lighting — which actually seems absurd to even point out — but apparently there are working photographers who do not! I am very, very attentive to detail and lighting ratios. My clients are often amazed at how perfect my images are, with no post-production needed.

ASMP: Your photographic style has been widely imitated and your images have been subject to unauthorized use. Please offer your insight into how to address and resolve either or both of these issues.

JG: I am still figuring this out. It's not possible to trademark a lighting approach, despite being (at the very least) widely acknowledged as the originator. In the fashion and tech industries there is something called Trade Dress, and I honestly think this could and should be applied to the visual arts as well, but I do see the difficulty in that.

ASMP: Do you register the copyright to all of your images on a regular basis? If so, has this benefitted you in a real life scenario?

JG: Yes, I do copyright all my images, especially my fine art ones. This does help, of course. But the recent court rulings (i.e. *Richard Prince v Patrick Cariou*) make it harder and harder to explain that fair use is not a free reign to steal images.

ASMP: Do you have a favorite among the magazines you've shot for?



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JG: I was very excited to shoot for *VMAN*; I really love men's fashion. I am working on men's beauty and fashion, since I have a particular appreciation as a hetero woman.

ASMP: Of all the different celebrities you've photographed, who has been your favorite to work with and why?

JG: Stephen Colbert was a highlight. He is so smart and funny.

ASMP: What was the oddest or most unpredictable situation you've encountered during a shoot?

JG: I was shooting a chimpanzee for *Conde Nast Portfolio* magazine and wanted to get some shots without his diaper. After a few rolls of film he began defecating. I was quite proud of myself for capturing the feces in mid-air.

ASMP: Please talk about your body of work with animals. Did this begin as an assignment or as self-assigned work?

JG: I've been taking pictures since I was very young, about eight or nine years old. I used to ride horses (although not very seriously) and when I was in fifth grade we got a dog, Plato. I began drawing and photographing him in all sorts of tableaux and making philosophical portraits of him with Vaseline on the lens. He was one of my first muses.

ASMP: Do you have a favorite animal to photograph?

JG: Horses were amazing and very, very difficult and dangerous to photograph. Since I was obsessed with drawing, painting and sculpting horses as a child, it was amazing to finally be able to return to them with all the skills I had developed.

ASMP: Are self-assigned images and/or projects an important aspect of your regular routine?

JG: I do my artwork when I'm not doing assignments, so I'm always working on something.



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ASMP: Your *End Times* series of crying babies was prompted by your frustration with Bush-era politics and fundamentalism, and the response this series included hate mail and death threats. In the face of such hostile feedback, what means did you use to create an emotional buffer for yourself and move forward as an artist?

JG: My *Ursine* series was a reaction to the controversy over those images. I wanted to photograph angry grizzly bears roaring at the viewer. I joked that it was safer to shoot Grizzly Bear portraits than children. My *Glass Ceiling* series was a response to how I was attacked over the McCain work.

ASMP: What is the biggest work or career challenge you've faced to date? How did you resolve it and what did you learn as a result?



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JG: During the kerfuffle over my McCain portrait on the cover of the *Atlantic*, I was quite disappointed that my reps did not have my back at all. Despite the word "artist" being in the name of their agency, they didn't have a clue about what to do with an artist making a statement.

But perhaps I had been confused, due to another assignment I shot at that time for a top business magazine, where I was asked to make the CEO look like a murderer. The title of the profile was "[Speed Kills](#)" and the editors wanted to portray him as an evil tyrant who had pressured his employees to the extent that five of them had killed themselves. When I was in Tokyo with the photo editor, we discussed feeling awkward depicting this nice man as such. But perhaps I did not realize that despite owning my images, and even with all of the political cartoons out there and theft of my work for other political campaigns (the crying kids have been used for political ads in Estonia, Switzerland and the US), this was too far outside the realm of what is acceptable of an assignment photographer.



