

Orientation

by Joakim Eskildsen

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My interest for photography started when I was fourteen years old. My brother had learned to print pictures at school, and we both tried to make it work. The pictures were grey and blurred, but still, I felt that it was exceptional, and from this day on I knew that I wanted to be a photographer.

I have grown up in the countryside, and nature has always been my great interest. My grandmother lived in a house that was over two hundred years old. She always told stories about her childhood in Sweden. Her garden was an adventure in itself, and there was always a lot to do - chopping wood, picking apples, flowers, strawberries, digging up potatoes, cutting trees, painting the house. My grandmother got water from a well, and a telephone very late. At her house, everything was understandable. The fire gave warmth, the house gave a shelter, and the sky gave sun and rain.

After school, I became an apprentice at the Royal Court's photographer Rigmor Mydtskov in Copenhagen. Here, we made portraits of famous persons in Denmark, and I learned that photography consists of a lot of different handicrafts. I continued to make my own pictures, and started travelling in the North. When I had finished the education after four and a half years, I did not know anything else than that I had to continue working with my own photography.

A turning point was Ritva Kovalainen's exhibition in Copenhagen in February 1993. Here, for the first time, I saw Finnish photography. Apart from Ritva Kovalainen's own pictures I saw books and portfolios by Jyrki Parantainen, Jorma Puranen, Ismo Hölttö, Pentti Sammallahti, Kristoffer Albrecht and Pekka Turunen.

All this Finnish photography was overwhelming to me. In Denmark, I only knew few photographers to which I felt related, and suddenly I realized there was a whole crowd of photographers that I felt connected to. I was immediately convinced that I had to move to Finland. A few weeks later I travelled to Helsinki, went to see Ritva Kovalainen, and applied to the University of Art and Design to make the book *Nordic Signs*. Since then I have been living in Finland.

To me, it is essential to believe; in a better world, in mankind, and in that there is a sense with it all. There are so many problems in the world nowadays - poverty, illness, pollution, environmental disasters, war - that it requires discipline to be an optimist. I try to collect photographs of a world that I can believe in, which gives me hope, and moments of magic.

The people I photograph are usually persons who I admire, and from which I wish to learn something. I mostly try to live with the people for longer periods of time in order to get a better understanding of everything, and to be able to photograph more peacefully. Usually, I am working closely together with writer Cia Rinne who is very gifted with languages. Without this cooperation it would be impossible for me to live and communicate with the people I photograph.

Photography is a form of still point in my life from that I orientate. Usually, I am interested in a specific matter. During the last three years, I have been working on *Drom si sukar*, a project on the Roma. Since I started photographing, certain issues have occurred. One important of these is human existence in relation to nature.

This exhibition map consists of works that have been important points of orientation to me.