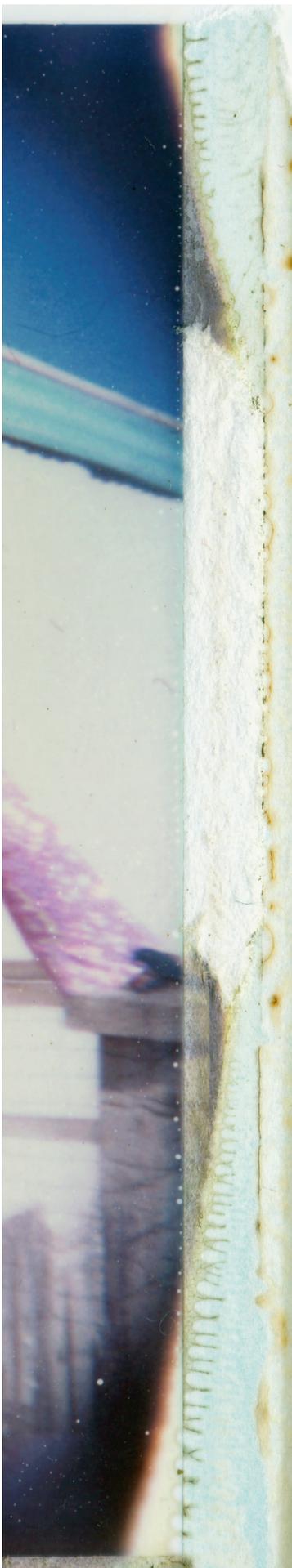


# POLANOIR

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# DAZED AND BLOWN AWAY

## An interview with Stefanie Schneider By Carmen De Vos

*This is the story of a woman who has an instant dream with an exceptionally long development time: the dream of shooting an entire movie solely on Polaroid film. A project called 29 Palms, CA.*

*Stefanie Schneider is one of the most influential contemporary female photographers around. She relates semi-autobiographical stories through photographs taken exclusively on expired Polaroid film. Recently, she concluded a project called Sidewinder, a photo-story about loss and passion, sexual tension, expectations and fulfilment.*

*Polaroids AND sex?*

*Yesss!*

*Berlin, here I come...*

*I meet La Schneider in her atelier in a quiet green neighbourhood of Berlin. The artist, whose work I savour with the kind of hedonistic bliss normally reserved for exquisite chocolates, turns out to be a sweet-natured, highly animated woman, whose long brown hair falls loose over her shoulders, and I can spot that she isn't wearing a bra. Cute dimples light up her face as she jumps from her bike, kisses me hello and pardons herself for being late. She looks so much less stiff than her older photographs have led me to suspect; softer and fuller too.*

*But sharp, yes, sharp of mind and with oodles of enthusiasm – that's for certain. She speaks in waterfalls and constantly draws new angles, point of views and spontaneous ideas into her effervescent stream of words.*

*I don't really need to ask questions. Stefanie talks as vacuously about her life as she does about her work, the two being so closely intertwined as to render a separate discussion impossible.*

## Prelude

*I'm pleased I've brought along my digital video camera to record her verbal rushes of creativity. I position the camera on the kitchen table on top of a milk carton. And no, I didn't drag my heavy tripod all the way from my hotel to her place; my high heels – dictated by the whim of the moment – simply did not permit such heavy combat action. I press the record button and brace myself for a ride to Planet Schneider, a world which resounds with the rolling Rs of her favourite expressions, 'really', 'cool', and 'really cool', like the sassy roaring of a lioness cub.*

## They paid right away with large cheques which we split fairly, 50-50

*'In 1997, after my studies, I moved to LA with my boyfriend of the time. We didn't know anybody there, but just before we left, we'd seen a documentary on German television about Frances Schoenberger (the German society reporter) – a really interesting woman – and we figured that Frances could make a good starting point. We'd moved to LA with no connections, no scholarship, nothing. We had very little money, and what we had, we soon burned thanks to a bad car purchase. Then I thought I should just call this woman and tell her I want to take photographs of her. Portraits. So I visited Frances and showed her my little portfolio with all the portraits of women I'd ever taken, and she loved it. I took some photos of her and her daughter. One of them she even used in the book about her life she published last year.'* (Barfuss in Hollywood. Mein Leben inmitten der Stars.)

