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On view at Scandinavia House in the spring of 2014, the exhibition *Darkness & Light: Contemporary Nordic Photography* presented over 30 recent works by 10 emerging and established photographers whose practices demonstrate the breadth and strength of Nordic photography today.

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Focusing on a diverse selection of recent photographic works, the exhibition illuminated the ways that light — both measured and perceived — informs the practice of contemporary Nordic photography.

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Curated by a panel of leading figures in the world of Nordic photography from institutions such as Brandts Museum of Photographic Art; The Finnish Museum of Photography; the Reykjavík Museum of Photography; Preus Museum; and Moderna Museet, the exhibition explored the active and challenging photography scene in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden.

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The ten artists exhibited—two from each Nordic country—represent several generations, backgrounds, and artistic approaches. Each of the ten photographers on view responds to, manipulates, and experiments with light and darkness to various ends.

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Many of the photographers focused on themes of fantasy, poetry, moods, and beauty of various kinds. The Nordic landscape was also a recurring theme in many oeuvres, as well as more recent exploration of urban landscapes.

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Since 2008, Norwegian photographer Tonje Bøe Birkeland's ongoing series *The Characters* gives women a position within landscape while exploring the authenticity of history, by staging female explorers on various expeditions. Materials are gathered throughout their fictional journeys, yielding stories and installations for every traveler.

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In her *Character #3* series, Birkeland takes on the role of fictional photographer and poet Luella Madgalon Lumière, a traveler of islands, societies, and continents, captured exploring islands from New York to western Norway. The 2013 work on view in our exhibition recreates an imaginary journey to the Orkney Islands, in the Northern Isles of Scotland.

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Swedish photographer and filmmaker Tova Mozard uses mystery as an element in many of her works, sometimes relying on fiction and at other times exploring her own biography.

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In her 2012 video work *The Big Scene*, Mozard stages a psychological drama, starring her mother, grandmother, and herself in conversation with a therapist, set on the stage of Stockholm's Royal Dramatic Theatre.

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Drawing from fairytales, horror stories, and fantasy, Finnish artist Ulla Jokisalo constructs intimate photographs that investigate identity and the instability of existence, often using cut-out techniques, such as in her 2013 work *My Eyes*, a cut-out pigment print with embroidery, thread, and needles on fabric.

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Icelandic photographer Bára Kristinsdóttir's series *Hot Spots* portrays the geothermally heated greenhouses throughout Iceland, such as in the 2014 print displayed here. Her works highlight the beauty sheltered within these oases, exploring contrasts such as heat and cold, light and darkness, and lushness and sterility.

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Icelandic photographer Pétur Thomsen examines the country's landscape through a more critically environmental standpoint with his series *Imported Landscape*, which began in 2003 during the building of a new hydroelectric project in eastern Iceland.

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Swedish photographer JH Engström's series *Far from Stockholm* took him on a journey through small communities and the untamed wilderness of the Swedish landscape, weaving the worlds of local community life together with the icy rivers and forests that surround them.

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Danish artist Katya Sander's photo essay *TIFO (EVENT)* uses photographs as a form of freeze-frame close-ups, approaching the aesthetics of documentary film.

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Finnish photographer Nelli Palomäki is known for her monumental black-and-white photographs of children and young people, such as in her 2013 print, *Roi at 7*.

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Other works on view used the U.S. as a subject. Danish art photographer Joakim Eskildsen's *American Realities* series examines the growing crisis of American poverty throughout the country, in works shot in New York, California, Louisiana, South Dakota, and Georgia, such as in this image of a child living with his family in a trailer park for migrant farm works.

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As Exhibition Curator Anna Tellgren, of the Moderna Musset in Sweden, wrote, "Living in the Nordic region, in the northernmost part of Europe, means having to relate to the darkness and light—both measurable and perceived. This is something all Nordic photographers are experienced in, and contend with, in one way or another."

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We were grateful to have the opportunity to bring the works of these diverse artists to New York audiences, and to highlight the ways they have used their understanding of darkness and light to create unique bodies of work.

END SCRIPT

CREDITS (for Chelsea)

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*Darkness & Light: Contemporary Nordic Photography* was organized by The American-Scandinavian Foundation (ASF) in cooperation with leading figures in the world of Nordic photographic art: Ingrid Fischer Jonge, former Director of Brandts Museum of Photographic Art; Jens Friis, Curator, Brandts Museum of Photographic Art, Denmark; Elina Heikka, Director of The Finnish Museum of Photography, Finland; María Karen Sigurðardóttir, Director of the

Reykjavík Museum of Photography, Iceland; Ingrid Nilsson, Director of the Preus Museum, Norway; and Anna Tellgren, Ph.D., Curator of Photography at Moderna Museet, Sweden.

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All installation photographs by Eileen Travell/ASF.