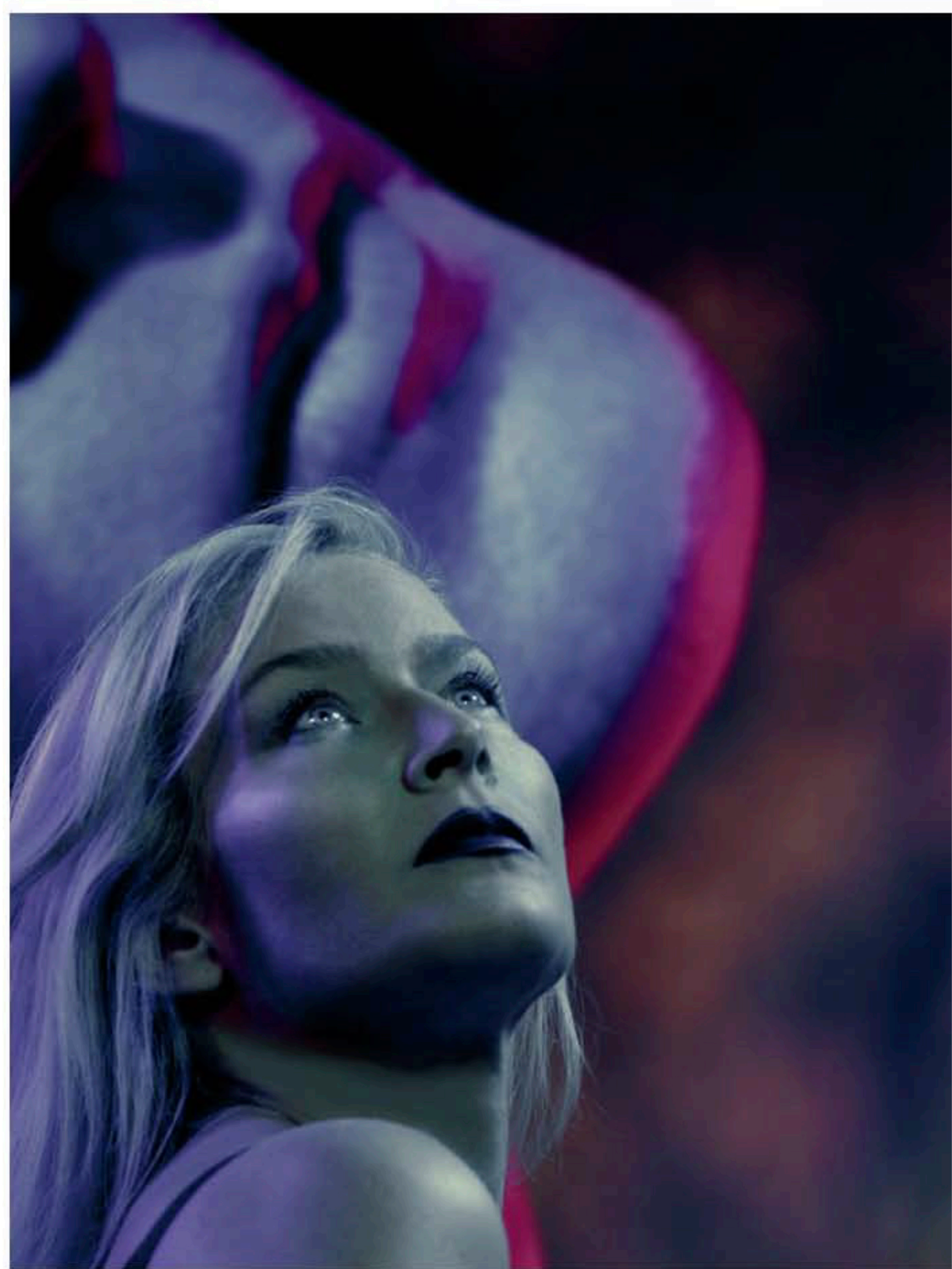


# In The Luupe

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SELF PORTRAIT © JILL GREENBERG

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## How Jill Greenberg Revolutionized Contemporary Commercial Photography

MISS ROSEN FOR THE LUUPE ON JANUARY 8, 2020

As a child, **Jill Greenberg** intuitively understood that the world is a stage upon which she could construct scenes to photograph the pleasures and pathos of life. "It was never documentary for one minute," she says with a laugh, over a cup of tea in her New York loft.

