

Photography

My best shot

Paolo Ventura's best photograph: my wife juggling in Tuscany

'I moved my family to the middle of nowhere. We spend our time writing dark plays and acting them out'



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Interview by **Tom Seymour**

Thursday 28 January 2016 05.45 GMT



i 'It's very comforting' ... Paolo Ventura in a triptych with his wife. Photograph: Paolo Ventura

Three years ago, I decided to leave New York and move back to the small village in Tuscany where I grew up. My American wife Kim and our six-year-old son Primo had never been to Italy before and, although the village was beautiful, it was in the middle of nowhere. We were all a bit in shock.

There was a barn in the gardens that I started to use as a studio. After a few weeks, a piece of the roof fell in meaning that, at a certain point in the day, the most incredible light streamed through. At first, I didn't know how to use it, so I just put some glass over the hole and painted a backdrop where the light fell.

We decided to build a little stage, a sort of theatre, where the light shone and soon we were acting out our own short plays. We'd think up ideas on a Friday, then the company - my family - would act them out over the weekend. It could be a bit of a nightmare. I'm a perfectionist and get frustrated when something isn't exactly right. Then my wife gets angry and Primo gets bored and restless. Although we fight, it is enjoyable.

I built the stage out of wood and cardboard then painted it. While I want my pictures to look as real as possible, I also want them to feel dream-like. I'm not that interested in reality - we're already living it. We dress in costumes I've picked up over the years, using props bought on eBay. When we finished the first play, Primo said he'd loved it, but I wasn't to collect him from school in my costume. This triptych, from one of our stories, reflects the fact that we always try to say something about the family. My wife, for example, used to be a juggler in a circus.

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Primo loved it but said I wasn't to collect him from school in my costume

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📌 'I've killed my twin brother - and even my wife' ... Paolo Ventura

There's something very comforting about this imaginary, internal world I have created to free us from our life in the middle of nowhere. I think it comes from my childhood. My father was a children's book author, so he was a great storyteller. He'd stay at home drawing and writing. Then, after dinner, we'd sit at the kitchen table and listen to him telling stories, some true, some invented, some about our family stretching back in time.

I like dark stories. In our plays, sometimes my son will disappear, or I'll kill my twin brother. I've even killed my wife. I guess you could say they're about my fear of losing someone I love.

CV

Born: Milan, 1968.

Studied: Academy of Fine Arts of Brera, Milan, Italy.

Influences: [George Simenon](#), [Saul Steinberg](#) and [Antonio Donghi](#).

High point: "Working alone."

Low point: "Working alone."

Top tip: "If you want to take photography seriously, go fishing. Often. Alone."

● [Paolo Ventura: Mystique Narratives](#) is at the Flatland Gallery, Amsterdam, until 5 March.