

art on paper



BACK TO BLACK: VISIONARY ARCHITECTURAL DRAWINGS

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Gallery Walks: Helsinki and Stockholm

Louis-Antoine Prat on collecting old master drawings

Curator Ann Yonemura discusses Japanese prints





Dan Palmgren, *Do not go out on the grass with bare feet; my garden is full of splinters*, 2002. Courtesy Galleria Jangva.

Maari Slattelid, *Protective*, 2000. Courtesy Kiasma.

Bill Jacobson, *Untitled #3882*, 2002. Courtesy Zinc Gallery.

Helsinki & Stockholm:

Finland, Sweden, and Denmark have a surfeit of talented young artists and designers, but not enough collectors to support an extensive commercial gallery system. From a foreign collector's standpoint, therefore, art is reasonably priced, particularly in the Finnish photography market, where major works by critically acclaimed artists such as Elina Brotherus, Pertti Kekkarainen, and Esko Männikkö are selling in galleries for €4,000–8,000. There is, however, an extensive support system of non-profit art centers and project spaces. In addition, the major contemporary art museums and kunsthalls actively collect work from emerging and established Nordic artists as part of their mission, even buying work on occasion from student degree exhibitions.

I arrived in Helsinki during the annual Helsinki Festival, a two-week performing-arts celebration. In addition to the concerts, thirty-four galleries and most of the major museums and kunsthalls were hosting special

exhibitions in conjunction with the festival. Galleria Jangva at Kalenvankatu 18 showed large-scale color photographs by Dan Palmgren, whose landscapes of Iceland use the horizon line, fog, rocks, glaciers, and different colored soil as compositional elements, recalling Olafur Eliasson's empty Icelandic landscapes, only more colorful and less detached.

Down the block, Valokuva-galleria Hippolyte, an important photography collective, was showing Steven Tynan's "Underpants," a series of Polaroid self-portraits of this British artist in various states of undress. A great resource for the work of emerging artists, Hippolyte also has for sale a wide range of portfolios and a good selection of monographs.

Jussi Helkkilä, the Finnish conceptual artist whose work is often based on the migratory patterns of birds, showed a subtle series of minimal sculptures made from ornithological books, craft-paper packaging with canceled bird stamps, and several string and feather constructions at Gallery Artina at Fabianin-katu 4.

Modern masters such as Matisse, Motherwell, and

Picasso can be found at Galeri Forsblum, at Pohjoisesplanadi 27, opposite Alto's famous Savory restaurant and the flagship Artek store; a space on the second floor is devoted to contemporary sculpture, painting, and photography.

Kiasma, the Stephen Holl-designed contemporary art museum, had several interesting exhibitions, including "Popcorn: Art and Politics," a survey of political art (mostly Finnish) from 1960 to the present. The agitprop prints of the muzzle of a gun by Antti Jantunen; photographs by Elina Brotherus and Mari Slattelid exploring feminist identity; visionary architectural models of the Futuro house by Matti Suuronen; and the politically charged pig sculptures by Harro Koskinen all give an excellent overview of how Finnish artists have taken up themes of pacifism, identity, sexual liberation, utopian ideals, and critiques of bourgeois values. In Studio K, Kiasma's project room, Erwin Wurm's *Sculptures with Embarrassment* was an installation of twelve "one minute sculptures" activated when the viewer assumes the props and positions outlined

in instructions penciled directly on the walls. The sculpture I chose to become, *Take your most beloved philosophers*, required me to create a stepladder of books between my arms and legs while the docent took a Polaroid of me (which, for €100, I could send to Wurm to sign).

At the Kunsthalle Helsinki, a few blocks from Kiasma, Maaria Wirkkala, daughter of industrial designer Tapio Wirkkala, had an installation entitled *So What*. Wirkkala, who very rarely exhibits, is known for temporary installations that explore the ephemeral in art. She is not concerned with the longevity of objects, and pieces like *Blind Wall* (1999), which consisted of light sculptures installed on the sides of buildings in Helsinki, are meant to highlight the inconspicuous and the insignificant. Themes of play and violence are featured in *So What*—in one part of the installation, the viewer looked through the sight of a gun pointed at her father's famous glass vases suspended from the ceiling; in another, docents navigated viewers, who had to sit in wheelchairs, through a room filled with broken glass.



