

# Watching the WATCHERS

by Jane Long

Some people see the world in black and white with stark boundaries between right and wrong, good and evil, beautiful and ugly. I've always preferred to think of the world in myriad shades of gray and a whole spectrum of colors. Race, sexuality, temperament — things aren't always as they seem, and the boundaries are always more blurred than they first appear.



Vigilant Virago



Creating images that make people question what they are seeing is something that really appeals to me. What at first glance might seem like a beautiful, innocent image is revealed on closer inspection to have a dark side or to have hidden meanings and elements.

Earlier this year I stumbled across a drawing by Mexican artist Kikyz1313 called "A Slumber Embrace." It's a beautiful drawing of a young girl holding a skull, surrounded by flowers ... but the flowers had eyeballs in them! I couldn't get the image out of my head; it was a real "aha moment." Having made eyeballs for my Frogs and Snails image, I loved the idea of using them in this way and immediately knew I had to create them in real life.

Usually when I'm designing an image, I have a final concept in mind and then work to construct any props or other visual elements that the image requires. This time it was the other way around, with the props coming first and the final concept not coming to me until much later in the production process.

I spent weeks creating the eyeballs out of ping-pong balls and found some artificial peonies on eBay for them to sit in. On their own, I knew they would not look 100 percent realistic, so very early on I decided they would need to be accompanied by fresh flowers to add realism to the scene. This idea quickly blossomed (pardon the pun) into an elaborate head and shoulder piece that would wind down the body. →





I created a frame for the piece by cutting out guttering wire and attaching it to a plastic headband. For the chest piece, I used guttering wire and then attached beaded wire around the edges.

After researching which blooms would be in season and placing an order with a wholesale florist, I produced a mockup in Photoshop of where everything would go. This became a critical reference when it came to assembling the final piece.

Each flower and foliage piece needed to be individually wired and ready to attach to the headpiece along with the eyeball flowers, extra doll eyes, and colorful beetles. The final piece took over 13 hours to put together, measured over 6 feet and weighed nearly 9 pounds.

The original plan was to shoot a series of images, some as a “dry” studio shoot and some in a private pool; however, on that day it poured down rain! Rescheduling wasn’t an option, as the fresh flowers would quickly wilt, so we decided to only do one shoot in the pool rather than the three or four I had planned. Somehow I seem to have a knack for shooting water scenes in winter and fire scenes in summer! My model, Bella Murray, was an absolute star, getting into a cold pool on a wet and rainy day and making it all look effortless!

We tried a number of different lighting options for both the studio shots and the water shots but the rain really limited our options in the pool. In the end, the key water scene was shot with natural light with a reflector to bounce in whatever extra light we could get.

Postproduction in Photoshop was a seemingly never-ending task of masking. The fine fern was very difficult to separate from the background and required all my masking techniques and tools,

right down to pixel-by-pixel editing. In the end, I created a custom brush from a small section of fern and overlaid that to soften some of the edges, making sure I set the size, angle, and color values on the brush to vary a little.

The cold also impacted the postproduction — Bella was covered in goosebumps! To counter this I used Frequency Separation and brushed a layer of gray grain very lightly over sections of the high frequency layer.

I enhanced the eyeballs with some close-ups of irises that I’d created after studying macro images of human eyes. I didn’t want to completely cover the painted irises, so the layers were set to soft light at about 60% opacity.

The background for Marquess was created from cloud images and a fog brush. By using a random brush in white, I created patchy areas in the top corner and then used Radial Blur set to Zoom to create the light rays. The dragonflies were shot separately and added in postproduction.

In Vigilant Virago I wanted to keep as many of the water ripples from the original image as I could, but I needed it to match with the background, which didn’t have drops. I copied and pasted a few and used a ripple brush to create continuity between the two images. Two birds were added, and I used Liquify to distort the reflection of the bird on her hand. The rain was created with a noise layer that I darkened and then added Movement Blur to, setting the layer to Screen.

It was a very challenging shoot in all aspects, but ultimately I think it was worth taking the time to construct things as realistically as possible and to go the extra mile in post production.



Jane Long is an Australian photographer and digital artist who combines photography and photomanipulation to create slightly surreal images that straddle the line between reality and fantasy. Completely self-taught, she has worked with Photoshop since 1994, both commercially and for personal work. She has exhibited in Australia, USA, Romania, and Greece. To see more of her work, visit her website at [janelong.com.au](http://janelong.com.au) where some limited-edition prints are also available.