*Stefanie nods her head at the memory, drinks some water and then adds, with childish enthusiasm: 'I have to get that book.'*



*The photo session turns out to be a great foot in the door. Frances loves the photos and invites her to a reception being given by Wim Wenders, the filmmaker.*

'At this party I met all the people who would be important to me for the rest of my career. Basically the people who were the connections to everybody else. That was where I met Marc Foster, the filmmaker (Monster's Ball, Finding Neverland, the new Bond planned for 2008) and right away, we got along well and became friends. We were constantly broke and Marc decided to start selling my pictures. He brought home collectors, colleagues, and investors he ran into in the movie scene and showed them my Polaroids. They bought them and paid right away with large cheques which we split fairly, 50-50. That's how we survived those first few years. And look at him now - he's making the new Bond movie. It is in this period that all my friendships were born: artists from different disciplines at the beginning of their careers, owning nothing but freedom; coming together. A connection was made for life, right there and then.'

*'Does he still split his earnings with you, 50-50?' I enquire.*

*Stefanie smiles and her charming dimples make a sudden reappearance:*

'No, but he is supportive of the project and he hasn't the time to sell anything now anyway. Wish he had. Would be fun.'



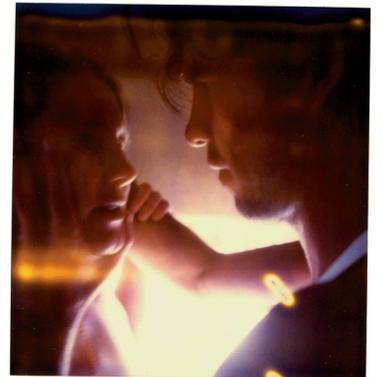
## ...and then she meets a man called Lance and nothing will ever be the same again

*She meets Lance while she's still involved in a rather asexual relationship with her then long-term boyfriend. Lance is an enigmatic character – the ultimate alpha male who seduces women and then breaks their hearts. They fall in love, passionately, but she is still trapped in her current relationship. When her boyfriend finds out about Lance, he goes wild and Lance decides to quit the scene rather than make one. For eight long months, she doesn't receive a single sign of life from him. It almost drives her crazy. In a way, she becomes crazy.*

*'When he left, I was totally out of my mind. I wouldn't leave the house anymore. I was constantly sitting at my computer, even over entire weekends. Out of frustration and despair, I started chatting with people from all over the whole world. That is how my project called Strangelove 2004 started.'*

*Stefanie smokes cigarettes in front of the open kitchen window. A gentle wind wafts her thoughts through the room. I eagerly wolf down the chocolates I brought her as a present. She talks. I long for a coffee and listen.*

*Her sudden solitude and broken heart drive Stefanie to the verge of a nervous breakdown.*



'I chatted with men with the Web cam on and I was constantly taking photographs of myself, frequently naked. It was a pretty intense time. I can show you a bit of what I did back then later.'

*Unfortunately I forget to remind her of this proposal before I leave again. Call me a dirty little bint, but I wouldn't have minded going over all her randy shots.*

'I had phone sex with one guy. I was constantly trying to find out who I was and what was wrong. I was so immeasurably hurt because Lance had left. I thought I'd lost it all and I wanted to experience who I was – what was left of me. I invited chat-people to Berlin, where I rented hotel rooms for the occasion and had sex with them. It was really bizarre, a very strange time. I really was almost insane.

## I could drive with them to the desert and say, "I'll do whatever you want, just take photographs of me"

At that time, I got the idea of hooking up with the LA-based people I met through the Internet when I got back to LA myself. I could meet them at some street corner and drive with them to the desert and say, "I'll do whatever you want, just take photographs of me." My idea was to experience myself with those different people and see how my body reacted. It was a crazy idea in retrospect; I probably would have been dead if many men had responded to my request. But in the end, nobody wanted to join me. Only one guy responded on the condition that he could meet me in a café beforehand. That guy was JD. At our first encounter, I left out a lot of details about my project, especially the sexual parts because they seemed to have scared all the others away.

