

THE SPORTRAIT

JUDY HOST

BY
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If you had been a presenter for the Golden Globes ceremony in 2004, you would have received a “presenter box.” This opulent party favor from the Hollywood Foreign Press and *InStyle* magazine included \$26,270 worth of products including a \$7000 spa package, a \$2000 surfboard and perfume worth \$1250. You would have also have been given an exquisite gift box of 12 Collector’s Edition 4x5 photographs and a portrait gift certificate for \$5000.





A veteran of corporate business prior to her career in photography, this certificate was not Judy Host's first marketing risk, but it certainly became one of her best. "Jack Nicholson gave the certificate to his daughter, who has two beautiful children. He wanted pictures of his grandchildren," she recalls. "Keely Shaye Smith, who is Pierce Brosnan's wife, wanted me to photograph her two boys for him for Father's Day. We did that as a surprise. Nicole Kidman wanted pictures taken of her

godchild as a gift for her best friend. Cate Blanchett gave hers to her agent as a gift." Of course, the advantage was that these clients loved Judy Host's work so much that they made purchases beyond the value of the small gift package. She has utilized this certificate four more times over the last four years and photographed exclusive viewing dinner parties for *In-Style* and Warner Bros.

The lesson here is not in name-dropping, but in proving that even jaded Hollywood

stars appreciate the deeply personal style of Judy Host's portraiture. Judy's patrons, both in Hollywood and in her adopted hometown, Atlanta, respond to her soft-spoken passion. "Photography isn't something that I do; being a photographer is who I am. This is why I'm here. It's a gift that I am constantly giving away, and it just gets better." With such a core at the heart of her "photo-losphy," it is not surprising that Judy has a fleet of photography awards to her credit, including three Kodak Gallery Awards. She was recognized as one of *RangeFinder's* Top Ten Children's Photographers in 2004 and has been profiled in numerous professional magazines.

Anyone who has stepped in front of her lens knows that Judy creates an instant rapport with her clients. She uses both her genuine personality and her camera technique to unlock vulnerability within her subjects; to create the "Soulful Portrait." She explains, "It is not an easy path to create an environment that allows your subject to be unguarded. Trust must be established immediately in order for your subject to allow you to see who they are and what they're feeling."

Her portraits are full of soul, both hers and her subjects'. "My work has always been about who people are, not what they look like." She adds, "I use my subjects as a way to express what I'm feeling from them, or to capture what they might be feeling in the moment. Imagery is a wonderful way of expressing both."

Lighting the Soul

Judy has been romancing natural light since she first began her career in photography. Judy discovers available illumination and the natural reflections that exist within a chosen setting. Her DVD, *The Art of Available Light*, offers insight into how she does this no matter what the time of day or the environment offers her. "When I'm teaching a class, I find a lot of my students are amazed at the amount of available light in any given space. I love digital photography because you can shoot anywhere and test the lighting immediately to see what it looks like." Judy also manipulates the focus of her camera to enhance the attractive qualities of her client and the overall soft, almost dreamy, mood of the Soulful Portrait. "My world is soft-focus and my images have a kinder, gentler look, much like

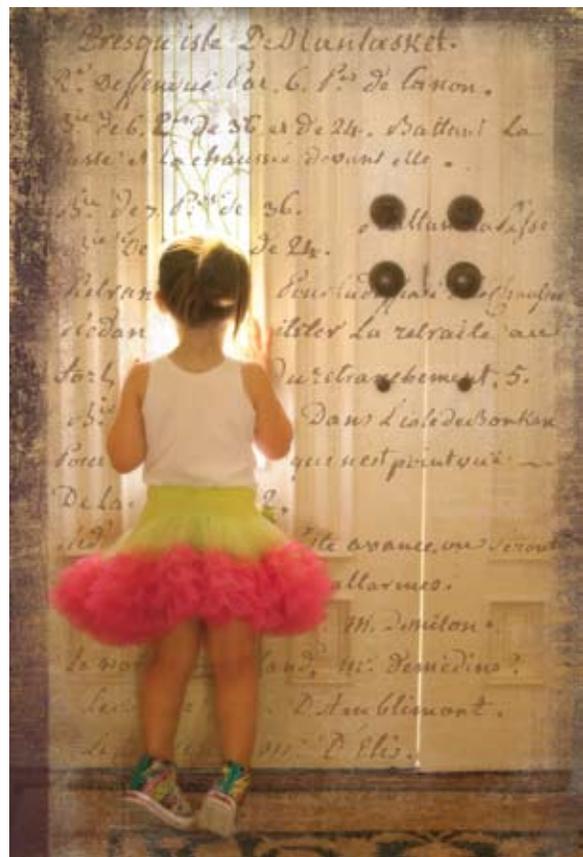


a Lensbaby Composer, using the double optic and the #4 aperture ring aimed directly into the window light, which I used as my background. To complete the portrait, I then added a template from Graphic Authority's Timeless collection to give it a painterly look."

