

RENJA LEINO **ABSENT MINDS**

RENJA LEINO **ABSENT MINDS**

Center for Contemporary Central European Art
Faculty of Art and Design
Jan Evangelista Purkyně University Ústí nad Labem

Center for Contemporary Central European Art
Faculty of Art and Design
Jan Evangelista Purkyně University Ústí nad Labem

RENJA LEINO **ABSENT MINDS**

The photographic cycle *Absent Minds* by the Finnish artist Renja Leino was produced thanks to the international cooperation of the Faculty of Art and Design, Jan Evangelista Purkyně University in Ústí nad Labem, the University of Sunderland, School of Arts and Design, Media & Culture, and the University of Jyväskylä, TAIKU, Studies in Visual Communication as a part of the project “Changing Faces” – International Photography Research Network. This large project was organized with the support of the European Union’s Culture 2000 programme.

i(p+r)/n
international photography research network



WHAT IS IPRN?

The International Photography Research Network (IPRN) is a rapidly growing organisation of collaborating institutions dealing with photography, varying from museums to art schools and universities. These organisations share a passion for photography and the will to understand and shape the medium within a social, historical and aesthetic perspective. The interaction between these approaches is key to IPRN's contemporary image commissions of new photography and its subsequent dissemination. It is IPRN's belief that this will lead to a new breed of photographers, critics, curators, picture editors, and art directors. Curators and critics benefit when they are confronted with the work of young artists, whereas photographers benefit from an improved theoretical background and a more discursive environment.

WHO IS IPRN?

The IPRN was established in 2004 as an initiative of the University of Sunderland (UK) when it set an agenda for developing European collaboration. The philosophy of the programme was to stimulate the production of new photographic work dealing with social-historical issues and fuelled and contextualised by academic research. The University of Sunderland with founding partners in Germany (Museum Folkwang and University of Essen), Slovakia (Dom Fotografie, Poprad), Finland (University of Jyväskylä) and the Netherlands (Paradox, University of Leiden), established a unique, commission-based collaborative project - Changing Faces. Funded by the EU Culture 2000 programme, it will create exchange commission projects with new partners in Brazil, the Czech Republic, Iceland, Italy, France, Lithuania, Russia, South Africa, and Spain.

WHAT IS CHANGING FACES?

Changing Faces is a three-year IPRN programme focusing on the visualisation of important changes happening in the context of socio-historical and cultural changes arising from the expansion of the European Union. In 2005/07, 18 commissions will be awarded to internationally known photographers, travelling to 16 different countries. During this first period, the programme focuses on WORK, a theme that connects countries and cultures within Europe and beyond. The outcome of each year's commissions will be shown in a series of exhibitions -WORK in PROGRESS- taking place in Essen (2005), The Hague (2006) and Jyvaskyla (2007). The exhibitions are accompanied by publications that catalogue the exhibitions, the preceding commissions, and report on the annual symposium proceedings in (Sunderland UK 2005, Jyvaskyla FI 2006, Poprad SK 2007). In 2008, a synthesis of outcomes of the project, research, and images will feature in a major travelling exhibition and be documented in a large format catalogue, bringing together the results from the complete three-year programme.

ABSENT MINDS

Fascination and frustration are some words to describe my feelings as a starting point to this new series of photographs. For quite a long time I have been looking at people working by their computers, watching TV, playing PlayStation games. It is almost the same, a strange expression on their face when they are inside a world of their own. They are often serious; sometimes some familiar feelings can be visible on their faces. People are for sure physically present, but somehow their minds are absent. The source, the box with electricity, pixels, magical light, some kind of Camera Obscura or Lucida, is catching their full concentration.

The phenomenon is global. No national borders exist when surfing abroad and around. Imaginary landscapes are visited, even real human contacts are made through the earth. All this happens within seconds.

My new work Absent Minds is an attempt to study this phenomenon of our time. For me it is not clear at all where all these electronic signals and impulses of light are leading us. Digital media is filling our rooms and our minds: The question is, with what.

Method: I use a mobile phone, provided by Nokia. People who I want to photograph can just relax because of this simple camera. Usually they even forget my presence because of the strange power of these machines they are working or playing with.

I also like the possibility of this small camera to play with color and light. In normal light conditions it works super. Sometimes it gives me visual surprises as a result, like present. Pixels are highly interesting, large print size important.

