



POLIXENI PAPAPETROU

The Ghillies

In *The Ghillies* (2013) I photographed my teenage son wearing ghillie suits or camouflage outfits originally developed for hunting and the military. The project began with his enthusiasm for games where ghillies are worn or simulated online. He wanted to possess a ghillie suit and to be photographed in it. Upon recording his presence in the camouflage, I noticed the most uncanny transformation, as he was still there—my son—but not there: a bush that dissolves into the scenery, a vegetal humanoid shape, an apparition, a hybrid genius, a botanical phantom, an abstraction of human stature, something that comes from nature and makes a claim for our one-ness with nature.

At the same time, remembering that the project takes its point of departure from the military and games, these photographs speak about boys, adolescence and identity and how they might reconcile their inner world with the social demands of the outer world as they navigate the darker continent of the teens. In that awkward evolution of youth, childhood identity recedes and new archetypes emerge for boys: some take on an institutional camouflage and blend in with their surroundings whereas others emerge as individuals. Always in harmony within the environment, my son both blends and retains a strong presence. Though partly submerged in nature, his force as a figure is symbol for his individuality in an increasingly conformist world.

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Polixeni Papapetrou is an Australian photographic artist who explores the relationship between history, contemporary culture and identity. Since 2002 Papapetrou has focused on the themes of childhood identity, memory and otherness. She has held over 50 solo exhibitions and participated in over 100 group exhibitions in Australia, Asia, Europe and the USA. Surveys of her work were held at the Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney (2011) and Centre for Contemporary Photography, Melbourne (2013). She has exhibited in major international photography festivals in Asia, Europe and Latin America. Her work appears in public, corporate and private collections in Australia, Europe and USA.