

# THE GIRL PROJECT

by Kate Engelbrecht



PRESS

[http://www.pdnonline.com/pdn/content\\_display/pdnedu/student-news-and-views/e3i1fefd617b0921810c09622870323fe4d](http://www.pdnonline.com/pdn/content_display/pdnedu/student-news-and-views/e3i1fefd617b0921810c09622870323fe4d)

## THE GIRL PROJECT LETS TEENS REVEAL THEIR WORLD by Kelly Ebbels

August 14, 2008

New York-based photographer Kate Engelbrecht is spearheading a grassroots photography initiative called The Girl Project that arms teenage girls with a disposable camera and asks them: What does your world look like?

The project is simple enough, Engelbrecht sends one Kodak Max HQ 35mm single-use camera to any girl in America, who is between the ages of 13 to 17 and willing to participate in the project. She asks the girls to take pictures of things that are meaningful in their lives, and then has them send the cameras back to her. The goal is to collect photos from 5,000 girls of diverse social and ethnic backgrounds and then organize the work into a book and a traveling exhibition.

It is a fresh look at what the teenage culture is up to—through the eyes of the girls themselves instead of through popular teen magazines or TV shows like, *The Hills* or *Gossip Girl*.

“As adults we create an image of who teenage girls are, and we sell that back to them—telling them who they are,” Engelbrecht says, “None of it is coming from the girls themselves—as a result the truth gets lost.”

From the photographs she has received so far, Engelbrecht is seeing a much different side of girlhood—not without its emphasis on boys and mirrors, but also with a more endearing side.

“These girls are so much more innocent than we realize,” she says. “Their photos are of themselves and friends, but they also photograph flowers and text. They like to shoot words or posters, something already written because it’s meaningful to them.”

Engelbrecht thinks that, while there is a place for some of the Lindsay Lohan-type material, much of the overstated information from the media on girl culture can be harmful—both to

girls and to society.

“To not understand adolescence is a huge mistake,” she says. “It affects our perception on them as well as their own opinions on themselves. The girls feel that they either have to live up to these images or combat them.”

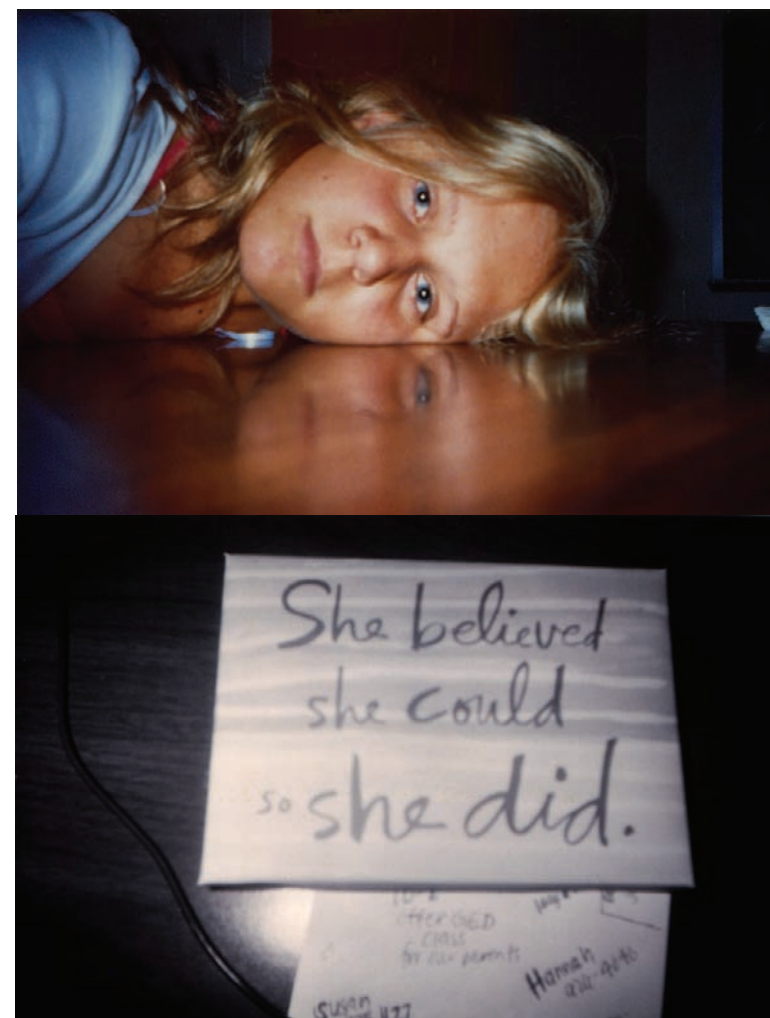
It hasn’t been easy to get the project moving, only 100 cameras have been returned from the 400 cameras Engelbrecht sent out. She has found that partnerships with adults, teachers, nonprofit organizations and schools yield much higher camera return rates than do her solo efforts. Money is tight and Engelbrecht has been paying for the disposable cameras out of pocket, however, Kodak is now allowing her to buy the cameras at a heavy discount, which helps offset the price.

