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Eeva Hannula

Interview

Foam Magazine Talent Issue 2013

Q: Let me start off with a simple question. What makes a good photograph? What separates a good photo from a bad photo?

A: For me, the important images are often in some way strange, confusing, distracting and unfamiliar. An interesting image makes me think, feel, and reflect on its possible meanings. It questions my customary thought and perception.

An interesting image disrupts the familiar. In some ways, it is ambivalent. It does not only imitate reality, but questions it and allows for conflicting interpretations to happen. I would like not to describe any images as bad, because the appreciation depends so much on the viewer's point of view, the context, and the subjective preferences. For me, however, the least interesting images are those which are somehow trite and does not manage to surprise me. They do not confuse my thinking, normal perception nor do they arouse mental associations, meanings or feelings.

Q: You write “To me the image is an uncertain matter located between fact and fiction, language and body.” Can you expand on this? Why or how is an image uncertain?

A: In my images there is uncertainty because they are always a mixture of fact and fiction. In my work I mix archival, staged and edited material with each other. So there is often an actual event, observation or existing thing behind the images, which then get a new meaning after being combined and edited.

A photograph shows reality from a single point only. Cropping and all the solutions that you use are subjective. The meanings of the images are also changing and fluid. In this sense, they are unsettled and uncertain. I often feel that because of the use of a camera things appear to be strange and unfamiliar in images. On the other hand, however, photos are always somehow related to reality, and because of that I think photographs are so strong.

I see image as I see words, which can be bent, mixed and combined as you like. I also think that they can be metaphorical and associative. In that sense, the image for me is a linguistic entity. On the other hand, an image contains so much material that does not turn into words and which can only be experienced physically and emotionally.

Q: The repressed, the incomprehensible plays a part in your work. Where does your interest in these concepts come from?

A: Intuition and the subconscious are important to my way of working. Chaos, fragmentation, uncertainty are interesting. Mind and experience in general are uncertain things, and they contain a lot of the repressed and incomprehensible dimensions.

I am also interested in psychoanalytical thinking. It contains elaborating about the repressed and incomprehensible that does not speak to you directly, but metaphorically. My pictures originate from personal concerns. Psychoanalytical thinking interests me because, in a way, it allows me to combine theoretical material with my own experiences. The theories are just a tool to shape the experiences and to understand them.

Covering part of the image is a metaphor for things where something has been prevented and cut off, or there is only a part left which you cannot take possession of completely. Cuts or disruptions in information are essential. Surrealistic art has also always interested me. René Magritte is one of my favorite artists.

Q: You re-work or process images in all kinds of ways. How did you get interested in this approach to making your pictures?

A: For a long time I felt that my images lacked intensity and associations. I felt that they did not speak enough. The mere photograph was empty or too quiet, and this felt somehow inadequate. Then I gave in and started to add something to or break the surface of the photographs, adding colors, cropping, or by combining them with each other. I understood that re-working images opened a whole new opportunity for adding meanings and elements to them. I find it fascinating that by isolating parts of visual material and by cropping the images I can combine and create associations between them. I also like the fact that in a way I can re-write the archive material, the memories and observations that they have once been.

Q: You write that error and chance play a role in your work, something we don't see very often in photography. Why are chance or error important for you? What do you gain from giving up full control?

A: This is especially important for the process, to the way I work. Uncertainty includes the feeling of chance, of errors, and the relaxation of control. It provides an opportunity to improvise and to find a unique new language through experimentation.

Chance and errors, the fact that I give up control – this releases my thinking. The camera often stores something you can't be aware of, because it is so fast. I like to shoot digitally, because I can improvise and leave room for chance.

As the process develops, I am more controlling and aware: various experiments that may have originated with an error may obtain a position and meaning, and then I can edit and analyze them more consciously.

Q: In this process, when or how do you know you're done with an image? When is it finished?

A: It is largely based on intuition. I know that the image is finished when it speaks enough. In other words, when it contains enough potential for meanings and associations. I need to get the feeling that the images are full enough, rich, or that they encapsulate some new idea.

I can see similarities between words and images. I also write poems. I compare the solutions that I find for my images to the writing process. It's like searching and finding the correct words or phrases.

I can often see my images as part of the whole, the overall structure. When a new idea or solution is suitable for the overall structure as well, or associated with other images, then the image will be complete. For

example I do a lot of diptychs. When two images begin to associate with each other then I know that the work is completed. Also the name of the image binds it to its place.

Eeva Hannula (b.1983, Finland) is actually enrolled in a MA program in photography at Aalto University School of Art, Design and Architecture in Helsinki. By intertwined personal archives with staged photographs and layering them with interventions led by potential errors, chance and experimentations, she creates contrasted and poetic combinations. Influenced by the Freudian concept of 'the uncanny', they call for the uncertainty of observations, feelings and languages. Her work was included in several group exhibitions among other Summer school, presented at in the Finnish Museum of Photography in 2013. She is represented by Gallery Taik Persons in Berlin.