Greenberg's passion for portraiture began as an extension of her drawing practice. "I don't draw from life; I draw from people in my head," she says. "They are theatrically funny, surreal, and cartoon-y. There are a lot of different styles that I do but it all comes back to portraiture. It's identity, expression, emotion, angles, light, beauty, color, and design all mixed together."

Greenberg began working as a commercial photographer in 1992 and was an early adopter of Photoshop, using it when it was still in its infancy for assignments like a **Deee-lite** editorial for *Mondo 2000*, a glossy cyberculture magazine, in 1993. Advertising agencies immediately took note of the young talent willing to push the envelope in an industry reticent to embrace the digital realm. Greenberg's cutting-edge talents earned her the moniker, "The Manipulator," which she then adopted in 1995 as the URL for her **award-winning website**, establishing an online presence well ahead of the curve.



Deee-Lite photographed for *Mondo 2000* in 1993 © Jill Greenberg

In addition to being a technological trailblazer, Greenberg has always been a prolific perfectionist dedicated to mastering a range of photographic processes including color gels, wide angles, black and white, projections, and distortions in color processing. Her virtuosity has helped consumer, media, and entertainment clients appear current, polished, and refined. In 1997, her campaign for Levi's made the cover of *Photo District News* and her *Entertainment Weekly* cover featuring Howard Stern won a Communication Arts award.



Levi's photographed in 1997, featured on the May 1998 cover of PDN

A natural-born innovator, Greenberg changed the game, creating the revolutionary "Jill Greenberg Effect." Inspired by the works of Richard Burbridge, Yousuf Karsh, and 1950s male pin-up photography, she developed an original studio set up that envelops her subjects in warm glowing light, giving them a radiant halo, supple highlights, and contouring shadows to enhance their character and dramatize their emotional state.

Nearly two decades after she invented this look, her work and techniques are now widely taught to aspiring photographers at schools like the Parsons School of Design, School of Visual Arts, New York Film Academy, London School of Photography and her alma mater, Rhode Island School of Design.



Downward Two (2005) © Jill Greenberg

Greenberg introduced "The Effect" in October 2001 when she started photographing monkeys for an advertising job. Recognizing how telling the animal's facial expressions and body language was, Greenberg discovered the perfect subject to give a silent voice to her growing socio-political awareness about the state of humanity in the aftermath of 9/11. She began casting simians for a personal series of work that later became *Monkey Portraits* (Bulfinch, 2006), her first monograph.



