

Taylor's new illustrations are an impressive addition to the historic depictions of Alice. Taylor's use of antique nineteenth-century photographic sources including anonymous daguerreotypes and tintypes imbues her imagery with a Victorian character appropriate to the setting of Carroll's narrative. Yet Taylor's use of twenty-first-century digital processes and Photoshop montage techniques results in images that are simultaneously historic and contemporary.

Perhaps the most unsettling, but inspired result of Taylor's reliance on photographic sources is that she casts numerous individuals—including young teenagers, not just little girls—into the ever changing roles and circumstances of the bewildered Alice. Our familiarity with Carroll's narrative makes it easy to identify Alice and the scene depicted, but the obvious individuality of the different girls representing Alice creates a powerful and somewhat disturbing universality to the changing image of Alice. Taylor's Alice is a complex, multi-faceted every-woman, not a one-dimensional character. Irony is at the core of Carroll's story and even his use of language. Thus it is especially appropriate that Taylor's use of the contradictory illusions of photographic realism combined with digital montage surrealism serves as a visual parallel to Carroll's literary methods. Perhaps more than any conventional illustrator or even Dali's energetic surrealism, Taylor has created a visual counterpoint to Carroll's writing style, not just illustrations of his story.

Carroll's tales of Alice's fantasy and travails are an ideal subject for Taylor. Embracing the concepts of invention



H.P. Robinson, *Fading Away*, 1858, albumen silver print, George Eastman House collection, gift of Alden Scott Boyer.



Où est ma chatte?

and synthesis, her artwork is aligned more with the tradition of drawing and painting than with the documentary mode prevalent in photography. Yet Taylor has also been attracted to the unique way photography renders the specific character of people and things of this world. Some of Taylor's earliest artworks were photographs of still-life arrangements of disparate common objects such as plastic toys, doll furniture, and even dead birds—often juxtaposed in disturbing ways in the tradition of similar surreal artwork by Max Ernst, Joseph Cornell and Frederick Sommer.

Taylor found her most powerful voice when she began using a scanner rather than a traditional camera to capture and transform common objects into malleable images. Through her skillful use of Photoshop, Taylor combines and manipulates digital images in ways not limited by the size, color, surface and other qualities of her original sources, yet her final images still retain their obvious photographic origin. A scan of a small china figurine is the source of the White Rabbit's head, while his Herald costume is from a snapshot Taylor took of a clothing mannequin in a theater. Alice's flamingo croquet mallet is

a composite from multiple sources starting with a scan of a toy and a glossy tourist postcard. Taylor's Alice series includes a broad range of transformations, but even seemingly simple images such as *Où est ma chatte?* are the result of radical changes as evident in a comparison with the source daguerreotype portrait to portray Alice which is just one of many layers of sources brought together into the final image. Taylor radically changed color, scenery and countless other elements yet the central portrait image still retains the power of the photographic source and the piercing stare of a very real young girl from more than 150 years ago.

Taylor's modern digital montage approach is directly related to the origins of serious "art" photography as pioneered by Victorian photographer, H.P. Robinson. In order to gain respect for photography as an art, he perfected a technique of "combination printing" using multiple negatives. Robinson's 1858 masterpiece, *Fading Away*, depicting a sick young girl surrounded by her concerned family, was not a real death bed scene, but a sentimental photographic illusion carefully composed from five different negatives (one for each separate figure and a fifth for the background). This tour-de-force of photographic technique proved photographers could construct a picture like a painter and even deal with melodramatic themes common to Victorian art salons.

Although early twentieth-century Modernist photographers rejected the idea of imitating painting in order to



L: Unknown photographer, *Portrait of a Girl*, daguerreotype, c.1850, collection of Maggie Taylor. R: John Tenniel, *Alice playing croquet*, 1865, wood engraving.



It's always tea-time.

legitimize photography, in the 1960s and 1970s the distinctly photographic possibilities of montage and combination printing were revived and explored by numerous experimental photographers, most notably Jerry Uelsmann, Taylor's mentor at the University of Florida and later husband. Uelsmann and many of his contemporary colleagues have continued their commitment to the craft and beauty of traditional black-and-white film and printing processes, but Taylor's digital manipulations and final inkjet prints defy the traditional categories of photography, painting, drawing, and printmaking. Her pictures may technically be illustrations because they are derived from and accompany Carroll's story, but they also have a life and imaginative power of their own independent of his text. Taylor's *Almost Alice* is a provocative series of images filled with multiple meanings and unanswered questions much like Carroll's original tale. This is a posthumous collaboration we might expect the author would have truly enjoyed.

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