

Ellen von Unwerth's best shot

'She was from eastern Europe. She disappeared after this – the agency couldn't find her. So she's like a ghost'

I took this maybe three years ago, on a fashion shoot for Italian Vogue. We developed a romantic story to go with it: a woman comes back to the place where she grew up, and finds it all dusty and falling apart. We shot it in a chateau in Paris. The girl was a model, and it was the only time I worked with her. After this, she disappeared. She was from eastern Europe, Romania maybe, and even the agency couldn't find her again. So she's like a ghost. The picture certainly has a ghostly feeling.

I love a picture that surprises you: you try to get everything perfect, then somehow it ends up looking wrong. That's why I love this one. It was taken with a Polaroid, one of those beautiful things that no longer exist. The light has caused the blurriness, giving the shot extra emotion. There's something eerie about it, too: the girl's expression is both vulnerable and strong.

I was a model for 10 years before becoming a photographer. That certainly helps me now. I always felt bad in front of the camera, having to pose in particular ways – when all I wanted to do was something silly. So now I love it when models move, when they express themselves, when they play.

I love beautiful women. I love to show their personality, their sexuality. There's a fashion side to my erotic pictures; I love beautiful shoes and



jewellery. But the erotic work I do is too daring and provocative for a fashion magazine. It's more fun, and if you have the right girl who likes it, more exciting, too. It's fashion photography, but with fewer clothes.



i Interview by Andrew Pulver. **Fräulein** by Ellen von Unwerth is at Michael Hoppen Gallery, London SW3, until 21 November. The book *Fräulein* is published by Taschen on 25 November.

CV

Born: 1954, Frankfurt.

Studied: "I didn't. I was a model and I didn't know anything about photography."

Influences: "Lartigue and Helmut Newton."

High point: "When you create a book."

Pet hate: "Being told what to do."

Top tip: "It's more important to decide what you want to shoot rather than what technique to use."