

Thursday August 14, 2014

Poly-Spam: photographer turns junk mail into striking visuals



Critically lauded photographer Cristina De Middel joins guest host Stephen Quinn to talk about Poly-Spam -- a photography project that visualizes spam emails as if they were from real people.

De Middel, best known for her popular series *Afronauts*, has staged elaborate photographs inspired by several apparent scams, treating them as cultural artifacts that tell a larger story about our desires and the world we live in today.

To whom it may concern

De Middel's spam series offers viewers stunning, often melancholic images to accompany bogus emails.

"One day I decided to read [a spam email] from a different approach, like really reading it and understanding the story, and almost appreciating it for its value as literature," De Middel says.

"It's like classics, a classical in literature, what they're telling - the poor widow, the poor student - there's always these clichés that come."

Below, posted with permission of the artist, is a selection of her images and a summary of the email that accompanied them.



Sandrine Nzi, *Ivory Coast*

Sandrine is the "unique daughter" of a gold miner from the Ivory Coast. Her father died mysteriously during a business trip, and she suspects her uncle was responsible for his death. Now, the financially-clueless 20-year-old student -- who is hiding out in a hotel -- says she needs help accessing a \$10K (U.S.) inheritance her father left her. She would like to transfer the money to a trustworthy person outside her country -- for a 15 per cent cut, of course.



Marisol, *Spain*

Marisol, a 37-year-old television actress and clairvoyant from Spain, would like to offer you her world class services. She says her clients include politicians, celebrities, artists and ordinary folk. She sends a phone number at which you can call for a private consultation.



Grace Smith, *England*

Grace is a 24-year-old tailor from England who lost her father in a terrible car accident, as well as her grief-stricken mother to cancer. Her father left her five million pounds -- but stipulated in his will that she must either be 30 years old *or* married to access the money. Grace would like you to "stand in" as her husband so that you can demand the money on her behalf. It's just a bit of paperwork ... and, who knows, real romance may follow.



Barrister Fagbemi Lateef, *Nigeria*

Fagbemi is a solicitor at law in Nigeria, who has been desperately searching for a deceased client's next of kin. As his efforts have been unsuccessful, he is now reaching out to people with his client's last name in hopes that they might accept \$3.5 million dollars before it is confiscated. His client, by the way, was a rich oil tycoon.



Garrick Ronald, *England*

Garrick would like to transfer 30 million pounds to you, as he needs to get the money out of his country immediately for reasons he does not disclose. "As soon as you give your positive response to this proposal, I will not hesitate in sending you the details ... "