© Jill Greenberg

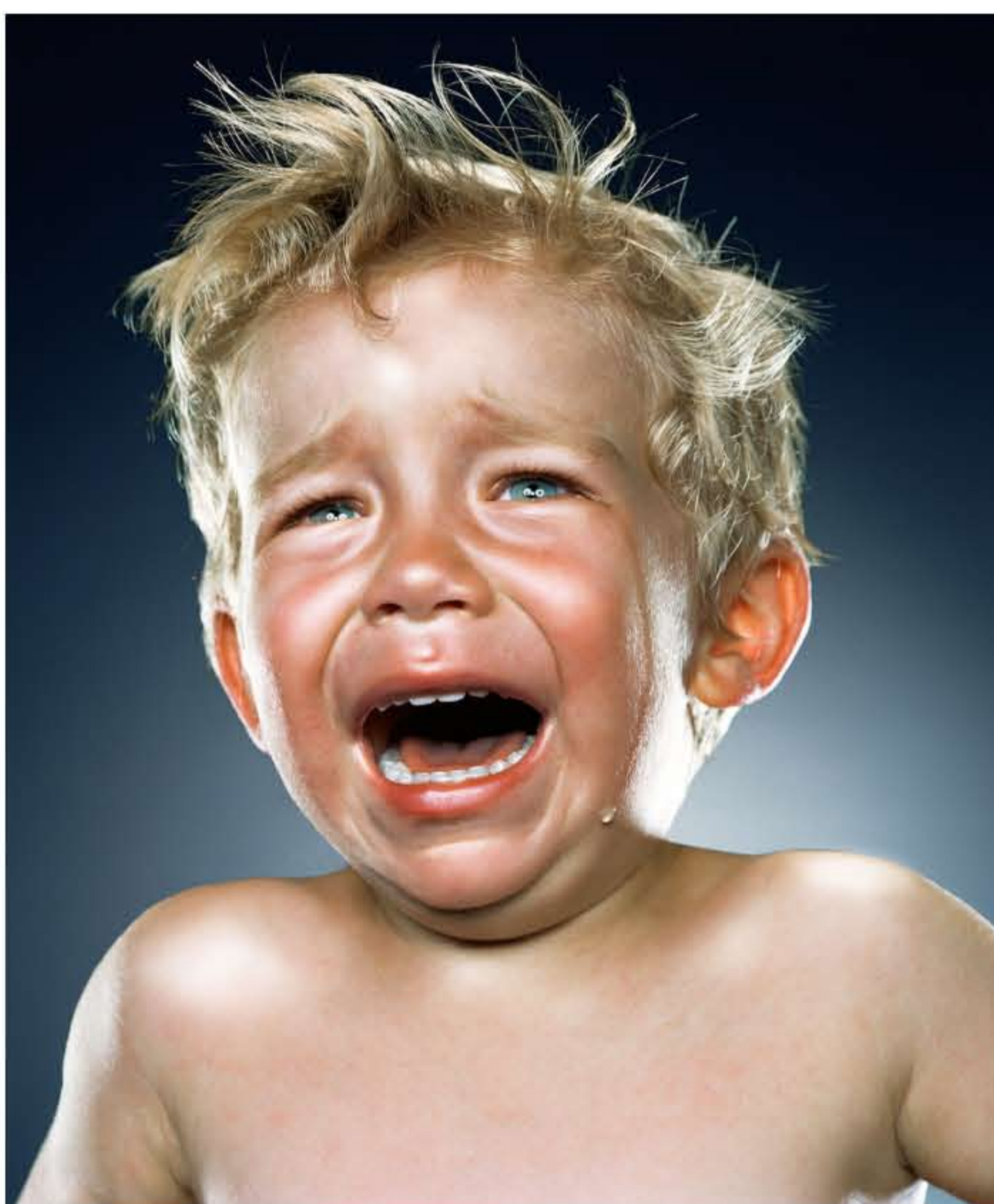
The "Jill Greenberg Effect" was a sensation. In a world that had gone bling, it offered extravagance without excess, highlighting her subject's best qualities without making them look contrived or fake. It landed her the campaign for *Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle*, the blockbuster women's action film starring Cameron Diaz, Drew Barrymore, and Lucy Liu. Greenberg's fierce, fun, and fabulous photographs of Hollywood's "It" girls were widely received.



Charlies Angels campaign © Jill Greenberg

It was a natural continuation of the love for collaboration that has long informed Greenberg's approach to portraiture. "Doing my work makes me happy and I want to spread the joy," she says. "I love the process of preparing, researching the person, looking to see what kind of light and angles are best. I don't shoot every day and I never did, so there is always time to regroup and reset. Every job is incredibly important to me."

So it was disturbing for the photographer to be caught in a media frenzy fueled by disinformation. In 2006, Greenberg was targeted by a photography blogger who imagined brutality where it did not exist when he discovered her series *End Times*, portraits of toddlers exemplifying the hyperbolic drama of the "terrible twos."