RENJA LEINO

THE TIMES WE LIVE IN; THE PHOTOGRAPHS RISING FROM THEM

After more than a quarter century of the Euroatlantic civilization's coexistence with digital media, there are attempts to resume technological development in the sphere of informatics, and to evaluate its geopolitical, social, and cultural impact. Ingeniously simple theories by young, and at first, independent, software researchers implemented in the substandard environment of garage laboratories, being continuously followed by applications of military-economic syndicates of the Cold War enemies, as well as the birth of the postmodern information society necessarily led to a gradual penetration of photography by numeric principles.

The essence of the photographic medium has shifted from a physical-chemical substance being anchored in the 19th century and determined by its social needs, to another, modern dimension. From an anachronistic product implanted in the postindustrial socio-cultural frame, it has been transformed into a polyfunctional, decodifiable, multipliable file, which structure can be intervened as desired. In this way, photography has lost its original social roles, e.g. its often mythicized and absolutized documentational ability, but at the same time, it has conquered new territories. If, at the turn of the 70's and the 80's, it was possible to discuss whether photography was part of visual art or not, as early as in the 1990's, this medium became even its dominant and innovative ingredient.

The turn of the 20th and 21st centuries brings a considerable extension of formal possibilities and changeability to the character of photographic output. The picture is more than ever emancipated from its base, apart from which it has not been able to exist so far, and it starts to live its own virtual destiny. It becomes a mere entity, a cluster of data. A parallel world of the global memory arises in which these files are stored and where they accumulate. From the deposit site where they stay permanently, they can temporarily be drawn out and eventually modified in an truly fundamental way. If the photographic picture is multiplied and these copies are further distributed, they are often only electronic versions. The recipient (viewer) is then sitting in front of his/her computer screen, and full of expectation, lets the photographs touch him/her.

A digital picture being watched on the screen of a technical device enables two-sided communication cohesion. All the action of how a new technical image is absorbed can be expressed by means of the following simplifying scheme: After establishing the initiatory moment, that is, switching on the computer and starting the corresponding programme, a file is opened (based on the perceiver's impulses). At this moment, the viewer's concentration reaches its culmination – his/her mind is transferred to a special standby mode. The viewer is fully concentrated on the pulsing, flashing picture in front of his/her face (as against the former, really static image). The peripheral perception is at this moment suppressed. The opened file, i.e. the digital image, emits light particles, information carriers, onto the viewer in the form of a special back projection. This emission actively returns towards the organic structure that, de facto, created the picture. It penetrates its interior with an intensity that may, at the same time, lead to imperceptible evolutionary changes in it. Thus, being factually independent of their carriers, the technical images become a detached part of the viewer's mind.

The moment when a photographic camera was built into mobile phones meant another movement in the civilization's cohabitation with devices and their picture outputs. Taking a picture is no more the primary function of such a device. The photograph changes into a by-product of communication. As taking a photograph becomes an automated, routine thing, it is possible to include this activity in approximately the same category as other intimate rituals carried out in order to socialize an individual (brushing teeth, clothing, saying hello to other people or sending postcards). Cameras built into mobile phones give us the possibility of taking a picture and sending it immediately to any place where an operator's network can be found. In this way, instant (from the technical point of view), touchingly imperfect snapshots are created to be viewed on a miniature display.

It is the spontaneity of the photographic activity, the all-society readiness to push the release at any time that makes our vigilance of being or not being photographed by someone slacken. We participate in a common social space that is freely available. Anyone can be monitored; anyone can be photographed, including us. We indwell this space physically, but in a metaphorical plane we also live in a virtual world of technical imagination that is shared

by the images we have created and those we are captured in, being created by someone else. However, the most extensive group of technical images in this realm is that which is absolutely not at all related to us. Total strangers share their „photographic albums“, once preserves of the deepest intimacy.

The power of digital photography lies especially in its bipolarity. Typical features of this double-line character are the easiness of taking a picture, the intimacy of the photographing process on the one hand (owing to the miniaturization of the devices, their mutual interchangeability and adequate software equipment), and the depersonalized ownership of the image and its easy availability in the virtual deposit site on the other hand. In this way, the context in which the author's digital photograph is found on the Internet is totally out of his/her reach.