Despite these hurdles, the project has been getting positive feedback. It won a coveted spot at the SCOPE Miami Art Fair this December. Engelbrecht has also received enthusiastic support for the project from Daniel Power, founder and CEO of powerHouse Books.

“Twens and teens are largely a demographic that’s been catered to, but rarely heard from. I think this project admirably attempts to change this,” Power says, adding that he could envision powerHouse publishing the book in the future.

Engelbrecht hopes that major corporate sponsorship will lend the project legs and influence, in order to get the message out—as loud as possible.

“Short-term, this project is so girls can learn to communicate and use media as a form of expression. Long term, it’s so our culture can take a look at this really important subculture in a new way,” she says.



# Ground Glass

thoughts on photography

<http://caraphillips.wordpress.com/2008/06/25/the-girl-project/>



## THE GIRL PROJECT by Cara Phillips

June 25, 2008

An interview went up today on the Girl Project blog, discussing my work. It was an honor to share my personal motivations with their audience. If you have a moment, check out the site. I am very excited to be a part of the Girl Project, a very positive and cool online initiative that works to empower and encourage teenage girls to express themselves using a camera. Even if you are not a teenage girl, their work is interesting and inspiring. Photography as a medium can have many functions, and it makes an excellent vehicle for young people to find their voice.

So many exciting and great things are happening for my work right now, more to come soon... But thank you all for your support and for staying with me through this process. As for WIP, it's success continues, we have lots of really fabulous things planned in the months ahead.

### WHAT IS THE GIRL PROJECT?

The Girl Project explores the lives of American teenage girls by putting them behind the camera to document themselves. Using disposable cameras, girls 13-18 photograph their lives as only they know and understand it.

There are two ways to share your photos. First, you have to become a participant in The Girl Project. E-mail me and I'll send you a disposable camera. Once you return it to me, all the photos on the camera will be considered for a blog posting (and The Girl Project website and future book). Second, (only after returning your TGP camera) you can submit new work that you would like to share. E-mail me a low resolution version of your photo (72dpi, 5x7in) and it will be considered for the blog. If it is selected I'll post it and write about it... and ask you to write about too.

<http://minerva.stkate.edu/alumna.nsf/pages/girlproject>

## KATE TRENNE ENGELBRECHT SP '98 STARTS THE GIRL PROJECT

### TEEN GIRLS DOCUMENT THEMSELVES!

To encourage creativity, self awareness, and confidence in adolescent girls, freelance photographer and writer Kate Trenne Engelbrecht initiated "The Girl Project," where girls receive a free disposable camera, shoot photos that appeal to them, and send them back for Web posting. Trenne Engelbrecht, sociology SP '92, sees this as an opportunity for the girls to gain recognition for their artistic work while offering others the chance to study their perspectives and concerns.

