

KHRYSTYNA'S WORLD

TODD HIDO



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DETENTION IN THE GETAWAY CAR

Essay by Katya Tylevich

Khrystyna has the rare ability to become unrecognizable; to become somebody else — many different people, in fact. Todd Hido, meanwhile, had never really bought into the idea of a muse. He had never worked so consistently with a single model before, but with just one Khrystyna he found himself capturing endless others: characters, times, places.

She had approached him first, in 2010. Khrystyna works in the ‘conventional’ modeling world by day: lipstick and glamorous fashion shoots. When posing for Hido, however, her psychology changes. She isn’t afraid to become unattractive when the photograph calls for it, or to disturb the viewer. Throughout *Khrystyna’s World*, however different the implied stories that Hido creates across this sweeping body of work, a single constant is Khrystyna’s fullness of expression. Never simply a prop for hair and makeup, she is an animate communication of Hido’s complex environments, their spirits, shadows and combustible associations.

In a single collection of photographs, Hido illustrates a sense of empowerment with the skeleton of vulnerability, sarcasm in the face of threat, and playfulness despite gravity. He ends on a beautiful moment of introspection: sunshine cascading onto

the exposed shoulder of a woman with her face turned down, away from the camera. There is no context to date or set the photograph, only black surrounds her.

Khrystyna’s World exists outside of time and place, therefore. The physical world shapes the title character’s internal one, at the same time that it is the reflection of it. The same can be said of Hido’s photographs. Viewers often remark about the powerful sense of familiarity they feel in Hido’s work. ‘You know, this reminds me of...’ say very different people, from very different backgrounds. Of what? Sometimes of something the viewer wishes to forget again.

In harmony with Hido’s earlier works, *Khrystyna’s World* implies a history immediately before his time. The cars, the wigs and clothing styles of many photographs in this collection belong to the generation of Hido’s mother, her friends and her sisters. A fictionalized account, maybe, and imagined, but certainly an honest one. Whether Hido is trying to accurately represent a certain period through Khrystyna’s character or rather to play ‘dress up’ — to recreate an obsession — is beside the point. And the point is exactly where memory and reality meet, to form Hido’s precise ambiguity.

In *Khrystyna's World*, whatever and wherever it may be, the character always appears to be in the act of escaping. Of the multiple characters she assumes, they all seem to be either in motion, disguise, or involuntary constraint. Nevertheless, Khrystyna's surroundings, regardless of their notable differences, are all versions of the same place. She, herself, is versions of the same woman, regardless of her differing appearances. Expressed more figuratively than before, perhaps, but this is a sentiment at the heart of all of Hido's work: you can run, but you can never hide from yourself.

There she is, toward the middle of this collection of vignettes: Khrystyna (or a version of Khrystyna) in the back of a car, either like a child or a suspect in custody of an authority. The car is stationary, and its driver presumably standing outside. Khrystyna's expression is caught between fear and annoyance ('get on with it, already'). She gives the impression of rebelliousness. The car, at once, serves as a symbol of her detention and, at long last, her breakaway.

This collection begins with the image of a wrecked vehicle. But foreshadowing is the stuff of narrative. Khrystyna's story doesn't move from beginning to end, but rather from one corner of the same situation to another. Khrystyna in the backseat of a car: will it drive her toward that big resolution, epiphany or tragedy that comes so satisfyingly at the end of any good work of fiction? In fact, as suggested by the photographs that follow, it's possible the car only delivers her to those already-familiar, dissatisfied patterns, which echo the first half of this collection. Khrystyna remains resilient in spite of it.

Like his title character, the photographer returns to his own patterns as well, even as he unmistakably moves forward and breaks away from them. *Khrystyna's World* is, in many ways, a departure for Todd Hido, who is foremost recognized for capturing the distinct personality of place. His place — elastic in its relevance and geography, protean in its ability to represent a space both from his past and that of any single viewer — still always has the markings of working-class Eastern Ohio in the '70s. Not coincidentally, that is the setting of the artist's childhood. A place that no longer exists (or never really did, considering the imprecision of childhood memory); a place that is relentlessly present.

The title, *Khrystyna's World*, is an ironic play on Andrew Wyeth's famous 1948 painting, *Christina's World*, which is widely understood to be a depiction of Anna Christina Olson, an acquaintance who had lost the use of her legs at age 30. In Wyeth's painting, a woman sits on a grassy field with her back to the viewer and her eyes on a farm house in the distance. At second glance, the woman appears to be crawling. Depending on one's reading of the painting, it has the potential for both pastoral tranquility and inescapable desperation.

Hido's recall of Wyeth's work is tongue-in-cheek, of course. Bite on the tongue, however, and the anxiety both women seem to experience comes to surface. Estranged from a (sense of) home that looks deceptively attainable, they both claw toward refuge that's out of reach. Who's to say they won't eventually get it? And there it is again: Todd Hido's place. Ubiquitous but untouchable. Familiar but inexact. *Khrystyna's World* is the photographer's, after all.



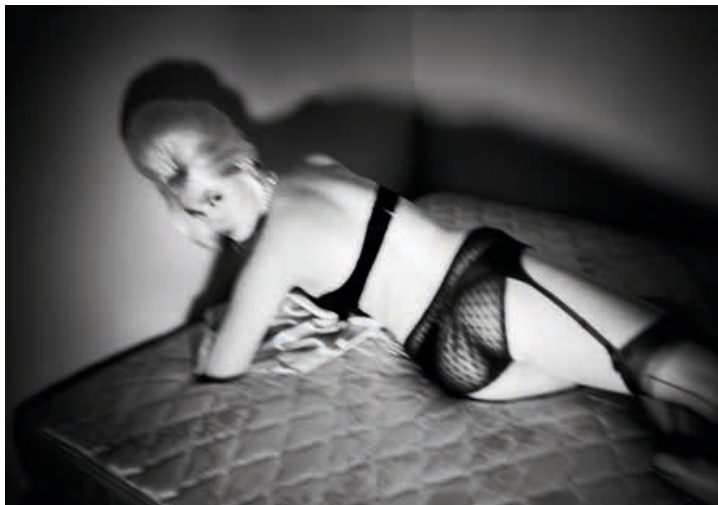
































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