Life comes at us at a maddening pace. Seasons come and go. We grow up, mature, and soon notice next generations pushing in from behind us. We too were the youngest once, and remember those days fondly as we help the next generation through their struggles of growing up. This is the cycle of life, but most of us would prefer slowing down the pace of change within and around us.

Blake Fitch alters that pace by allowing us a look at the transition of pre-pubescent girls into young women outside a chronological time sequence. When the project began in 1997, it included multiple girls at different ages. Beginning with the original grouping of subjects, Fitch included girls in her direct surroundings, such as cousins, siblings, and their friends. Gleaned with trust and patience, the images convey not only the ideals of youth, but also the rapport the photographer built with those being photographed. The project eventually evolved into the series *Expectations of Adolescence*, a ten-year project that focuses on just two girls, Katie and Julia.

The images of *Expectations of Adolescence* convey the respect the photographer has for Katie and Julia, and the celebration of their youthful beauty. Shown as snippets of life, the photographs capture an age span during which many changes occur both emotionally and physically. The images fast-forward through different points in the girls' lives as their self-image changes along with their bodies. While the photographs capture the intense friendship between the two girls, who are cousins, the images also suggest a high level of trust toward the photographer, who is Katie's older sister. When the girls look up in the picture they see someone very close to them, not the mechanics of the camera.

The difference between Fitch's earlier and later images clearly lies in the relationship to the photographer. The "other" girls lie outside the reach of family time, which places them in the realm of photo appointments and preplanned photo ideas. While beautifully poised, the girls in the earlier images are more aware of the photographer, and less at home in the photo shoot. There are trace elements of discomfort, of being observed, that translate in the image to a subtle discomfort in the viewer. This makes the images of Katie and Julia all the more alluring in their openness and inclusiveness. The presence of the photographer causes no ripple in the water, no second glance from Katie and Julia. They allow themselves to be photographed while preserving the integrity of the moment. They remain real within themselves, acknowledging a presence of the camera but seeing past it.

The early images of the other girls are striking and individually memorable. But they describe staccato fragments of time, fleeting and gone from one moment to the next. The *Redhead at Window* looks at us, sullen for an instant, but is already vacating the space emotionally. *Dorothy* slips into her ruby slippers, fixed on a moment that is already waning away. There are fewer images, and rarely does Fitch return to the girls to capture their progression through time or their transition to adulthood. Neither the camera nor the viewer is allowed to get to know these girls. Their names are not even included in the image titles.

The early images are about youth but not about the girls personally. In contrast, the images in *Expectations of Adolescence* are focused solely on Katie and Julia, and who they are to the photographer. Sometimes their collaborative effort of creating the images takes the shape of a playful performance, while in other images the camera is graciously invited to share quiet and private moments. Katie and Julia have allowed the camera into their lives, and it is in this trusting environment that the girls' growth and maturity unfolds.

While we get to develop a familiarity with Katie and Julia that is normally reserved for close family or friends, in essence the other girls remain beautiful strangers.

_Hannah Frieser_  
Director  
_Light Work_