At first, I didn't like JD, but by the time we went to the desert, we really got along well. We rented an Air Stream trailer and I had a crazy and intense night with him: loads to drink, loads to eat and a lot of sex. It was just really intense. Then out of the blue, in the middle of the night, JD jumped up, went onto my computer and wrote the beginning of a little story – a short story. We had no idea this would be the beginning of a complete film project. But I was like: (takes an imaginary paper in her hand and pretends to read it) "My God, this is great! Let's do it! Let's come back here and make a movie out of this."

*The project Sidewinder was born.*

## Sidewinder

*JD, the one man who responded, turns out to be the former theology student and now Hollywood actor, JD Rudometkin. Both protagonists – Stefanie and Rudometkin – have their own demons to fight and, after the aforementioned orgy of excessive booze and sex, they agree to spend five weeks together in a camper in the desert. During that time, Rudometkin writes, develops and plays the character of Lance (Waterman), her lost love. In Sidewinder, he reconstructs his own old inner conflict about priesthood; she relives her traumatic passion for Lance. They live together and register their physical reactions to each other on Polaroid film. Both cross borders they wouldn't cross if they hadn't been at exactly that point in*

*their lives and at exactly that stage in their relationship – a situation which is fortunately limited in time and space. They each fight against their own histories and process them into one joint catharsis: the Sidewinder film.*

*Her sister is there to witness and to shoot their story in Polaroid pictures. Stefanie feels no shame about having her nudity and sexuality captured in photographs:*

*'When it is for my art, there is no stopping for me. How could I feel ashamed of my nudity in my own art? It would mean I didn't believe in what I was doing. JD and I spent five or six entire weeks in the desert. Even the German TV channel Arte was interested in the develop-*



## How could I feel ashamed of my nudity in my own art? It would mean I didn't believe in what I was doing.

ment of my experiment and shot a documentary about it. It was intense. I fell in love again for the first time after Lance, even though I thought that would never be possible again. Part of what made the Sidewinder project so thrilling for me was that I was struggling and still searching for something that was missing;

trying to make something happen, but nothing happened. JD rejected me.

Finally, we finished the project and put the Polaroids together in a pdf, in the form of a little film. I asked JD to write music for it and to write texts for different pages, and that's basically how the sidewinder project came about.

Just as we'd finished it, Lance came back into my life.'

*After eight long months not knowing if he is still alive at all, a little note is dropped into her mailbox. Lance is back and takes up his place in her life again. She is now able to finish Sidewinder emotionally, too.*



## 29 Palms, CA - The story continues

*Sidewinder is only one story line in the great multi-disciplinary project called 29 Palms, CA: the project she considers to be the logical continuation of her life-annexed work. Not only will this project eventually close the Polaroid epoch, she uses it as a nerve centre where friends converge.*

'29 Palms, CA really started when I was doing the Sidewinder project. The debauchery in my life caused by my sadness about Lance meant that I was regularly hanging on the phone with my friends in LA, looking for comfort and a listening ear. I kept telling them outrageous stories about the catastrophe in my love life and they just couldn't believe it. Still, all of a sudden we realised that everybody has a story to tell: my friend Rhada started to tell her story, Nadia told stories about her love life... We were all in a position and at a stage in our lives where we had crazy life stories to tell. So we decided to make a project out of them. My friends would write down their life stories, I would turn them into screenplays. All these different story lines would be connected in one big Polaroid film.

And so we started.

We shoot the scenes in the desert after I've arranged the decor and the props. To film the scenes, I shoot thousands of Polaroid photos, sequence by sequence and scene by scene.'

**Every photograph taken for the project will become art, as well as every piece of film**

*'This must demand a hell of a lot of concentration,' I exclaim, 'Photographing people moving and acting at such a fast pace and still knowing where and when to focus.'*

*'Oh no, when I'm shooting I can't be bothered with such details,' says the world's most renowned Polaroid artist.*

*I manually close my dropped jaw and take a sip of my coffee.*

'Until I can find new funds to continue shooting, I'm having a Web site built where all the friends who are part of this project can find their place. I provide them with an Internet platform where they can upload their ideas. From those ideas and story lines, I select what might fit into the project. Their personal pages in the big 29 Palms, CA website allow them to develop their characters online. For example, they write or invent their own diaries so that the public gets background information about their characters. Interaction with the public is important. Some of the story lines resulted in spin-offs. For instance, we have the Lonely Heart Radio Show, which will have real live Internet broadcasts with a real live DJ. Here again, interaction with the public is part of the artwork.'

