

PHOTOGRAPHY

[NSFW] Go Gaga for Man-Baby Photos from London's Infantilist Scene

- DJ PANGBURN

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Courtesy of the artist and Mier Gallery.

At LA's Mier Gallery, UK photographer Polly Borland is showing 'The Babies' in its entirety for the first time in 15 years.

For the first time in over 15 years, prolific photographer Polly Borland is showing her photographic series, *The Babies*, a body of work that dives into the world of adult males role-playing as infants. As an aspect of fetish culture, male infantilism lacks the threatening power dynamic of BDSM, or the eroticism of photographs showing people at the moment of orgasm. For those interested, its attraction lies elsewhere. Through Borland's lens, the men—dressed in diapers and often sucking on a pacifier—look vulnerable and somewhat sad, but always desiring of comfort and care.

In one photograph, Borland captures in close-up the face of a man sucking on a pacifier and wearing a wig, his face partially covered in bubble bath foam. Borland also showcases a man in a baby gown riding a rocking horse, as well as another man-baby bent over, staring at the camera

through his legs. It's a collection of images that still baffles and engages with equal parts humor and pity.



This new exhibition, at Mier Gallery in Los Angeles, will also feature new tapestries inspired by Borland's iconic Queen Elizabeth II woven portrait from 2001. To make them, Borland worked with an English prisoner's arts advocacy organization, Fine Cell Work, to craft woven interpretations of the original. They are designed to showcase people—specifically, prisoners undergoing rehabilitation—living at society's edges.

Borland tells *Creators* that she had worked on *The Babies* project independently for five years before Nick Cave showed the work publicly in 1999 at Meltdown Festival in London. The subculture of infantilists original came to her attention by way of friend. At first, Borland didn't believe it, but the friend assured her that they were real. The friend suggested Borland contact another friend, Kim West, a maker of rubber fashion wear, who confirmed their existence.





Shortly thereafter, Borland found a club in London called "Hush a Bye Baby Club" in the back of a top-shelf magazine, the term used to refer to sex and porno magazines in the United Kingdom. A personal contact section in the back of the magazine served as Borland's portal into the world of infantilists. In amazement, Borland dialed a phone number and set up an in-person meeting with the club to discuss photographing them.

"I loved the fact it was so surreal, first and foremost, and that it was so secretive," recalls Borland. "It had a seediness to it, too, which I loved, adding a very present multi-layered-ness in meaning and its context. The physical and psychological dimensions of the subculture attracted me, as well as the fact that no one had really heard about the subculture before or had photographed it."



Initially, Borland found it hard to gain the trust of Hush a Bye Baby Club, as they didn't know the photographer nor her intentions with the project. Once Borland began working with the club, however, relations smoothed out. And as she came to know the community, Borland was granted even more access, eventually traveling the world taking photographs of men dressed as babies.

18 years on, the series still resonates with the same strange allure full of pathos and humor. And even though infantilist subculture is better known to the public these days because of mainstream reporting and documentaries like *The Fifteen Stone Babies*, Borland's photos capture them in a way that remains unique because of the artistry and honesty that she conveys.





As for the tapestry pieces in *The Babies* exhibition, Borland says the work was made as part of an arts-oriented rehabilitation program that teaches inmates how to cross-stitch. "They are paid for their work, and also make cushions for the Catholic Church and cushions for the Victoria & Albert Museum's gift shop in London," says Borland.

Borland is currently at work on another set of tapestries for an upcoming show in Australia, which will open this November at Murray White Room. She is also creating another body of work that will be on display at the National Gallery of Victoria in 2019.