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I was doing the McCain shoot for free — just my expenses were to be covered — so I negotiated a very aggressive embargo deal, resulting in a two-week domestic embargo and no international embargo for the images. I did exactly the heroic picture the magazine assigned; I have e-mails from the *Atlantic* calling him "Senator cranky pants" and saying "it is ok to leave his eyes red." To that end, there were three rounds of rush Photoshop I did the day after the Saturday shoot.

Additionally, the magazine's contract — which I did not sign — requested me to "use your best efforts to participate in the promotion and marketing of the work... in settings including but not limited to, articles... interviews... press conferences, television appearances, Internet Web Sites maintained and operated by you, and any other media available for the promotion of the Work." I've never seen that clause in any other contributor contract, no matter how independent the publication. So after my McCain agit-prop pieces were posted to my own Web site, the *Atlantic* got more than a million hits to its site that week, linking to mine, which they were massively redesigning and relaunching the following month. I had flown to Las Vegas from a job in New York, and the magazine refused to pay my invoice for any expenses, yet they publicly stated that they were happy with the cover.



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Rick MacArthur, the publisher of *Harper's*, really wanted to run my McCain shots on *Harper's* cover wrap, but after the *Atlantic* hired Gibson and Dunn to send me scary letters — the same lawyers who stole the 2000 election from Al Gore for George Bush Jr. — I was a just a bit nervous. MacArthur texted me that he wanted to "take it all the way to the Supreme Court," defending my freedom of speech. He compared my situation to that of images *Harper's* had recently published of bodies from the war, which MacArthur had to also defend in court. In a way, I regret not giving these images to *Harper's* because, in the back of my mind, I had shot



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the images precisely for them and that kind of vindication would have been amazing. But at the time, the Fox spin machine was on full tilt, which was overwhelming and frightening. My name was on the Fox News scroll on September 15, 2008, the actual day of the Global Financial Crisis. I was getting violent and misogynistic e-mails and death threats.

In retrospect, I feel quite confident that if a male photographer had done what I did, he would have been high-fived. He would not have been treated the same as I was treated by the *Atlantic*. Further, let's not forget that both Richard Avedon and Arnold Newman did very similar things on assignment. But times have changed. The up and down economy has created a culture of fear, and I am not just referring to photography. In all businesses, and even in the art world, it's quite rare for anyone to go out on a limb with a strong opinion. Such behavior is especially not tolerated when it comes to women artists. Yet, my actions in this matter were in large part inspired by living with my husband, who is very politically active. His father, Philip Green, is a political scientist and also on the board of the Nation.

Artnet, one of the preeminent art world Web sites, [called me out](#) as the only gallery artist to do political art in 2008. I am proud not to be hemmed in my fear — it's antithetical to be an artist and afraid.

ASMP: What has been the proudest moment in your professional career to date and what made that particular moment so special?

JG: Getting the cover of *American Photo's* Images of the Year issue for the second year in a row was pretty cool. I loved my shoot with the band Daft Punk. I worked very hard to make it great and it really came out nicely.

ASMP: In your opinion, what is the key to maintaining inspiration? How do you keep your eye fresh?

JG: I have no problem maintaining inspiration. There are not enough hours in the day to produce all the ideas I have.

ASMP: What projects, personal or professional, are you currently planning? Where do you see yourself in five years' time?

JG: I am currently working on some photographs of paintings that I make. Many artists paint from photographs; I am making paintings specifically to be photographed. I shoot them when they are wet so the light reflections are part of the image. Therefore they are time-based. I am thinking of calling the series "Greenbergian?" in reference to my namesake — Clement

Greenberg, the most influential art critic of the twentieth century — to whom I bear no relation. He was a huge fan of Abstract Expressionism, which this series resembles. In a way however, they are fake paintings, a simulacrum of impasto. I am exploring methods of rendering them, possibly as actual paintings, in a manner similar to how Urs Fischer's acrylic paintings are made. I am super excited about this work, but it is very new.