*29 Palms, CA represents the biggest Polaroid art project ever: a gigantic feast of Polaroid pictures, several Web platforms and the great Lonely Heart Radio Show – all to climax in the long awaited 29 Palms, CA long-play movie, which will be almost completely assembled out of Polaroid material, mixed with short Super8 sequences.*

*Every photograph taken for the project will become art, as well as every piece of film. Another 17,000 Polaroids still need to be shot, even more funds will have to be collected and who knows if this film will ever be realised. But until such time, the friends from LA always have a reason to meet on regular basis. The artwork in progress can be followed in her photographic work and on [www.twentyninepalms.ca](http://www.twentyninepalms.ca).*

'For me, 29 Palms, CA is also a way of keeping all our friends together, of talking again on a regular basis;

because before, we weren't taking the time to do that anymore.

Everybody brings themselves into the project, contributing their own knowledge and talents, and I'm putting it all together in 29 Palms, CA. It is a huge project, growing from all directions, developing slowly. But perhaps that is a good thing.'



## Stefanie Schneider in brief:

**1968** Born in Cuxhaven  
**1994-95** Erasmus scholarship at the Academie Julien, Paris, France  
**1996** MFA, Folkwang School, Essen  
Lives and works in Los Angeles and Berlin

**Solo exhibitions (selection from 2007 only)**

**Instant dreams, Polanoir Gallery, Vienna, Austria**

**News from 29 Palms, CA, Lumas, New York, USA**

**Wastelands, Kunstverein Recklinghausen, Recklinghausen, Germany**

**Stranger Than Paradise, Galerie Oui, Paris, France**

**Sidewinder, Scalo | Guye Gallery, Los Angeles, USA**

Stefanie Schneider is one of the most important contemporary female photographers.

She chooses to photograph solely on expired Polaroid film, which she pushes to the limit. She plays with the chemistry, the colours and our senses, narrating passionate stories of love and desire. She has a filmic approach and creates a distinctive feeling that strikes deep emotional chords within the onlooker.

Serial editions of her photographs are on sale via Internet Galleries such as Polanoir and Lumas. She immediately re-invests the earnings from those sales in her art. Stefanie Schneider employs six full-time co-operators, including Lance and herself.

Polanoid.net, one of her main sponsors, started collecting expired Polaroid material from all over the planet to support her vision. In return, Stefanie Schneider now presents a very special and dedicated collection of limited edition prints of as-yet unpublished and unseen pictures from the 29 Palms, CA project in their Polanoir gallery in Vienna.

**[www.polanoir.com](http://www.polanoir.com)**

Mica Film, Berlin co-producer of 29 Palms, CA characterises the project as follows: *'It is rare to find such a concentration of so many uniquely talented artists combined in one project, and then to have such an impressive person as Stefanie Schneider with her continuous eruptions of ideas as a driving force – a woman who, with her obsessive passion, lives for and with her art. Their manic energy and promising visions in all directions awaken a longing to join in yourself and become a part of 29 Palms, CA and its activities in the expanding, total work of art.'*

It is the Sidewinder project, with its focus on the emotional and sexual dynamics of an unfolding relationship, which TicKL has singled out. We would like to illustrate this part of the 29 Palms, CA project with a selection of pictures for your enjoyment.

[www.twentyninepalms.ca](http://www.twentyninepalms.ca)

[www.polanoir.com/schneider](http://www.polanoir.com/schneider)

## Epilogue

'This was the best interview ever,' Stefanie decides,  
many gallons of coffee later.

**'It rreally was!'**

(Yeah, yeah...just believe me, I have it on film.)



**carmendevos**

I can be really lazy. Hang around horny for whole blessed mornings.

I can be very sweet. Slowly stretching my body and rolling it in the luke-warm sand, searching for spiders and idly pulling off their funny little legs, tenderly empathising with their pain all the while.