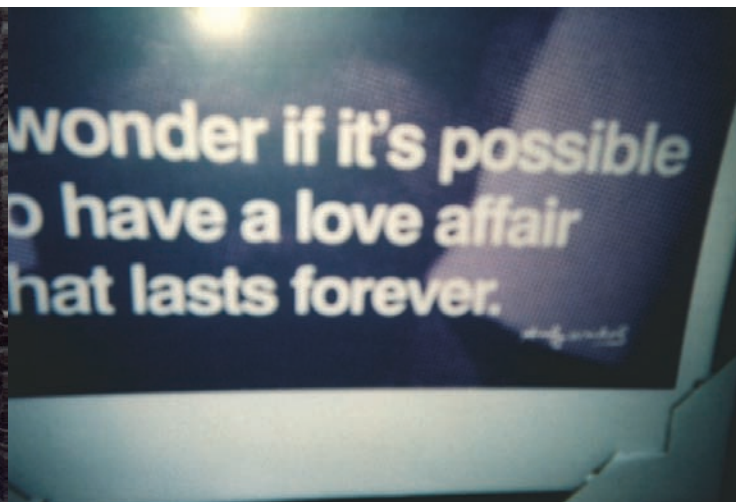
Thousands of girls across cultural, economic, and geographic segments of the United States have asked for and received their cameras in the mail and the invitation from Kate to document themselves and their views of the world around them.

The value of their photography extends beyond the images' qualities as art or documentation. "I think The Girl Project is without question a sociological project as much as a photographic project," Kate states. "The cameras are a way to gather information, and the photos are a means to understand and communicate themes derived from the images...I think a lot of photography and our culture's interest in it is linked to sociology."

Kate, however, warns the young participants that though The Girl Project would like to post and exhibit all their images, that is not be feasible. "Only the most unique and creative will be selected. Should one or more of your photographs be chosen for the book and/or gallery show, you will be notified. GOOD LUCK!"

As the images are received, Kate selects the photos to post on the web site and collect for the book and traveling exhibit. "As more and more pictures come in, a story unfolds. I need to use that story as a guide for how I edit and remain true to the story. It is also about selecting images that compell the viewers to think as well move and inspire them to do something. Certainly themes of similarity and diversity are of interest to me too and will be reflected in the selections."

Together, the web site, book, and exhibit will offer a complex, provocative, artistic, self-initiated and directed portrait of teenage American girls. Kate aims to collect images from at least 5,000 participants. She will later donate the negatives to a library or institution to preserve and make them available for additional study.



## THE GIRL PROJECT IDEALS

"The Girl Project stems from two ideals," explains Engelbrecht. "First that teenage girlhood is an important and meaningful subject for photography. Teenage girls are an ever-changing social group whose influences cross pop culture, communication, economy, and the future. Further, their voices are often muted or altered for our consumption. In order to really see teenage girls, in order to create a true and honest portrait, we need teenage girls to be the originators of the content. Photography offers girls a creative approach to think about themselves and their environment, and to communicate it visually."

Aspects of this project flow from Engelbrecht's experiences at St. Catherine's. "I definitely feel as though my time at St. Kate's instilled a strong desire to seek and explore important ideas and questions. At St. Kate's we were encouraged to search for meaning and understanding in life, not just academics. In that way, I think I am and always will be asking questions and looking to find answers."

Kate urges each girl to use the camera's 36 photos in her own way. "Shot close-up or far away. Use the film to photograph 1 or 36 subjects. Take pictures of people, things, or landscapes. Take self portraits. Use the camera to express your feelings and thoughts -- happy, sad, angry, or indifferent. Be thoughtful or careless, formal or informal, traditional or experimental, literal or symbolic."

## KATE, NOT YOUR ORDINARY FREELANCE PHOTOGRAPHER

Once a pipe dream, The Girl Project is now a full-time job for founder Engelbrecht. Originally from Northern Minnesota, Kate lived for the ten years since graduation in New York City, where she first worked as an associate strategist for Fallon New York (an advertising agency). After realizing she wanted to be a photographer, she began shooting images and portraits of families and children. Her work has been published in PDN and Time Out New York. Reaching beyond photography, she has also

conducted research and written articles on a freelance basis for Oxygen Network. "Right now," says Kate, "my days are spent sending out and collecting cameras, editing pictures, and then the least fun task -- searching for funding."

