

Books:

What does it mean to have a geographical origin? And how, exactly, should one relate to this mental and spatial place as we grow older? Artist Torbjørn Rødland develops a visual space for reflecting on these issues in his latest book, *I Want to Live Innocent*. The book supposedly revolves around his native town, Stavanger, Norway, but contains no manifest story or explanation of the artist's relation to his hometown. There are, in fact, only a few clues as to where the photographs are taken: the sculptures of the monumental Viking-like swords near Hafsløvdalen in *Metal Monument* (2006), sections of the cityscape in *West Coast Snow* (2006), a glimpse of a local pub in *Pallet* (2006) and the words 'Stavanger Taxi' in *Coastal Viewing nr 2* (2006). The majority of the images are geographically anonymous. They could have been taken more or less anywhere. In some of them Norwegian words are visible, like the 'Åge' written on a stone in *Åge* (2000), but this is less than hard evidence as to where they have been taken.

The title of the book might serve as a key to the anonymity of the images. What kind of innocence is the artist talking about? At first one might be inclined to think of the title as a description of the nostalgic longing for a lost childhood in Stavanger, and the corresponding desire to relocate this state through the lens. But as it turns out, it is the innocence of the images contained in the book which is at stake. Far from pointing to some originary place or state of mind, they are, as they gradually unfold, released from any specific spatial or temporal reference.

They are impersonal in addition to being geographically anonymous, because there are no confessional or obvious emotional investments present. They remain cool, distanced, to the last page. The detachedness of the images refers to one native territory only: the book and its conceptual frame. The version of Stavanger that is evoked floats at the edges of the book as a possibility rather than something actual, present. The sought-after innocence is not the innocence of an authentic or original place of birth, but rather the nomadic and free-floating state of Rødland's photographs, which make them easily appropriated as new geographies. In this manner the artist tells us that images are not instruments for reassuring oneself of one's authentic origin or belonging, but rather tools for reflecting on the spaces one moves in throughout life.

I Want to Live Innocent is, ultimately, about how images placed in relation to a specific geography work as reference points, or models, for the reader's own movement in space. The images operate smoothly within the conceptual frame of the book, but not because they give any strict reflection of Stavanger, remind us of it or even belong to it. They work because they make up a visual map which, as much as it concerns the artist, draws out new cartographic associations from the reader. In the end, *I Want to Live Innocent* might be described as a conceptual double exposure that doesn't restrict itself to Stavanger or Rødland but refers the reader to spaces, images and maps of his or her own.

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I WANT TO LIVE INNOCENT

By Torbjørn Rødland
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