



Lucy Davies

Lucy Davies is a photography critic for the Telegraph and picture editor of the Sunday Telegraph Seven magazine. She also edits telephoto, the Telegraph's project devoted to art and documentary photography, which tweets under @telephotography. When she isn't working, Lucy paints portraits, most recently of Beryl Bainbridge. Alongside reflection on all things visual, she'll be casting an unflinching eye over art-speak.

The choreography of sleep

<http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/culture/lucydavies/100007450/the-choreography-of-sleep/>

By [Lucy Davies](#) [Photography](#)

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When I was nine years old, my best friend and I devoted more conversation than was healthy to imagining what we might look like when we were asleep. She proposed an experiment: a sleep-over, during which one of us would wait for the other to nod off, take a photograph with her trusty Halina 208, and repeat in reverse. Needless to say it was flawed science because neither of us could fall asleep in the excitement of being on the frontier of discovery.

Suffice it to say my curiosity has not been quashed. I still sometimes find myself idly speculating on this most tantalising of subjects, and a quick email poll says I'm not alone, too (although one pollee admits this is only because she has a habit of falling asleep on buses).

I had cause to think on this yesterday when the Australian photographer [Olivia Martin McGuire](#) sent me examples from a series she's been hard at work on titled 'Sleepers', which pictures a number of individuals and couples at the very moment self departs and sleep takes hold. "I was hoping to catch the psychology of the shell – as in the body – once the inhibitions of consciousness were gone" she told me.



Lilly Dreams © Olivia Martin McGuire



Rob Dreams © Olivia Martin McGuire



Jacqui Dreams © Olivia Martin McGuire

To take the photographs, she strapped a digital Hasselblad to the ceiling of a photography studio. Each result is so individual, that I assumed she must have posed each one, but she says categorically no. Instead she asked them to spend a few weeks thinking and focusing on the way they slept – did they lie on their side when they fell asleep; was their hair in their eyes when they woke up, and so on.



Helen Dreams © Olivia Martin McGuire



Loren Dreams © Olivia Martin McGuire

At first, most of them found it difficult to sleep under observation, and so McGuire would begin the session by asking them to recall these shapes – on their stomach or their back; arms outstretched or tucked beneath them until they became comfortable with the process. The particular shapes were important to McGuire: “I was hoping to make it look like a dance across the walls.”



Leika Dreams © Olivia Martin McGuire



Jess & Nadav Dream © Olivia Martin McGuire

Printed life-size on thick-textured watercolour paper, they were exhibited recently at the [ACP](#) in Sydney, alongside a video installation where the subjects toss, turn and dance their way across the screen. I prefer, I think, to experience these as still photographs, where the figures remain silent and their childlike vulnerability enchanting. I hazard the snoring and gargling would turn the intimacy awkward.

‘Sleepers’ is a continuation of an earlier series called [China Dreaming](#) which probed the difficulties the country was experiencing in the run up to the Olympics in delicate, nuanced metaphor.