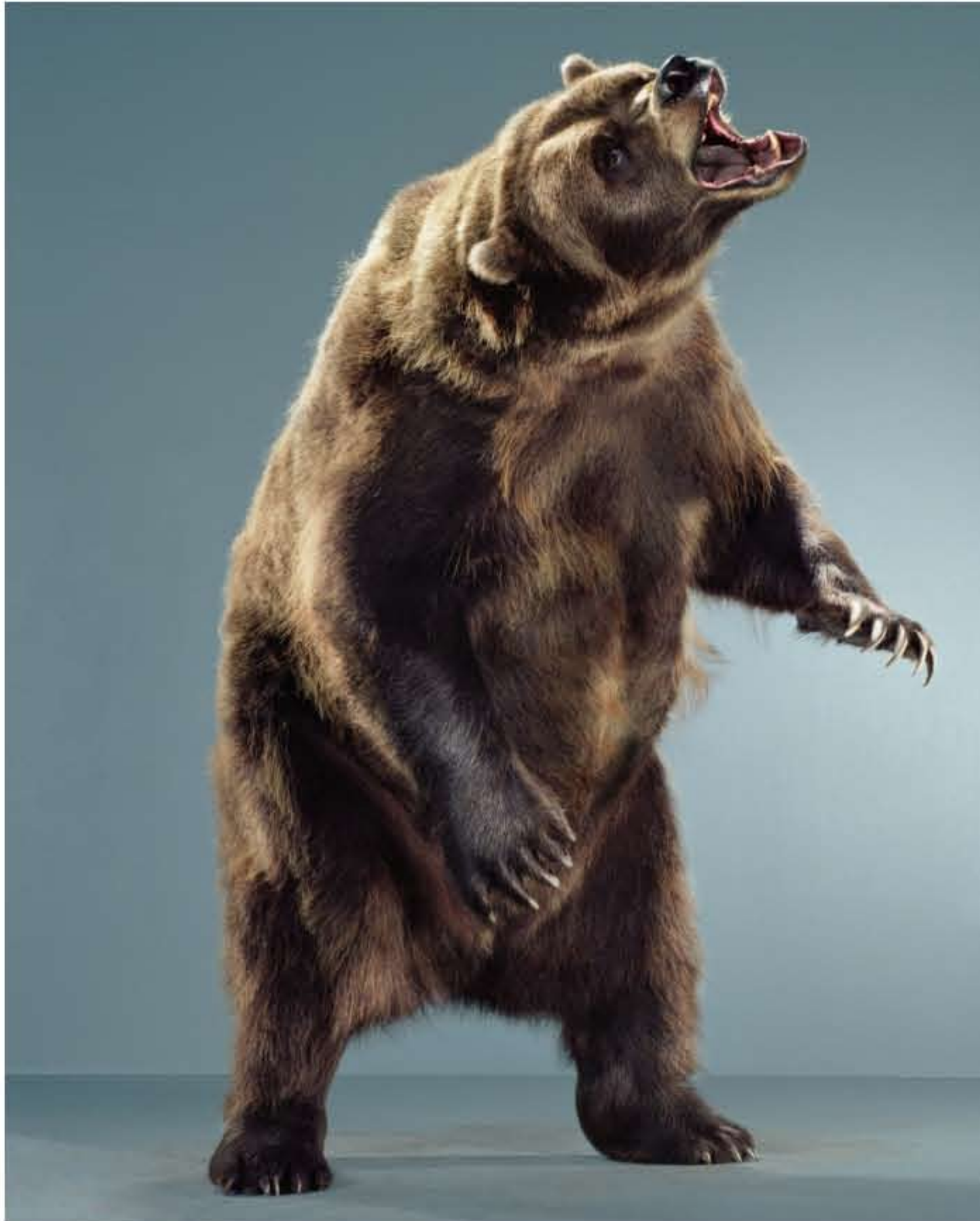


© Jill Greenberg from her End Times series

Newly a mother, she photographed young children crying with overwhelming displays of sadness, anger, and frustration when asked to return a lollipop. She first presented them at SCOPE New York with no pushback. The blogger demanded Greenberg be "arrested and charged with child abuse." His baseless accusation spread like a virus and controversy ensued, with global media fanning the flames of a non-story for ratings.

"It was a gendered response," she says. "When you live it yourself, you don't know it's gendered; you think it's you. I'm not a man, I'm not allowed to do things that make you feel uncomfortable." With the birth of the blogosphere, Greenberg became one of the first women to be targeted for harassment by an anonymous public laying in wait, eager for the opportunity to level irrational, uninformed attacks based on rumor and speculation.

