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Far Too Close



I have been a quiet admirer of Martina Hoogland Ivanow’s photography since I came across her portraits of Lou Doillon lounging seductively in a turn-of-the-century Parisian fencing club. So when news arrived that Steidl was finally printing Martina’s long-awaited monograph *Far Too Close*, it seemed it was time to find her in Berlin or Stockholm or whatever far-flung frozen place she was currently residing. Whether it’s Siberia, Tierra del Fuego in South America, Sakhalin Island north of Japan or the Kola Peninsula in Russia, Martina has a taste for remote landscapes and the people who inhabit them. Moody sometimes to the point of eeriness, the images that populate *Far Too Close* capture both moments of quiet intimacy between members of her family and dark landscape portraiture from distant “ends of continents,” as she calls them. Martina will be signing copies of *Far Too Close* at Rough Trade East in London on Thursday, March 17th from 7pm.

Julie Cirelli: Why don’t you start by telling me a little bit about the photographs in your book. Where were they taken and over how long a period? How did you choose these over others?

Martina Hoogland-Ivanow: *Far Too Close* is about emotional and geographical distance. Images of my journeys to the far ends of continents are layered with interiors from my home, family and friends. There are photographs from Siberia, Sakhalin Island, Tierra del Fuego and the Kola Peninsula in Russian Lapland that I shot between 2001 and 2005, and images from Stockholm from 2006 to 2008. It started as a personal investigation into my relationship with travel, and travel as a method of creating work. Why is it necessary to travel so far to take a step into oneself? And why is it so much easier, at least for me, to describe something that is geographically remote than it is to describe subjects that are emotionally close. The inclusion of ‘close works,’ so to speak, came at the end of the process – but played an important part. The editing, order and selection in the book were meant as an experiment with a sort of rhythm of perspective – an exploration of two seemingly opposite positions of proximity through the experience of closeness and distance.



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Julie: Is there a photograph or set of photographs in the book that is particularly meaningful to you?

Martina: There are a few images that symbolize ‘in-between-ness’ to me – like the boy in the air with silver shoes, the ladder into the water, the two sisters on the cover (my grandmother and her sister) or the horse in search of eye contact – where there is both a sense of belonging and of isolation. It was a while ago now, but I think I searched a lot for that in-between-ness specifically. Also, it has become more and more important to me how one image relates to another – I spend a lot of time with and enjoy that part of the process.

Julie: What was it that brought you to the Kola Peninsula in Russia? How long were you there?

Martina: I was there for a few weeks in 2005. I was looking for those ‘ends of continents,’ originally for their shared history; they all seemed to be places that had certain dark elements to them, like political prisons, war zones or nuclear waste sites. I wanted to capture something of this, but at the same time try to point out my non-relation to each place by positioning the camera far from my subjects. The Kola Peninsula was the last place I visited, and I was there during the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the end of World War II in the Valley of Death. Because I didn’t experience the war, I wanted to illustrate my distance or inability to relate, if that makes sense. I am not sure if this has any importance for the viewer of the book or the final result, but it was my method.



Julie: Where are you based now? Berlin? Stockholm? How do you balance being home and being abroad, both in terms of your professional practice, and personally?

Martina: I have been back in Stockholm now for just a few months. I had the luxury of spending last year in Berlin at Künstlerhaus Bethanien on a grant from Iaspis (The Swedish Arts Grants Committee’s international programme for visual artists). Just to know a bit about my background: I left for Paris and New York for art school around 1992, then finished my degree in New York and worked for a few years in London before returning to Stockholm in 2002.

I have been based most often in Stockholm, or at least I always seem to return here. I like Stockholm – I think a lot of people (including me, sometimes) complain about it being too safe, too middle class and with too

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many repressed emotions, but after so many years abroad, I still think it is quite an unusual and exotic place. It is also quite a strange place – especially considering it’s a capital city. It’s sophisticated and has an old history, and it’s in the middle of the forest and surrounded by water all the way up in the northeast part of Europe. I think it’s a good place to be based – it does not demand your attention and just leaves you to it.

I am not sure I make a distinction between being at home or abroad, but traveling and returning do give you perspective and time to digest your material. Also, I am not the kind of photographer who carries a camera at all times; my work is only done in specific periods and in specific situations. I spend equal amounts of time editing and printing, and for that reason I need to be based somewhere.



Julie: What are your plans now that you’re back in Stockholm? What are you working on now?

Martina: Right now, I am playing with the idea of working with the moving image. Apart from that, I just finished the first part of a project called Satellite, which is about how one defines themselves through others. There are images from various ‘alternative’ communities and other groups, including family and lovers, that explore how we either identify with or are alienated from them. I’m not quite done with it yet, so I might continue a bit this spring and summer and see if I can take it somewhere else.

This entry was written by Julie Cirelli, posted on March 16, 2011 at 7:37 am, filed under Books, Events, Features, Photography and tagged Far Too Close, Martina Hoogland Ivanow. Bookmark the permalink. Follow any comments here with the RSS feed for this post. Post a comment or leave a [trackback](#): [Trackback URL](#).

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