Finding the Texture

Judy's portraits exhibit a dimensionality that seems to extend beyond foreground, midground and background. Elements of graphic art in the multiple Photoshop layers of her images lead the viewer into the depth of the image. She creates the illusion of space and distance beyond the skin of an individual, the texture of the soul. Use of digital textures, vectors, brushes and design embellishments has elevated her imagery to fine art. "To intermix graphics is my style now." A turning point in her design work came when she discovered Charlie Mosher's Graphic Authority software. With the help of Charlie's software, Judy might give a soul a visual texture with the illusion of stone, silk, paint or wood. She might even embellish a moment with a design element like an ornament from an ancient map.

In the image of Madison [below], a little girl in a pink and green tutu and turquoise tennis shoes exemplifies her use of texture to create layers of feeling. Graphic edges of smoky gauze lead the viewer's eye beyond



the softness of the old RB soft-focus lens."

She shoots with the Canon EOS 5D Mark II and loves the 70–200mm f/4 lens. Additionally, she often uses a Lensbaby Composer to position just the right amount of focus exactly where she wants it. The Lensbaby is an odd little lens on a ball and socket joint with a manual focusing ring. The lens bends to Judy's desired angle and stays in the bent position and causes soft, selective areas of focus.

The maternity image of Courtney [above] is a perfect example. The soft focus mists all but the subject's blissful face and precious baby bump. A silken texture of pastel gold and teal helps to shape the background into a halo of light. "Courtney is a cancer survivor and pregnant after a year of chemotherapy. I wanted this portrait to display the miracle of this pregnancy. Her expression says it all. To create a dreamy feel to the image, I photographed it with



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the child's shoulders, the window and into the distant light. A layer of elegant writing transforms the contemporary environment, merging past with present. "When I looked at the image after it had been processed, I realized the image would be enhanced by adding an antique overlay because it already had an old-fashioned feel to it. The templates help to create a timeless look."

Embracing the Story

Judy sees story as an integral component of any Soulful Portrait. "You can create a good image using all the basic artistic elements, but without the storytelling element, it lacks soul!" For Judy, every soul in front of her camera reveals a distinctive narrative of his or her life journey. Like a detective solving a mystery, Judy searches for clues to what has happened and what is happening in the heart of her subject.

Learning her subject's story and then illustrating it in the Soulful Portrait is a four-step process. The saga of creating the portrait of Diane [above] serves as a

perfect example of this formula. "Diane, a wonderful photographer in her own right, is also a gymnast with stage three cancer. She shared that she was recovering from both a double mastectomy and chemotherapy," Judy says. "I wanted to capture her progress in a very positive way without portraying her as a victim of this horrible disease."

Judy always researches and pre-visualizes what she might make. This step often includes careful choice of the setting for the portrait. "It was important to send a message of hope and courage, something Diane lives with every day," Judy decided to use window light in Diane's hotel room. "I do this research step even though I know my pre-visualization will change once I start shooting.

"The dynamics of the individual I am photographing always come through and inevitably my own visual take is altered." Indeed, halfway through the session, Judy realized the lighting was harsh and the room was claustrophobic. "We liked the images but somehow it was not the story

we wanted to tell."

There's an effortless open dialogue between Judy and her clients, an environment of emotional support and trust that draws them into the creative process. "Flexibility is an important part of what I do. I make sure that I am always open to my subject's suggestions, making them a part of the design of the portrait. For me, the collaborative effort is the best part of working with others."

This is why Judy and Diane left their first setting and found a large, high-ceiling room, empty but blown full of soft light. "Immediately, Diane felt lighter and started to dance. Her background, unknown to me at the time, was ballet. When Diane started moving to her own music, I realized what the portrait was going to look like."

The final step in the process of telling the client's soulful story is the addition of artistic elements to the portrait. "I left the image pretty much the way I shot it with some minor retouching. Then I added a faint graphic texture from Graphic Authority's Behind the Scenes templates as a finishing touch."

In Diane's portrait, the graphic treatment contributes delicate filigree to the design and adds light-heartedness to the empty space, enhancing but not overwhelming the story of the moment that Diane danced in light. The result is a soulful portrait that tells Diane's story, not just as a survivor but also as a victor.

Visit www.judyhost.com to see more Soulful Portraits.



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