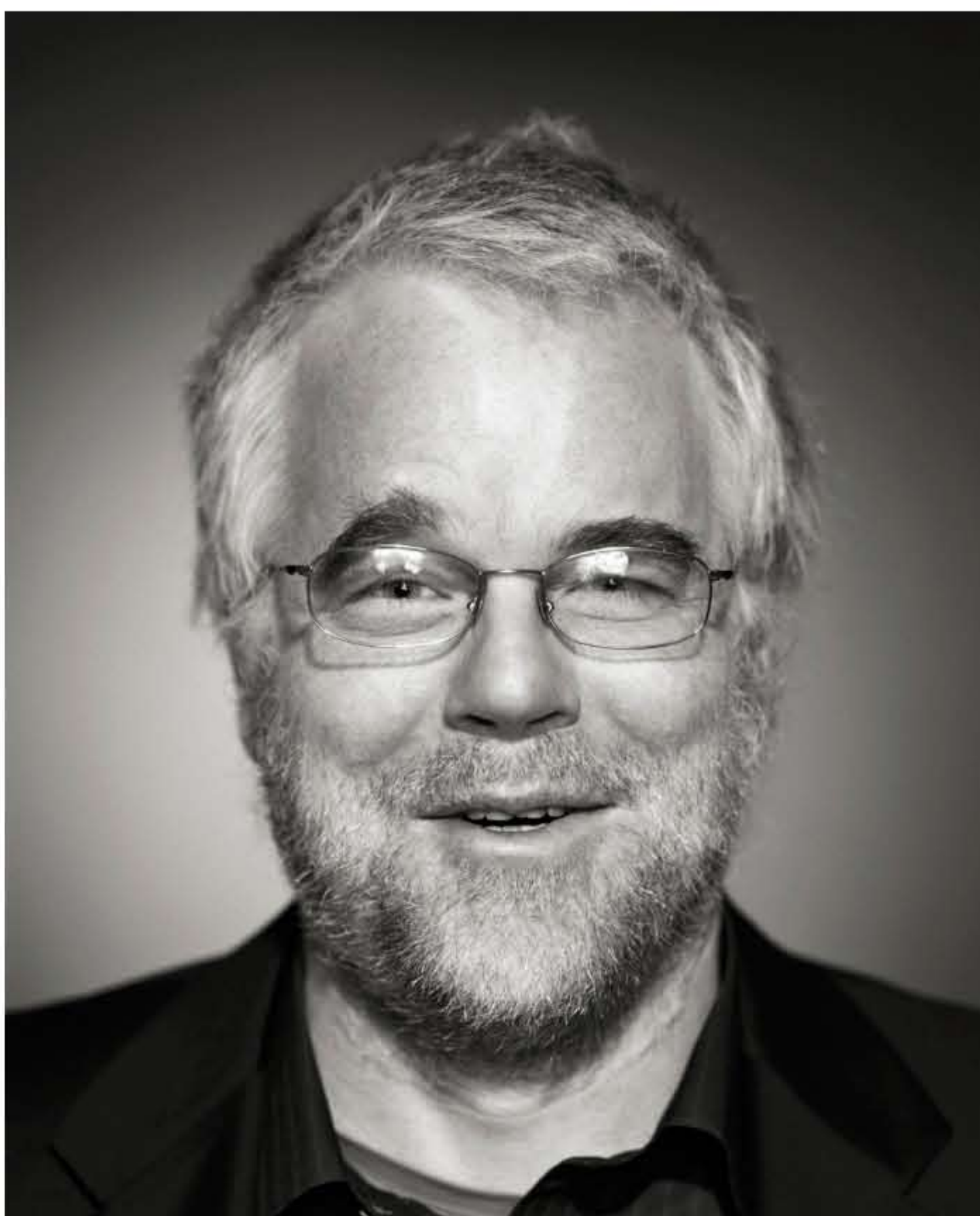
People began hacking the websites Greenberg made for her children to share photographs with family in the years before social media came into vogue and she struck back with *Ursine*, a personal project started that same year.



