

Two Photos and a Microphone

BY MIKA HANNULA

At the beginning, there were two photographs. At the end, the same. Two photographs. But in between the start and the finish, there was definitely something else. It was a comparison, an interplay between two images within the same framework. A collision of complexities dancing on the verge of a cliché: the Nordic light and winter countryside.

One of the two photos has a person in it. The other does not. The first is from a series that could be described as images of women having something white on top of their heads. And the second photograph is a landscape caught in a moment of sensual light. Together they demand and deserve

attention, creating a strange tension between the purity of an image and its sexual connotations.

Let me focus first on the landscape. It is a rather big color print. What we see is a bunch of trees backlit by the hazy winter morning sun. It's a phenomenon both beautiful and pathetic, but that does not really matter. What matters is the proud presence apparent in the photograph. An image too good to be true, a perfect cliché for nature lovers. An image that is and is not ashamed of its inner value. It seems far away but is not.

What about the picture of a woman, playing in snow, sitting on her knees and holding a huge

pumpkin size snowball on her head? A small but important detail. A jolly carrot for the nose and two small stones for the eyes. A snowman without a body. Behind her, a strong early afternoon light that shines so extremely bright. Her eyes are fixed on you, and her mouth – it is open. All you can do is to stop and stare. And the unseen choir repeats: take a picture here, take a souvenir.

In the first image you need to fill the scenery yourself. A landscape which is more of an escape than anything else. But what is it that you wish to leave behind? What is it really that you want to forget by projecting a sensation into that blank check of an image? In comparison, the photo of the woman is relatively loaded. This time around, you need to dismantle it, free the knots and see, feel and experience what happens. How many demons have you managed to set into motion? How many inner contradictions have you arrived at?

The comparison between Torbjørn Rødland's two series of photographs goes on. The admittance of admiration. Sooner or later, what you see is the scene of the crime. But which was first – and how much time has passed between the photos? If you need a clearcut version, you have to assume that the waiting-to-be-filled emptiness comes afterwards. Before the silence of the lambs, there was laughter, there was joy and happiness. Perhaps.

Another way to turn and tune in, of course, is from the opposite direction. First you have the morning. A majestic scene of nature at its best. A buy, play and throw-away version of it. And after that, yes, after the obvious presuppositions and expectations, comes the surprise. A surprise in which you are left completely baffled. You cannot pin down why you can't decide what is going on. You are stuck with these images and with their sophisticated content. You know very well what they are about and where they have been taken.

However, you can't pin them down. Especially when they are together, there is no means but destruction to make them go away and stay put. You may close your eyes, but that just makes the effect more dynamic and stronger. A merry-go-round version of the old maxim: what you see is not what you get. The funny thing is that you cannot help it. You want more, much more of images you know you are not supposed to like.



The Beginning, 2000. Courtesy of Galleri Wang.