

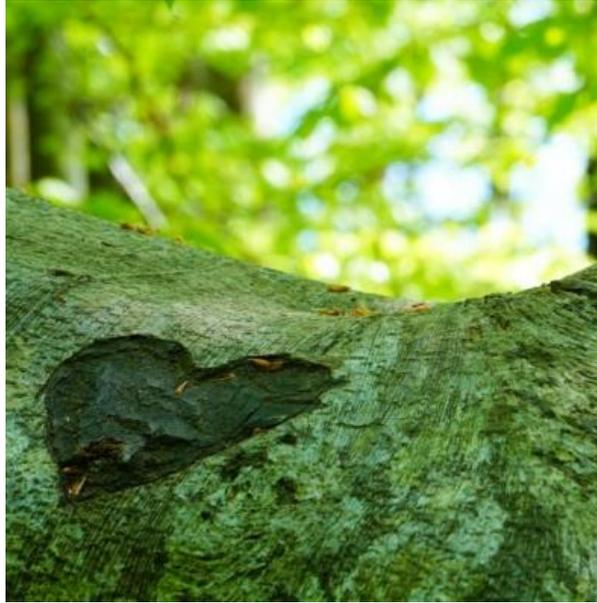
Exposition de Photographie

FOUR SWEDISH SEASONS

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MAI 2019
ATELIER H4B
Boulogne, France

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1. THIS EXHIBITION IS...

Before April 28th, 2018, the day I landed to the teeny tiny airport of Linköping, I had never put a foot in Scandinavia.

When you arrive to an unknown place, at first, you're hit by the whole picture of your new environment. But what constitutes the real culture shock, the one that takes months to domesticate, is in fact made of very little things, imperceptible to the natives, yet a constant wonder for the explorer.

As usual, I kept hunting for the Beautiful in this brand new daily life and here is a selection of photos from this very first year in Sweden.

See this exhibition as an anti-guide book, an anthology of the details that raised my eyes' attention during this first four Scandinavian seasons.



2. THIS EXHIBITION IS NOT...

This exhibition is not an exhibition about Sweden. It is a curiosity cabinet of insignificant little wonders.

I have, in my wanderings, covered a very little part of this vast country, which, for the records, is almost twice bigger than the UK. Without the slightest intention of being a compulsive tourist, I radiated around our new town, following the pace of our family life.

This exhibition is not exhaustive either. It is a series of photos spontaneously taken about the things that, along the way, I found were lovely, surprising, moving, different...

It is only while preparing this event when I noticed some recurring topics among my photography work of these last 12 months. This is how I came to think about these redundancies and my adaptation journey.

You will not leave this gallery knowing more about Sweden. But I hope I will have succeeded in passing you on what touched me, in order to make you feel the long domestication and constant wonder that suppose the beginnings of a new expatriation.



3. THROUGH THE WINDOW

When you go out of your usual frame, you are sometimes struck by things which could yet appear very trivial at first sight.

For example, since I live in Sweden, windows constantly have drawn my attention. I have dozens and dozens of pictures of windows only taken this year.

Well aligned, regular, perfectly arranged, on colourful or neutral walls, they are the joy of my eye, in perpetual quest for patterns and compositions. No blinds, few curtains, and, almost always, a lamp or candlestick placed behind, as a nod to this external regularity, secretly mocked by the individual living behind the walls.

In houses and old buildings, the glass of the windows is often still the original. From the inside, its irregularities bring a particular distortion to the external view, exaggerating the contrast of the parallel dimensions that represent the outside and inside to each other.



4. TALES OF THE COLD

When the winter covers everything with its vast white coat, the landscapes become so modified that we rediscover with a new eye places that had finally become familiar.

I loved this cotton silence on snow-covered days, the soft light brought by the white of the snow in those oh-so-short days at the heart of the winter, the cold that envelops all that it touches with its minuscule frozen crystals (even the cobwebs!), and the frozen lakes that become immense white deserts.

One thing that really amused me was the ballet created by the footprints in the snow. They reveal an invisible world that goes completely unnoticed in normal times. I realised that there are lots of animals crossing the same streets as me. It allows following the trajectories of birds, air, ground, air. We can sometimes recognise the footprints of our neighbours. It is very indiscreet!

As on photographic paper, the movements print and add to each other, freezing the movement in mesmerizing patterns.



5. THE DANCE OF THE SEASONS

In this country where nature is omnipresent, the cycle of the seasons takes on a very special importance.

The length of the days and the nights, the fluctuations of temperature, the strongly marked seasons, make me very often reflect on the minuscule of my condition of human being.

Here, I think of the planet, its place within the solar system, its revolutions, its inclination to the sun.

I think of the little point on which I am on the planisphere, almost at the top, lost in the middle of lakes and woods.

The length of the days are watched six months of the year, and the length of the nights during the six others. We're getting ready for hibernation in the fall, wrapping up in the winter, getting impatient in the spring and taking advantage of every drop of light in the summer.

The wheel of the seasons turns, and each brings its lot of beauty to this majestic nature.