Untitled 16C-49 (2006) © Jill Greenberg

"The bears were a response to the vitriol I got for the crying children," Greenberg says. The raw strength and power of these apex predators represented the animalistic rage being displayed against her. It ultimately earned the admiration of actor Phillip Seymour Hoffman, inspiring him to pose for a portrait shoot with Greenberg in 2008 for *Los Angeles* magazine.

"If you can reach a serious artist on their level, they will give you their best. They see how much care and effort you bring to the job, and they want to give the energy you need for the photograph."



Phillip Seymour Hoffman, 2010. © Jill Greenberg for Los Angeles Magazine

Despite her wish to let the work speak for itself, Greenberg's willingness to push boundaries has generated some public outcry. In 2008, she made headlines once again for an agit-prop series published on her website, taking aim at John McCain, the Republican Presidential candidate.

After photographing the Arizona senator for the cover of *The Atlantic*, Greenberg had McCain stand in a second set up that used "monster" lighting typical of horror films, for a series of ghoulish and grotesque photographs she soon published on her website. In one image, "The Bloodthirsty Warmonger" appears over McCain as he fiendishly licks blood off his vampire teeth. In another, a monkey takes careful aim and excretes on McCain's head. Greenberg initially received criticism for the series but in the decade since, many have reconsidered their position against her for having the courage to speak out in a pervasive climate of fear.

"There's more acceptance of it now, but you can't be Kathy Griffin," Greenberg says. "It's such a double standard. As a woman, they're not going to let you do anything like that."



© Jill Greenberg from the series "Glass Ceiling"

It's then that "The Jill Greenberg Effect" widely picked up speed in the industry as other photographers actively tried to replicate the look. But by then, Greenberg had moved on, refusing to be pigeonholed for her own invention. That same year, she introduced *Glass Ceiling*, an exploration of gendered violence. Greenberg scuba dived to the bottom of a pool to make a series of luminous photographs of faceless, sometimes headless women clad in bikinis and high heels. Reduced to anonymous, interchangeable bodies, beautiful yet lifeless — playthings at best.

Efforts to silence Greenberg and usurp her style simply missed the mark. If anything, they have made the photographer more determined to speak out. In lieu of creating political art, she simply became political. In 2018, Greenberg launched *AlreadyMade*, showcasing the work of leading women photographers and videographers in conjunction with *The Female Lens*, her TEDx talk calling out sexism in the photography industry.

Greenberg notes the widely shared statistic that while women are responsible for 85% of consumer purchasing power, they account for 10% of the photographers making commercial work.



When They See Us' Jharrel Jerome © Jill Greenberg



When They See Us' Michael K. Williams © Jill Greenberg

As we enter into a new decade, Greenberg remains attuned to the zeitgeist, having just received the 2019 Graphis Gold Award for a portrait of Michael K. Williams for Ava Duvernay's Netflix series, *When They See Us*. "It's an intense emotional portrait," Greenberg says of the gritty black and white image of Williams as Bobby McCray, father of wrongly convicted teen Antron McCray, who was pressured by NYPD to sign a false statement against his son.

It's an image of knowing more than one ever should, a feeling that underlies Greenberg's 2017 campaign for season 1 of *The Handmaid's Tale*, which features an unforgettable image of actor Elisabeth Moss peeking out from under her bonnet. The photographs also marked a turning point for Greenberg, who began using softer lighting in her work – a testament to her acute sensitivity to the larger cultural shifts at work.



"Handmaid's Tale" Season 01, Elisabeth Moss © Jill Greenberg

Greenberg's professionalism is matched by her warmth, wit, candor, and desire to collaborate. On the set she forgoes a directorial approach, keeping relatively quiet and allowing the moment to unfold and letting her subjects reveal themselves. At the same time, she has a room filled with people to keep happy as she works.

"When you do a photoshoot it's like you're hosting a party," Greenberg says. "I want everything to be right: good food, music, lighting, people, and energy. I love my work. It makes me so happy to make pictures. This is all I want to be doing."

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