



Being at home, being a stranger and the photographic approach. Evi Lemberger and Mads Holm in conversation about the exhibition Homat moi Zwoa.

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M: You are from here, this is your home. I am a stranger here. Obviously we must have had very different perceptions of the Bavarian Forest when we photographed it. Why did you make the work in the first place?

E: I began the series when an editor asked me to visualize my idea of home. And so I did. I went to places which seemed to be important to me, met people who were part of my past and those of my present.

M: What do you think really changes in a photographer's approach when he or she leaves home and becomes a stranger somewhere?

E: For me, leaving home and being a stranger somewhere else means that I am in an insecure state of mind. I do not know what to expect and how to react. This enables me to be more curious and excited and less entertained. When I am in a familiar place I can explore the unknown in the known, I can see through the obvious and discover the extraordinary or make something extraordinary out of the ordinary. That's what I like. You made images as a stranger here. How was it?

M: Being a stranger in the unknown has always been an extremely important part of my practice. I was a stranger when I was photographing in Bavaria and yet I had a sense of connection to the place through you, the local. It helped me to enter situations I would never have found myself. Another important aspect of being a stranger somewhere is

that the inhabitants of the place will often have a bigger understanding towards a stranger's extraordinary curiosity and excitement.

E: Totally. People just take you as a stranger, without individuality and personality, which fits the practice of a photographer perfectly. You try to be the so-called fly on the wall. But then, the stranger can easier end up stereotyping a place and its people, right?

M: Stereotypification can definitely occur when a stranger with presuming ideas encounters a new place. For some photographers it shows in how a place and its people are represented and it comes down to how a photograph functions visually - strong symbolism, ambiguity and graphical simplification of complex situations. But perhaps that might as well be the role of the photographer and the photographs. I mean, a stranger will never perceive a place as a local would, otherwise the stranger is no longer a stranger.

E: Not necessarily, I think. It might just be how the photographer makes images and not about whether you are a stranger or a local. I believe, based on my knowledge and experience, that the way of making photographs is embedded in a context and full of references. Take my approach for example; following German traditions, straightforward, quietly portraying life, of course in color. All combined with my desire to tell stories in an emotionally intriguing way where narrative goes beyond the picture. Is your photographic approach different when you are a stranger somewhere from when you work in the familiar?

M: I don't actually think my approach to actual image-making differs a lot from when I am home to being a stranger somewhere. No matter where I am photographing

I am always trying to make a photograph that abstracts from time and place. This way I can make images that speak about not just the specific moment or situation but about what that moment symbolizes. By rearranging my photographs in a new context I believe I am suggesting new relations between elements, which can surprise the viewer and make one think again about what one sees. I think, my work seems very mysterious to a lot of people, simply because a lot of information goes missing. And a lot of the reading then arises from the viewer's own imagination. I think that is what photography is good at. Making recognizable elements seem unfamiliar. Photographs do not hold much information (some would argue they hold none) so the actual message is very ambiguous and arises only from the assumptions that the viewer makes from what the photograph suggests. I think photography is a highly interesting medium to discuss on the matter of the familiar (home) and the unrecognizable (strange). Simply because a photograph is both a description and a distortion. Do you remember we talked about that when you visited me in Glasgow?

E: Of course I can remember me. Photography has the ability to completely disconnect the actual meaning from what you see in the picture. Due to the fact that other media overtook the responsibility of creating more accurate representations of reality, photography no longer has the moral obligation to do so. For me photography has the power to move people, emotionally touch them and give them something to start thinking and dreaming. Photography is able to tell a lot of stories at the same time and you never know which one. It is like creating magic. Within these four edges everything is possible.

M: I think it is exactly photography's direct link to reality and the believable that makes it so powerful and able to move and touch us.

E: The camera enables the photographer to extract certain parts of reality. It includes and excludes, shapes and misshapes and gives sense to the world. My duty as a photographer is to tell, to explain, to create awareness, interest and open for thoughts and dreams outside of the picture. I think, for me, life is too full of beauty and extraordinariness and I do not allow that to be neglected. That is my mission.

M: Those are great words, Evi. I could not agree more. I just remembered a drunken night in Leipzig where we were talking with one of your friends about cynicism. Or maybe we did not talk about cynicism, we just had cynical approaches to whatever topics discussed. Your words here are quite romantic and idealistic. Do you never get hit by an overwhelming cynicism and frustration towards this world and does that not influence your work as well?

E: Hm ... being cynical ... I recently had a conversation about something really weird. So weird I can't even explain it. Anyway, one of the things discussed by this guy - from the catholic church - he does not accept war. I answered that I do not like war, but I accept it as part of life. I think, there are things in life you can not change, and getting frustrated just takes your energy away from things that are more important to put your energy into. If that is being cynical I do not mind and I do not think it affects my work. Why? Because it is my world, I guess. Within that I can select, create and dream.

M: Lately I have thought a lot about what it means to change things. I have previously thought too big of

it. You cannot change the fact that war exists in this world and probably always will, but I believe you can change our ideas of war. And that is important, because that could maybe lead to the change of wars. I think I have been more cynical previously, but I still think my view of the world has a tendency to be cynical and it definitely affects my work. My work is my channel of this cynicism and I am quite pleased with that. I think it shows the darkness, mystery and sarcasm of my work. Even with the photographs from Bavaria. So in a sense we have quite different views on that. And we have just made a collaborative exhibition. Do you think we succeeded?

E: Looking at the images, the ideas and the outcome I think we were a bit successful and later, when I have time to look back and reevaluate I think, I will find it even more successful. Creating a dialogue and opening up for others to experience it is successful in itself. Creating thoughts and ideas and launching them into this world is a fundamental base for life. What do you think?

M: For me it has been a helpful experience to work differently with photographs that actually are part of a much larger body of bookwork. I have made the work over the last four years and my visit to Bavaria has been important in the making of the material for the book. Two of the photographs in the exhibition are in the book. Then working with the material in a different context (the context of the actual place, Bavaria) has been very useful in terms of how I can use the photographs. Besides that I have actually left the work for now and moved onto something a bit different. Exactly what it will turn out to be is still very hard for me to imagine. Nonetheless I am planning to visit Bavaria again with a new idea. I am very curious to see how I will look

differently at the area. We will see. The very last question - do you think you will continue to make photographs of your home?

E: Any reason not to? The world is changing and has endless possibilities, so does my home.

Evi Lemberger was born in the Bavarian Forest. When she was 20 years old she left. Up till now she always returned and left. For 12 years. Then she came back home and made her new old home into her new home. The images, originally photographed for the magazine *Chrismon* in 2014, are characterized by this search.

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Mads Holm, born and raised in Copenhagen, Denmark, now studies in Glasgow, Scotland. Mads photographs things, places and people in a constant attempt to decontextualize and rearrange elements and thereby, somehow, search for what they could symbolize.

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