Kate, herself, did not really start "shooting herself" as a photographer seriously until after college "I wish I had been inspired earlier. Obviously I had a camera in high school and college, but I wasn't using it to express myself or explore anything. I was just taking snapshots." Shifting gears into life as a photographer changed not only her professional ambitions but also the ways she perceived, gathered, and shared information about life. "Photography is a phenomenal way to express one's self and communicate but also to start looking at things, people, and environments more closely. In other words, it's a great training tool for the eye -- a tool for examining life closely."

Engelbrecht has received a grant from the SCOPE Foundation, which supports emerging artists in key cities around the world. The Kodak Company has agreed to sell the necessary 5,000 cameras to The Girl Project at a greatly reduced rate, so the project is well on its way but it needs additional funding sources. "My goal is to have all 5,000 cameras out by mid 2009 and have a final edit ready for publishing by the end of the year (2009). I have met with several interested publishers but have yet to commit to one at this time. Once the photos are all in, I'll have a better sense of the book, its market, the scale of the distribution."

Kate has two hopes for her fellow alumnae in terms of The Girl Project: "that readers will pass information along about The Girl Project to their teenage daughters, nieces, etc. and encourage them to participate -- and that those who are inspired by the project will spread the word among their networks of smart, influential female friends that The Girl Project is looking for corporate and strategic partners to help in the large task of funding the project."

So if you know some adolescent American girls, send them to [www.thegirlproject.org](http://www.thegirlproject.org) -- and explore the site yourself to learn more about these unique beings and the project itself. The blog spot is also very interesting.... <http://thegirlproject.blogspot.com>.



<http://nymphoto.blogspot.com/2008/06/girl-project.html>

## THE GIRL PROJECT: A CONVERSATION by Nina Buesing

June 25, 2008

The talented Dina Kantor recently made us aware of the ongoing The Girl Project --"A national collection of photographs taken by teenage girls. The photographs represent teenage girlhood and life as seen through the eyes of young women in America", states the project's website.

Reminiscent of projects such as "Kids With Camera" and "Through The Eyes of Children - The Rwanda Project", this project however gives viewers a unique look at girlhood in America today and encourages and empowers girls to express themselves and take ownership.

The project intrigued us and made us curious about who is behind the idea. The Girl Project is spearheaded by New York based photographer Kate Engelbrecht, who took the time to answer a few questions for us:

NP: Tell us a little about yourself.

KE: I am from Minnesota originally. I grew up in Northern MN but have lived in NYC for the

past 10 years. After college I didn't have a clue what to do with myself. I had majored in sociology and was not interested in a career in academia, so I moved to NYC and started working in advertising. Shortly after I learned I didn't want to work in advertising.

NP: How did you discover photography?

KE: It was at the ad agency I worked for. While I was quickly becoming uninterested in advertising I was even faster falling in love with photography. I bought a used Minolta with a 50mm lens for \$150 and started shooting. It is still my favorite camera.

NP: How did this project come about?

KE: I had been toying with the idea for some time - looking for a way to blend two things that interest me (photography and girlhood). At some point I realized that the opportunity was bigger than just examining female adolescence through photography... and that it could also be a way to understand girls in an entirely new way. I figured why not go to the source

- why not let the subject speak for herself.

NP: What would you consider to be the ideal venue to show an exhibit of these images you are collecting and curating?

KE: Great question. And I'm torn between two answers. One is institutional, by where my dream is to see The Girl Project on exhibit at ICP, Mass MoCA or The Walker. The other is to make it more approachable... more accessible... and get Target to sponsor a traveling exhibition in their stores.

NP: Thanks so much! We are much looking forward to seeing how the project progresses.