Our lives, homes, and workplaces have been flooded with technical devices. Those that are able to produce or reproduce visual technical images become dominant, and in the form of multimedia messages they more and more enable the modification of deep-rooted classical communication schemes and replace them with completely new models and patterns.

ZDENA KOLEČKOVÁ

ABSENT MINDS, 2005

digital pigment prints, glossy lamination, 140×180 cm























Public space presentation: Ústí nad Labem – BILLBOART GALLERY EUROPE,
August–October 2005, two works in size 2,5 × 5 m.





RENJA LEINO CURRICULUM VITAE

born 1958 St Karins, Finland

Lives and works on Korpo island in the Turku archipelago.

2 children born 1993, 1996

Address 21710 Korpo, Finland Phone +358 44 3631 503

E-mail: renja.leino@turkuamk.fi,

Hippolyte Photographic Gallery, www.artists.fi, photo@artists.fi

Head of the Department of Photography

at Turku Arts Academy 1998-2004

Lecturer at the Turku Arts Academy since 1997

Teaching photography since 1991

EDUCATION

1996–90 Konstfack, Academy of Photography in Stockholm

1999–90 University of Industrial Arts,
Department of Photographic Art, Helsinki

1995 University of Industrial Arts,
Pedagogical studies for artists, Helsinki

1984–86 Assistant of Photography for Lars Kohler, Uppsala

1980–84 Studies in psychology, dramatics, esthetics,
Uppsala Universitet

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

since 1988 Sweden, Finland, Russia, Lithuania.

Selection: Rantagallery /Nothorn Center of Photography 2005,
The Finnish Museum of Photography, Project 2003, Gallery Titanik,
Turku 2002, Pushkinskaya 10, St. Petersburg 2000, Waino Aaltonens
Museum, Studio 1997 Lietuvas Aidass gallery in Vilnius 1995,
Photographic Gallery HIPPOLYTE, Helsinki 1992.

GROUP EXHIBITIONS since 1986 in Sweden, Finland, Russia,
Germany, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and in Central-America.

Selection: Turku Art Museum 2004, Helsinki City Art Museum 2004,
Pushkinskaya 10, Russia 2000, Ars Nova Museum 1995,
Moderna Museet, Stockholm 1992, American Institution in
Guatemala 1992, Kulturhuset, Stockholm 1988.

COLLECTIONS

Finnish State, Private, Helsinki City Art Museum, TYKS, Gallery
Harmonia

MEMBER

Finnish Union of Art Photographers, ARTE, PERI Center
of Photography, ARKADIA

GRANTS

2004, 2002 Art Council of South-West Finland, 2003 Arts Council
of Finland, 2003 National Council for Photographic Art, 1997, 1995,
1991 Art Council of Turku and Pori, 1995 Konstsamfundet, 1994
Svenska Kulturfonden, 1993 Finnish/Swedish Art Council, 1988,
1990 Swedish Art Council

LIST OF IMAGES

(195) Television

(373) Woman with E-mail

(260) Man working with Mac

Center for Contemporary Central European Art
Faculty of Art and Design
Jan Evangelista Purkyně University Ústí nad Labem

RENJA LEINO **ABSENT MINDS**

The Absent Minds project was produced as a part of the International Photography Research Network programme organized by the University of Sunderland, School of Arts and Design, Media & Culture in cooperation with: the University of Jyväskylä, TAIKU, Studies in Visual Communication Museum Folkwang Essen the University of Leiden House of Photography Poprad

The photographic cycle Absent Minds was partly presented within the activities of Billboard Gallery Europe in the public spaces of Ústí nad Labem from August to October, 2005.

Texts by: Renja Leino, Zdena Kolečková
Editor: Jaroslav Polanecký
Translation: Josef Procházka
Graphic design: Tomáš Trnobranský
First edition
Number of pages: 28
Number of copies: 500

ISBN 80-7044-672-2

Published by: Faculty of Art and Design
Jan Evangelista Purkyně University Ústí nad Labem
Velká Hradební 13
400 01 Ústí nad Labem
Czech Republic
Tel.: ++ 420 475 285 121, e-mail: matousek@fuud.ujep.cz
www.fuud.ujep.cz

The Absent Minds project was organized with the support of the European Union's Culture 2000 programme.

The Absent Minds project was supported by:
the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic
the city of Ústí nad Labem
Billboard Gallery Europe



