

ヘルシンキ・スクール
写真展

風景とその内側

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The Dialogues between Four Artists

The artists emerging from the Helsinki School can be divided roughly into four generations, depending upon when they studied at the University of Art and Design Helsinki. The first generation began in the 1980s and includes artists like Jorma Puranen, Ulla Jokisalo, Timo Kellaranta, all of whom have become well established in the world of contemporary Finnish photography. The second and third generations include artists like Tiina Itkonen and Sandra Kantanen, now active as core figures and leading positions of the Helsinki School today. The fourth and youngest generation is comprised of up-and-coming artists like Susanna Majuri and Anni Leppälä. Since one hallmark of the Helsinki School is its encouragement of artists to interact with and influence one another, this exhibition has chosen to feature not those first-generation artists who have already made their names, but rather the aforementioned representatives from the second, third, and fourth generations in their respective capacities and in an attempt to stimulate a kind of inter-generational dialogues.

Among the four Tiina Itkonen got her start earliest, photographing landscapes in Greenland. Itkonen first traveled to this far-northern country in the early 1990s. Attracted by the seemingly slower flow of time and drawn by the friendliness of the people there, she became a regular visitor. Itkonen's photographs are born of her deep love and respect for that landscape, and from her observation of it. In her photos of glaciers she captures the panoply of whites, blues, and grays emerging from the natural light falling on the ice. She prefers to shoot not under clear blue skies but rather in the flattened lightings created by cloud cover and mist. She finds the real, subtle beauty of these massive ice flows to be revealed best in the breaking light of dawn, under moonlight, and during snowfalls. Perhaps it is the utter lack of any trace of human presence that allows the delicate subtleties of light inherent in such magnificent nature to be felt.

Itkonen's work also includes photographs of aboriginal Greenlanders, highlighting their relaxed demeanors and open, friendly gazes. Living in

local villages for periods of time during her shooting has allowed her to get to know these people and understand their way of life, and the naturalness of the resulting photographs offers an easy window into these. If Tiina Itkonen's modus operandi is to enter deeply into a place in order to capture the reality of the landscape and the people living in it, Sandra Kantanen takes a different approach that involves altering her photographed images to create idealized, half-real/half-fiction landscapes. Interested in the different kinds of landscape representation created by different cultures, Kantanen has studied Chinese landscape painting in particular for a number of years, and in 2001 spent time as an exchange student at Beijing's China Central Academy of Fine Arts. She considers Western techniques as perspective and realism to compose landscape paintings, but in the Chinese style, realism is replaced by idealized images that imbue scenes with a sense of the sacred. Her work tends to be informed by her feel for Finland's rich natural landscape (where every town and village typically has a forest growing nearby) as well as by her conceptual understanding of both Western and Eastern landscape painting. By now, so many places have been modernized, leaving none of their original old beauty. Kantanen therefore leaves such reality as it is by using the method of photography, but then adds pictorial elements to create what she feels is an ideal landscape. In the past this has involved printing on painted sheets of aluminum, a technique that merged photography and painting. Her current work involves digitalized scanned negatives and printing them herself to create double exposures that give effects similar to painting. She first fixes one negative and exposes it, then takes the same negative and slowly shifts it to make the resulting image seem as if it had been painted with a brush. Her works in this exhibit do not necessarily add anything new to the photographic representation; rather, they are new images generated from the lines, shapes, and colors already present in the original photo. For Kantanen the printing process itself becomes just as important as the actual shooting. By using a variety of techniques to lend such

pictorial effects to photographs, she succeeds in blending reality and fiction into what amount to new landscapes.

Susanna Majuri's photographs are very much reminiscent of movie stills, each seemingly lifted from the climax of a film in a way that allows a single photograph to offer a pleasingly full sense of having seen the whole story. Majuri confesses her fondness for both paintings and stories, and speaks of her photography in terms of "painting with the camera" and "taking photographs as if writing a novel." Throughout her work the elements of water and sky have particular significance. Water, she feels, is a medium that both carries people and conveys emotions. The people in her photographs tend to be depicted in extremely close relationships with water—returning to it, emerging from it, living in it. Majuri avoids showing their facial expressions, preferring instead to express these through the colors of the water and sky—clear blue water contrasted with gray sky; gray water blending with gray sky; or people immersed in the water. Throughout we get the sense of water as something that is both essential and dangerous, and for this reason Majuri's bright, clear colors also foment a certain unease. The people in the photos, Majuri says, might be her, or they might be the viewer. Using the sky reflected in the water to create a variety of colors, Majuri attempts to convey her own feelings and create an emotional atmosphere, with scenes of natural sky and water, or backgrounds of buildings, giving emotional context to the human subjects appearing in them.

Anni Leppälä's photographs are also marked by a sense of happening or performance, but the story is expressed as taking place not before or after a single photo, as in Majuri's work, but across several photos arranged in meaningful ways. Her works are often reminiscent of the kind of "flashback" scenes typical in mystery films and the like. The people, things, and spaces depicted all convey a sense of nostalgic fondness, yet it is difficult to pinpoint whether this comes from déjà vu or fiction or reality.

