

We all had one when we were children: our secret, enchanted garden, our very own universe far from the grown up world, school, or the bullies of the neighbourhood. It is the true home of all children, rich or poor, from posh villas or council flats, behind old walls overgrown with ivy or boarding fences plastered with advertisements. In their secret garden they know all the hidden paths and dangers. Every day reveals new miracles and ancient monuments, long forgotten by the rest of the world, at least by most of us.

In her photographic series, Eva Kern allows us to take a look into those enchanted gardens, through the eyes of the children, whom she photographed as if they were woodnymphs, little hunters, enchanted princesses, clever little geniuses, playful fauns, small rockstars or frightening creatures from Japanese ghost movies. Each one of those little garden inhabitants once had their home in Eva Kern's own childhood fantasy, as regular guest or occasional visitor, from out of her soul and as part of her personality. She never let them go, but treasured them in her heart and memory, bringing them to life again in the portrayed children- without veiling the strong personality of her great little models.

The four to eleven year olds, amongst toadstools, flowers, owls, fur, feathers, bring back old memories. Very softly, because in today's world of mobile phones, cars, e-mails and daily commitments, you can't afford to let yourself get carried away to a time where everything was magic and new but at the same time completely natural.

The gate opens behind the patina of the "my secret garden" photographs, towards the incredible freedom of the supposed helplessness of the first years of life. To all the treasures and discoveries which could be made in those almost forgotten days gone by, even in the dusty flats of whimsical old aunts, in trance and otherworldliness, which we were allowed and obliged to experience as a child, before the horrors of puberty would call for a life more serious. It is a life we long for in some of our dreams; a time where one was more than just a mere being, trotting unperturbed the predetermined paths of life, onto the bitter end. The time, in which one would have felt like the reincarnation of a long forgotten god, if at that age such thoughts would at all have been possible.

Eva Kern's pictures from "my secret garden" show the grown up, idealised version of childhood- but that is already much more than what most of us are capable to perceive in our adult lives.

The rusty iron gate has opened up a bit, inviting us to visit the artist's enchanted garden. But think of it: "The owls are not what they seem...."

Peter Hiess