# Bay Area ArtQuake!

news and views of the visual arts in the San Francisco Bay Area

<http://baartquake.blogspot.com/search?q=The+Girl+Project>

## THE GIRL PROJECT by Nancy Ewart

January 15, 2009

Yesterday I got an e-mail from Liz Hagen, the owner of Venetian Red – a fellow artist, writer, blogger and neighbor! The e-mail told me about the Girl Project, the idea of Kate Engelbrecht, a photographer, who is sending disposable cameras to girls in the US, collecting the photos, and then curating them for an exhibit/installation. Humans have long been fascinated with female adolescence. The promise and hope behind their eyes... the purity and romanticism youth represents, the razor thin line between immaturity, maturity, innocence and rebellion. (The Girl Project Statement)

In today's world it not only piques our curiosity—it feeds our insatiable need for drama. The supposed lives of teenage girls have become modern entertainment. Our ideas about them grow from what we read about Lindsay Lohan in The New York Post or what we saw on last week's episode of The Hills. We learn what they like, buy and wear and what they believe, think and do... and just as quickly as we get our fix, we fail to understand the complexity and truth behind the very group we obsess on.

With the hope of reintroducing them to us, The Girl Project explores the lives of American teenage girls through images they create themselves. Using the raw, honest qualities of photography, girls reveal their self-perceptions in a daring act of intimacy- both behind and before the camera.



by julia, age 15

<http://www.relatemag.com/the-girl-project-photographing-your-life-in-the-raw/>

# PHOTOGRAPHING YOUR LIFE IN THE RAW by Katie Hinderer, Web Editor

April, 2009

For Kate Engelbrecht a fascination and curiosity with teenagers today launched a country-wide project that is uniquely original and highly noteworthy.

Originally a Minnesota girl, Kate moved to New York City after completing her Sociology degree and landed a job at an advertising agency. She spent three long years working for the company before realizing that was not at all what she wanted to do with her life. Her secret love was photography. So, although she had no idea how to begin or what to do, she bought a camera, started studying the art of photography and eventually landed a job as a wedding and portrait photographer.

As she began to photograph the world around her, Kate became fascinated with the today's teenagers. "Girlhood seemed to have changed so much from when I was a teenager and I couldn't figure out how girls had suddenly become the crazy, bratty, slutty, mean people I kept seeing on TV, in books and magazines," Kate tells RelateMag.com. "It also occurred to me that unlike my generation, today's girls were being represented everywhere! Female

adolescence had become entertainment... and I started to wonder how accurate the representations were."

In order to find the answers in 2007 Kate launched the Girl Project. The idea behind this project is to give girls the opportunity to photograph their world in its true, raw form. Participants are given a disposable camera and are asked to take pictures that document their lives. Once the entire camera is used up it is sent, undeveloped, to Kate.

"The undeveloped part is really important," Kate says. "This way girls shoot honestly and instinctively without seeing the outcome. It is really an unusual experience for a lot of the girls, who have only ever used digital photography and takes a lot of trust and faith on their part."

Once she receives the camera, Kate develops the pictures and adds them to the collection.

"Letting girls represent themselves started as mini-quest just for myself in order to get some answers. Today it is much bigger than that," Kate says. "Now I'm on a mini-mission of sorts.

I feel really strongly about sharing what I've learned... and helping girls share their view of themselves with others."

No, digital pics aren't accepted. It's got to be a Kodak disposable camera that Kate sends out to girls interested in participating. The idea behind the disposable camera is simple, "One, for consistency everyone shoots with the same Kodak HQ camera. And two, girls submitting images they've never seen provides the project with a rare and candid view," Kate says.

So far about 1,000 girls have participated in the Girl Project. Kate has plans to send out a total of 5,000 cameras to girls in every corner of the country. Anyone can participate and it is totally free. Participants only need to request a camera.

Eventually, the Girl Project will become a book and traveling exhibit. It's too early to say when the pictures will travel to, but Kate is dreaming big and hoping for an exhibit that travels the entire country. The book she envisions as one in which the viewer can just get lost in the pages. Some of the early participants have been featured on the Girl Project blog.



"I hope The Girl Project (book) will give people the opportunity to get lost and become inundated by new images of adolescence - photos taken by girls themselves about themselves," Kate says. "It really is a perspective that's missing from our culture."