Each photo contains some clue for unraveling a longer story. Throughout

her work, "memory" is an important element of the presentation. She often photographs her grandmother's former house, where she spent childhood summers. Visiting this now abandoned house a few years ago, after being away for ten years, she found it replete with memories and dreams and hopes, but also an oddly solitary place capable of making one forget the passage of time. This house, and her experiences there, became the jumping-off point for much of her work thereafter. In *Girl in Green* (2007) and *Hands* (2007), both set in a green room in her grandmother's apartment, she photographs her younger sister dressed in clothing used to be worn by an aunt. In *Yearly growth* (2009) she photographs a fondly remembered forest near her father's house. In *Orange Tree* (2008) she recalls a garden with orange trees she saw in Crete while traveling there with her family. The vibrant orange color, never seen in the nature of Finland, struck her as somehow absurd and surreal, suggestive that something might possibly be hidden in the background. As seen in these photos, most of Leppälä's work stems from her memories and the use of these to create worlds mixing imagination and fiction with reality.

Tiina Itkonen, journeying deeply into her chosen location to capture the emotional depths of the landscape and the inner lives of people there. Sandra Kantanen, altering realistic landscape photographs to transform them into more personally idealized scenes. Susanna Majuri, treating images of landscapes and light with effects that draw out their dramatic, dynamic beauty. And Anni Leppälä, tapping into her own memories to create worlds imbued with a sense of the mysterious. What links these four unique styles is the way they all use forms of association to link reality to worlds of imagination and fiction.

Given that the Helsinki School offers a situation so very conducive to having artists as unique as these find mutual stimulation and lucubration, we can certainly look forward to more of the same.

(Keiko Toyoda/Shiseido Gallery)

Tiina Itkonen



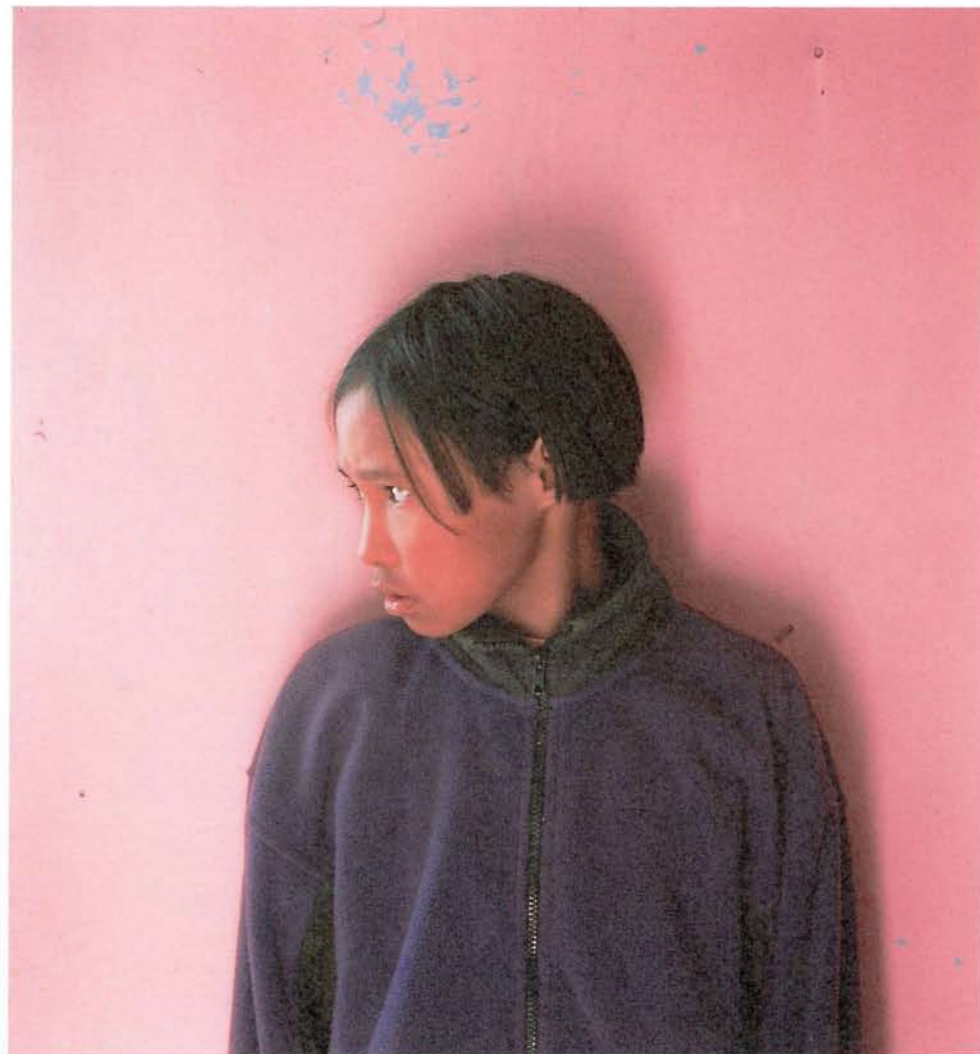
Iceberg II 2006 c-print/diasec 100 x 122 cm



Icescape II 2005 e-print/diasec 70 x 200 cm



Kullorsuaq I 2006 e-print/diasec 70 x 200 cm



Maaja 2002 c-print/diasec 80 x 74 cm



Man IV 2002 c-print/diasec 80 x 80 cm



Masaitsiaq 1998 c-print/diasec 80 x 80 cm



Tiikala 2002 c-print/diasec 80 x 80 cm

SHISEIDO GALLERY