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On view at Scandinavia House from January through April 2013, the exhibition *New Wave Finland: Contemporary Photography from the Helsinki School* brought together over 40 recent works by photographers and video artists from Finland's distinguished Helsinki School, whose innovative approach and inspiring roster of artists have received international recognition.

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Organized by the American-Scandinavian Foundation and Gallery TAIK, and co-curated by Gallery TAIK curator Timothy Persons with ASF consulting curator Pari Stave, the exhibition featured works by nine of the School's early to mid-career artists, of both emerging and international caliber: Pasi Autio, Joakim Eskildsen, Tiina Itkonen, Hannu Karjalainen, Kalle Kataila, Anni Leppälä, Niko Luoma, Riitta Päiväläinen, and Mikko Sinervo.

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Established in 1995 and since considered one of the premier photography schools in the world, the Helsinki School comprises selected alumni and faculty from the Aalto University School of Arts, Design and Architecture, formerly known as the University of Art and Design, Helsinki. The school is similarly distinguished by a collective spirit and support that includes their exclusive exhibition space Gallery TAIK, which is located in Berlin, where artists are introduced to the international community through exhibitions as well as promotion and publication.

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Rather than being defined by a specific discipline, nationality, or geographic region, the school represents an innovative approach in which the camera is simultaneously a conceptual tool and thinking eye. Each generation of artists is encouraged to reinvent itself and push the boundaries of the photographic process.

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The nine artists exhibited in *New Wave Finland* illustrate the diversity of the School's distinctive artistic and pedagogical approach. Primarily interested in light and its movement, Niko Luoma's work focuses on energy and is about the process as much as it is about the result. He combines mathematics and geometry, symmetry and chaos – both found in nature.

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Over the past ten years, Luoma has repeatedly found new ways to manipulate and challenge the photographic process. Works such as his 2010 print *Spira #1* use multiple exposures layered onto single negatives to create a map of time and chance.

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Helsinki-based artist Anni Leppälä's work exists in a realm of contradictions and metaphors, executed through traditional forms of photography like portraiture, landscape, and interiors. In works such as her *Rescue Devices*, 2010, currents of symbolism run throughout, with dream-like narratives that toy with ideas of memory, nostalgia, and the intersection of the momentary and the constant.

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Riitta Päiväläinen, who lives and works in Helsinki, creates site-specific photographic sculptures using discarded clothes from second-hand shops and flea markets. In works such as her 2005 *Wind's Nest*, the old garments carry silent, unknown stories that are brought to life by the landscape, subtly distinguishing between absence and presence, memory and personal history.

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Danish art photographer Joakim Eskildsen is primarily interested in exploring the visual poetry of identity and place. The images in his series *Home Works* are a thoughtful survey of the six different homes his family had then lived in over a six-year period, and are both painterly and intimate.

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Kalle Kataila's work is based around concepts of landscape, awareness, and personal stories. Contemporary illustrations of the sublime, his photographs such as *Contemplation, Guhyaloka*, 2004, evoke 19th-century Romantic landscapes, where solitary, melancholy subjects stand in awe of nature's spectacle.

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Finnish photographer Tiina first traveled to Greenland in 1995 for her studies, where the empty and tranquil beauty of the island and its icebergs has informed and dominated her work since. Her 2002/2012 pigment print *Dawn, Savissivik*, was captured on a settlement of the Avannaata municipality in northern Greenland, located on Meteorite Island.

12

In his video works, Pasi Autio explores the connections between conscious and unconscious thought — specifically, the complex network of conscious and involuntary functions that make simple human activities possible, and yet at the same time difficult to fully understand. His 7½ minute 2012 work *An Unusual Step*, 2012, examined the process of walking.

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Mikko Sinervo takes as his starting point the optical term “afterimage” – the visual apparition generated by the overstimulated eye. In his works, saturated, pulsating bodies of color read as a visual metaphor for the persistence and changeability of memory.

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An interdisciplinary artist whose concept of film and photography intersects and intertwines, Hannu Karjalainen makes video and visual art with a marked influence by the cinema. In works such as *Blackpool Pleasure Beach*, 2009, which was screened continuously in the Scandinavia House Gallery, Karjalainen explores the ways in which color is coded and branded, particularly for commercial purposes. By de-contextualizing colors from their respective brands, he uses them and their attached meanings as tools to investigate the world.

15

As curator Timothy Persons said of the exhibition, “What distinguishes the Helsinki School artists is their ability to use the photographic process as a conceptual tool. Collectively, their ideas are as varied as their raw materials, yet all seemly share a fascination with the passage of time through the measurement of light and self-reflection.”

16

ASF was glad to have this opportunity to show these nine artists, and to introduce American audiences to the unique educational model of the Helsinki School, which has since become an international standard in encouraging students to close their eyes to see.

Credits:

Photographs by Eileen Travell/ASF.

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