Elina Brotherus, *Love Bites III*, 1999.
Courtesy Kiasma.



Annika von Hausswolff, *Untitled*, 2002.
Courtesy Andhréhn-Schiptjenko.

Critic's Picks: Helsinki and Stockholm

The Finnish Museum of Photography: "The Politics of Place," group show including Andreas Gursky, Nanna H., Anthony Haughey, Margareta Klinberg, Maria Lantz, Walter Niedermayer, Ingrid Pollard, Jorma Puranen, Torbjörn Rodland, and Allan Sekula, through March 2, 2003. Kiasma: "Popcorn and Politics—Activists of Art," through March 2003. Photographic Gallery Hippolyte: photos by Nygård's Karin Bengtsson, December 7–29. Magasin 3: "Extension, Works from the Collection, No. 2" and photographs by Georg Oddner, through March 23, 2003.

Finally, on view at the recently expanded Finnish Museum of Photography in the Cable Factory, about twenty minutes from downtown Helsinki, was "Light," an expansive show from the museum's permanent collection that covers the history of Finnish photography from the late 1800s to the present.

I arrived in Stockholm after taking the overnight cruise on the Silja line from Helsinki. (I would highly recommend the experience for anyone who appreciates the merger of Las Vegas, good strong beer, and John Denver tunes sung in Finnish.) The first place I visited was Färgfabriken (The Color Factory), a project space run by Jan Åman, famous for the controversial "Interpol" exhibition in 1996, during which the Russian artist Oleg Kulug first performed naked as dog and bit a man, and Alexander Brener, another Russian artist, destroyed Wenda Gu's human-hair installation. On view was the first posthumous survey of the Swedish photographer Christer Strömholm, whose images are rooted in classic black-and-

white street photography infused with social commentary and irony.

Andhréhn-Schiptjenko is probably one of the best contemporary galleries in Stockholm, representing a wide range of conceptual and contemporary Swedish artists and sculptors. The gallery, which had just opened a new exhibition of Annika Von Hausswolff's large color photographs, has been actively participating in the Armory Show in New York and Art Forum Berlin in an attempt to diversify its market and introduce the Swedish art scene to the United States and Europe. Now living and working in Berlin, Von Hausswolff is one of Sweden's most acclaimed young artists. She represented Sweden in the 1999 Venice Biennale, and had a solo show at Casey Kaplan in New York this past fall. Her work deals with unfinished narratives, the body, architecture, and our relationship to clothing. Two of the photographs on view were particularly striking: One depicted a young girl in an anonymous-looking room, with her eyes closed, holding a chainsaw, and the

other showed a rattan chair dressed in a blouse with a bra over it and a pair of shoes strewn about near the legs.

On view at Galleria Magnus Karlsson were photographs by Ulf Lundin, in a show called "From Darkness: Photographs." Lundin's subjects had been sitting by themselves for half an hour in total darkness when Lundin, who was in an adjoining room, randomly snapped their pictures. The models didn't know when the flash would light up their faces, and the element of surprise allowed him to capture the expressions of the models as they slipped into the nebulous, non-social zone of complete darkness.

The Zinc Gallery, a small underground space, was showing photos by Bill Jacobson, which feature blurry color studies of urban landscapes. The saturation of the images with the washes of light and shadows make for intriguing semi-recognizable scenes.

One of the most interesting spaces in Stockholm is Magasin 3, located in the shipyards about twenty minutes from downtown Stockholm. It has a collection of contemporary art

including James Turrell's *Dawning* (1991), which can be seen by appointment only. In the project space, Tony Oursler was setting up *Stations*, an installation of video projections and defunct video- and sound-editing equipment. In the upstairs gallery, "Extension, Works from the Collection, No. 2" offered an excellent survey of contemporary work by Nordic artists, among them Jockum Nordström's *The Final End Childhood* (2001), a naïve, sexually charged pencil drawing; Miriam Bäckström's *Set Constructions* (1995–99), nine photographs of abandoned movie sets; and Lena Svedberg's untitled drawing of two crowds walking toward each other.

Curator Hans Ulrich Obrist summed up the Scandinavian art scene a couple of years ago as the "Nordic Miracle," and it did strike me as remarkably vibrant. Even given the lack of contemporary art galleries and collectors, artists produce innovative, high-quality work, and art centers and kunsthalls take risks. It seems the Nordic Miracle is here to stay. 