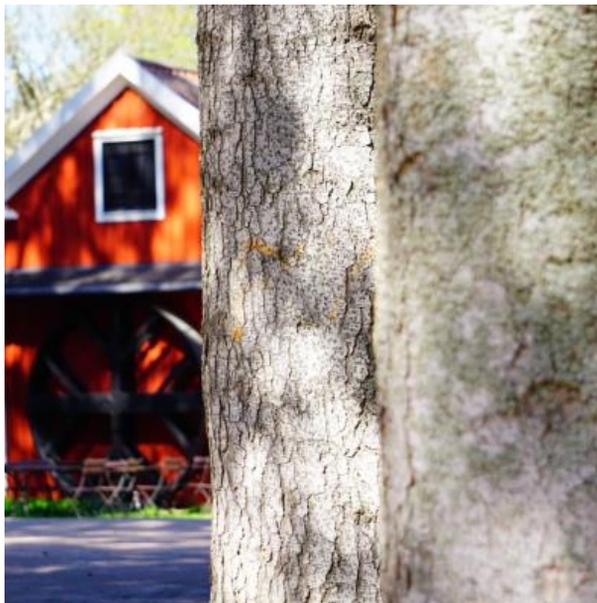


6. THE COUNTRY OF THE INFINITE SHADOWS

On these northern latitudes, the sun, even in the middle of summer, never rises high in the sky. The result is surprisingly long shadows that mysteriously project their subject, forming exaggeratedly deformed images on everything they touch.

In the winter, the sun stays so low that, during the few hours of daylight, it does not even sticks out to the buildings, although quite low in my small town. The light sneaks between the streets, skimming the ground, tongue of fire like lava taking over everything at its reach. The lighting remains that of a sunset, warm golden light in the cold of the winter.

It is also the time when shadows become infinite. The countless pebbles that are scattered across the streets to make sidewalks less slippery, project shadows which are at least ten times their size, giving the impression that they are silently hovering over the frozen ground.



7. TOYHOUSES

The Swedish countryside is sown with red, yellow, or pastel, wooden houses, which bring nice touches of colour in the white of the winter and the green of the summer.

With their small pointed roofs or slightly rounded facades, their white framed windows and well-tended gardens, they have the shapes and proportions of the homes in children's books.

Their wheathered, slightly cracked, painted wooden shell, offers their inhabitants a warm and comfortable shelter, as in a cocoon.

In winter, the gutters are adorned with regular stalactites such as a jaw of ice summoning the cold to stay at the door.

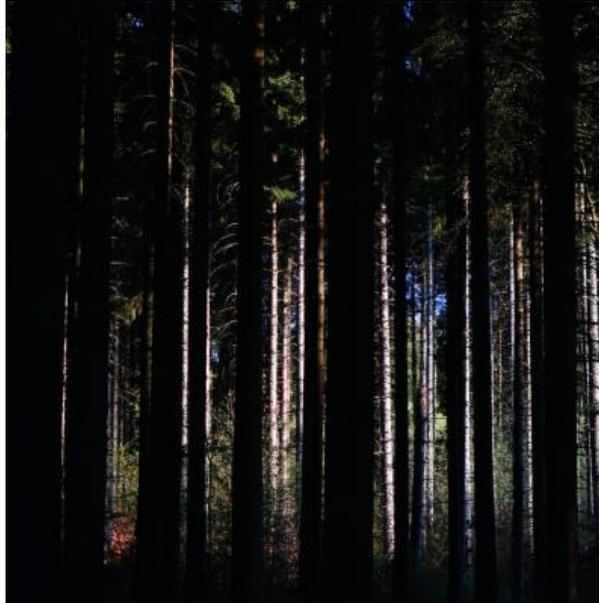


8. MIRROR, MIRROR ON THE WAL...

Lakes, rivers, puddles, ice, the opportunities to see the world upside down are not lacking and the Swedish waters, whether quiet or frozen, often project almost perfect illusions. Almost, but not completely: an imperceptible breeze, a floating leaf, a patch of ice, there is almost always an element that reminds us of the illusion. And, often, it is especially this association that makes the image captivating.

I am also bewitched by vertical reflections thanks to my new obsession for windows. It is as if the walls, jealously guard their contents and, in order not to reveal their intimacy, deliberately retrench themselves behind this protective mirage.

Fleeing from the numbing cold and darkness of a sunless winter day, I rushed into the beautiful Linköping cathedral. The tenuous light that comes from a stained glass window is reflected in the pipes of the organ. It's well known: rain + sun: here is my rainbow!



9. LAND OF CONTRASTS

Lakes with calm waters and infinite horizons form long horizontal lines at the foot of toothpick forests, all in verticality. It is also the softness of the blue of the transparent water that is opposed to the dark and opaque depth of the woods.

But also:

- The delicacy of the hues of the winter contrasted by the liveliness of the colours warmed by the Scandinavian sun.
- The overflow of night in winter and the overflow of day the summer.
- The roughness of the rendered or wooden walls against the smoothness of snow and ice.
- The delicacy of the fruit trees flowers, the fragility of the sweet grass that frowns in the wind in the heart of strong, tough, infinite forests, and their imposing rocks,.
- The small isolated charming villages, and their old wooden houses, suspended in time, rubbing shoulders with the fastly growing cities and their huge building sites swarming like anthills, in transmutation.

In the country of Lagom*, the contrast may be subtle, yet it is permanent:

(Untranslatable Swedish word meaning "neither too much nor too little", absolute philosophy that prays the benefits of balance and simplicity)*