I am often searching. Face against skin, searching for attention. His skin. Stubbled flesh. (Thus far, I may touch. Beyond here, other skin begins. Other men's skins, forbidden playgrounds.)

I like to float in my body, in my skin, while thoughts spin round inside my head, so full of domesticated desires.

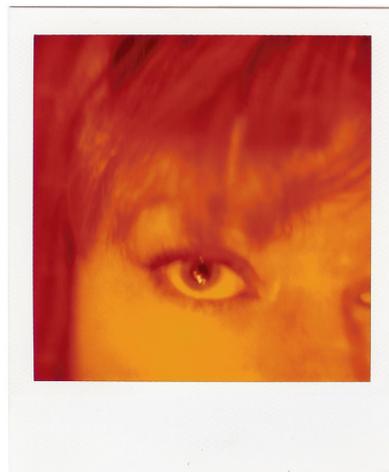
And then I get up and anoint my body with smoothing moisturisers for days on end, after which I leap with fleet and fluid step into my high leather boots and start running. On a foray. For hours. For weeks. For you. Collecting passion as a way to channel my lust.

ADHD patients get Rilatine; for myself I thought up TicKL.



**Doc**, born in Vienna in 1969. In the blessed year 2004, after 12 years of gazing at spiders' eyes for his biology dissertation and inhaling lomography as a way of life, he finally got hold of his first SX-70. Ever since this startling moment, his whole life seems to revolve around these almost forgotten pictures with their peculiar scent that instantaneously develop in the palm of a hand. Fascinated by the combination of intense analogue creativity on the one hand and the infinite digital possibilities of community building through the Internet on the other, he founded Polanoid: an Internet community that functions as a laboratory to keep the noble art of Polaroid-taking alive, to give talent a platform and to investigate the place of the Polaroid picture in the contemporary art scene. TicKL is the natural thrilling high-class erotic spin-off of this project.

StrangeFields (or '**STrAnGeFields**' as she now prefers to be called) first adopted the bewildering artistic affectation of referring to herself by surname only and in the third person, when she was a mere seven years of age. Even then, she felt sure she was predestined for a higher – or rather a more 'cReAtiVe' – calling. Asked by the local vicar's wife what she would like to be when she grew up, she reportedly responded very sweetly – though most flamboyantly – with: 'StrangeFields often wonders why your biscuits smell like b0iLed carRotS.' As those disarming words of precocious genius slipped from her mouth, little did anyone suspect that the future career of this thoughtful maiden would one day involve dropping her knickers between the sticky back pages of this glorious 'art pamphlet', or that you, dear reader, would purchase it and not even bother reading her biography to the end, because you were too busy flipping to the back to have a shuftly at her bare bot. Chuh – perverts, the lot of you! (I don't mean you of course; you read to the end. I only meant those other ones.)



**Stefanie Schneider** is one of the most influential contemporary female photographers around. Her career began when she turned down an invitation from a German consul to participate in an exhibition, because she thought he was full of bullshit. Stefanie Schneider doesn't compromise. She creates her distinctive images on unreliable expired Polaroid film, out of passion for the unpredictable – the same passion she feels for the man in her life, her art and her projects. And if her art dictates that she must retreat to the desert, naked, for five solid weeks, then so be it.



**Lieve Blancquaert** works freelance for some of the most respected magazines and newspapers in Belgium and the Netherlands. Not only is she a welcome TV guest and the highly reputed author of a number of successful books on social themes, she's also got a bit of a thing about shoes.

Publications: Vrouw, Inch-Allah, Mijn Status is positief

**David Levinthal** started working with toy figures back in 1971, while he was a graduate student at Yale studying with Walker Evans. He has continued to work with toys ever since then, as he has constantly been fascinated by how a camera could be used to transform small inanimate objects into what appear to be living, breathing creatures.

'When I started using the large Polaroid camera back in 1986, I found that it was the perfect compliment to my work with toys. The large 20x24 prints were so rich and dense with colour. Especially with the XXX series, I was able to create such a sensuous atmosphere with all of the models emerging from a deep black background, greatly enhancing their sexuality.'

