



**CIG HARVEY DIDN'T KNOW** that her new series was about the serious car crash she survived in August 2015 until she showed the photographs to a friend. "He said, 'The accident is literally all over these,'" she recalls. Harvey was psychologically scarred, but rarely ever talked about it. "We're often the last ones to know what our work is about," she muses. The fact that the series was born of trauma was no surprise to Harvey, however. "Whenever something massive happens in my life, I make pictures as a way to respond to it," she says. "I'm the most productive when something derails me, or I don't understand, or [something] floors me. It could be an amazing thing or it could be a terrible thing. I use art as a way to slow the world down and better understand it."

The crash, which she says could easily have left her daughter without a mother, made clear how Harvey's life has shifted since she gave birth to Scout, who is now 5. "The world became instantly more beautiful, and instantly more terrifying," she says of becoming a mother. Her mortality came into sharp focus. "Things can change on a dime, and you need to be paying attention." Her work changed as a result. "It became more beautiful, but with an element of danger," she says. "What I'm seeking is something that makes me gasp."

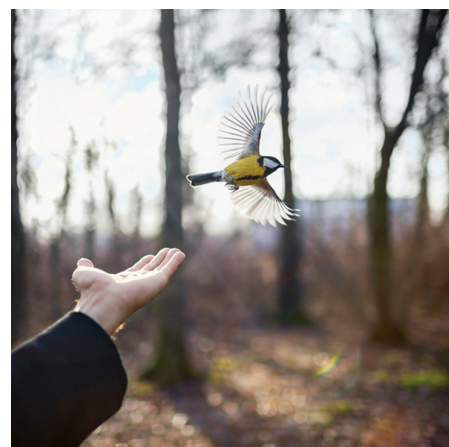
Harvey titled the series "You An Orchestra You A Bomb" after a conversation she had at a dinner party. "Everyone in the room was

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PSYCHOLOGY

## Through Mother's Eyes

Cig Harvey uses photography to understand the beauty and anxiety of motherhood. **BY BRIENNE WALSH**



**TOP AND ABOVE:** Cig Harvey's new body of work, "You An Orchestra You A Bomb," reflects the ways her life changed after a serious car crash, and after becoming a mother. "Whenever something massive happens in my life, I make pictures as a way to respond to it," she says. But she didn't know at first what the images meant. "We're often the last ones to know what our work is about," she admits.

dealing with stuff, and this idea came to me that we are all made up of many beautiful things, but we're also made up to be a bomb. We are explosive. We are piling on a bunch of things. It seemed like a great metaphor for life." It will be published as a monograph by Schilt Publishing this coming fall.

All of Harvey's memories are in color—she says that color affects her viscerally. The hues in "You An Orchestra You A Bomb" are reminiscent of the way color looks when one's body is flooded with adrenaline—for example, in the split-second before an accident, or right after giving birth—as if the color itself is alive and breathing. More so than in previous series, in the final edit of the new work, Harvey uses scenes she stumbled upon rather than ones she staged in the final edit. "The farmer constructs, the hunter finds and I'm a mixture of both," she says. "The difference is that I didn't set out to make this book, I just made a ton of pictures. I had them up on the wall, and I listened to them, what they were telling me."

Color played a central role in both *Gardening at Night* (2015), Harvey's book about family life, and *You Look At Me Like An Emergency* (2012), which was about her relationships before getting married. New in this series is the sense of menace hidden beneath the beauty. An image of Scout under water appears alongside an image of a bubble bursting on the surface of the ocean, as if capturing a dying breath. Wolves mix with songbirds and fields full of butterflies. A pregnant woman turns her back to a white-haired man in the center of a whirlpool.

As with her previous books, the photographs are informed by Harvey's writing, which is interspersed throughout like verses of poetry. Jotted down early in the morning, when Harvey says she has a clear head and a "lovely cup of coffee," the texts are autobiographical. They provide a sense of narrative, and also, of wholeness. Harvey



ABOVE AND BOTTOM LEFT: Unlike previous bodies of work, in "You An Orchestra" Harvey relies more often on found images and stages fewer. "The farmer constructs, the hunter finds and I'm a mixture of both," she says. But color remains integral, especially the vivid color that she associates with visceral moments.

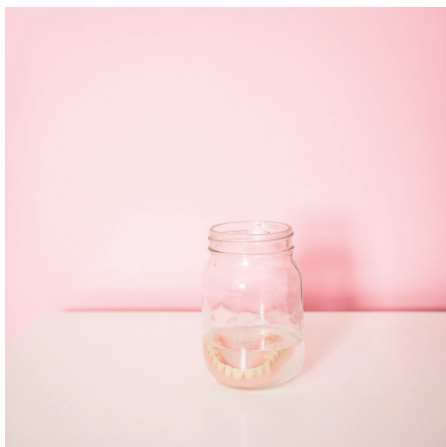
says the process of combining the words and photographs together was like figuring out a puzzle. "That's the agony and the love in the sequencing of the work," she explains. "There is a proper place for everything, but you don't want to put them together where one explains the other. They need to stand independently and bring more than the sum of their parts."

In the introduction, Harvey notes that after the accident, the man who hit her glared as if the crash had been her fault. She made her feelings of rage toward the man explicit in images of violence and danger: A photograph of three teenage boys playing with a raft is awash in black tones. A photograph of two young boys shows them pointing a gun at the camera.

Undertones of masculine violence combined with the powerful force of feminine

beauty—flowers, patterned fabric and lips recur frequently—read, in the current political climate, as a sort of feminist howl against rising chauvinism. "I've never made outright political work, but I have felt kind of ragey this past year, especially not being able to vote," says Harvey, who lives in Maine but was born in Devon, England. "I felt very vulnerable being a different nationality from my child." As a result, she felt compelled to apply for United States citizenship, and received it in March.

Harvey writes in her introduction to the series that she was once fearless, but no more. "I'm fearful of so much," she says. "But the pictures are braver now." They demand your pay attention as she was forced to: To a strip of blue velvet, the car in the intersection, the violence that lurks in the everyday.



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