

KRISTOFFER ALBRECHT: INK ON PAPER

For Pentti Sammallahti, the photograph as a physical object has always been important. This implies to when he is printing in the darkroom, but also to his work as a book-artist. Sammallahti's books and portfolios are not mere show-windows for exhibiting his images. They are self-contained art objects, with their very own aesthetic identities. Some of them are numinous and imposing. Some are very modest. Some are serious and some are humorous. But every book that Sammallahti has published himself has been made with true passion for the work.

The basis lies in the attitude toward the work. Sammallahti is working uncompromisingly. He is a craftsman with the ambition to carry out every stage of the work as well as possible. But he is also an artist who leaves room for unexpected turns in the process. These incidents have led to many innovations and unconventional solutions. Flexible working habits and thorough knowledge of all the working stages have resulted in exceptional and beautiful books and portfolios. All the works are the result of a personal artistic intent and made without any demand for standardisation.

When Sammallahti published his first portfolio *Cathleen Ní Houlihan* in 1979 he called it his Opus 1. This work was the one that initiated the Opus series. Since then more than 50 titles have been published in the series, by a dozen, or so, photographers. The works have sometimes been published in very small editions, occasionally in editions of thousands. In Finland the Opus series awakened a serious interest in ink-printed photography.

Although Pentti Sammallahti is well known for his exceptionally beautiful silver prints, the strength of his photography is wonderfully conveyed through his books and portfolios. In these works he is taking advantage of all the expressive strength that this medium has to offer. He makes design, typography, materials and printing technique work in favour of his art, thus offering us intimate, yet powerful pieces of his visual world.

Cathleen Ní Houlihan

Opus 1, Helsinki, 1979

31,5 × 29,5 cm.

Portfolio in soft cover binding + a signed special edition of 200 numbered copies, in hardbound box, containing an original silver print.

30 black and white photographs

Duotone offset

Preface by Edna O'Brien in English and Finnish

Poem by W.B. Yeats in English and Finnish

This portfolio contains photographs from Ireland. They were made in the west parts of the island in the summer of 1978. Heavy masses of clouds hang over the landscape. The people as well as their dwellings are one with the terrain. This portfolio shows how the overall control of the maker is conclusive for the nature of the work. Sammallahti made the photographs, designed the portfolio and was responsible for the technical realisation. This groundbreaking portfolio is dedicated to the memory of Paul Strand.

Pohjolan yö · The Nordic Night I and II

Opus 2 and Opus 4 Helsinki, 1983

52 × 42 cm

Hardbound portfolios

8 matted Ektaflex colour prints in each portfolio

Edition: 20 numbered and signed copies

In the summer of 1980 Sammallahti photographed on the Faroe Islands and in Iceland, utilising the soft light of the Nordic night. Portfolio I contains details from nature and portfolio II larger landscapes. The images show the harsh northern landscape. We are faced with basic elements of nature: water, clouds, rock and volcanic eruptions. The portfolios are handsome and hand bound, with the title embossed on the cover.

Ei kenenkään elävän vihamies · Senki élónék ellensége
(The Enemy of no Living Man)

Opus 3 Helsinki, 1983

30 × 24 cm

Hardbound portfolio

6 matted platinum prints

Edition: five numbered and signed copies

Title poem by Endre Ady

This portfolio contains photographs from Hungary. They were inspired by the poetry of Endre Ady and made during three trips to the Zemplén Mountains in the years 1979-81. Platinum printing is the most distinguished photographic printing method. The technique gave Sammallahti the opportunity to use lithographic rag papers, which unlike conventional silver gelatine papers make the image seem an organic part of the paper.

Andante

Opus 5 Helsinki, 1984

14,5 × 11,2 cm

Hardbound portfolio

8 black and white photographs

Tritone offset

Edition 120 numbered copies + 30 artist's copies

The photographs were made in Tallinn, Estonia in the winter of 1981. In a street Sammallahti photographed people passing in front of a wall. The result is a gallery of personalities, which is simultaneously warm, commonplace and good-humoured. Sammallahti composed small musical one-liners to accompany the photographs. They appear as scores, with the tempo indication in Italian to match, not only the music, but also the photographs. The beautiful and small portfolio is the consequence of tests Sammallahti made for the reproduction work of the larger portfolio *Rannalla*.



Ristisaari, Finland 1972

Rannalla

Opus 6, Helsinki, 1986

32,5 × 38,2 cm

Hardbound portfolio

25 black and white photographs

Quattrotoneoffset

Edition: 480 numbered and signed copies

Text by Pertti Lassila in Finnish

Poem by Aaro Hellaakoski in Finnish

The portfolio contains photographs of the Finnish archipelago made in springtime during the years 1969-1980. For many years Sammallahti made expeditions with his bird-watching friends at the time of the spring migration. However, Sammallahti's main interest does not lie in the birds, but in the landscape of the archipelago, the rocks, the skerries, the reeds, the ice and the sky.

Honnos soittajani, Honnos my Fiddler

Opus 8, Helsinki, 1987

21,5 × 43,5 cm

Hardbound portfolio

9 black and white, 3 colour photographs

Quattrotoneoffset and five-colour offset

Edition: 200 copies in Finnish and 120 in English, numbered and signed

Poems by the artist's brother Pekka Sammallahti

The portfolio is a poetic look at the Romani people in Hungary and Romania. Sammallahti had travelled in Hungary in the late 70s and early 80s. In 1985 he made a trip to Transylvania in Romania together with his brother. The images constitute a strong and expressive portrait of the gypsies. This was the first work by Sammallahti that made use of an entirely irregular screen pattern. This kind of a screen gives a

continuous and clean rendition of the grey tones. The grainy pattern is a means of expression that also has the character of photographic film.

The Japanese Portfolio

Opus 15, Helsinki, 1990

Together with Kristoffer Albrecht

36 × 73 cm

Wooden box

20 toned black and white silver prints

Edition: 20 numbered copies

Essay by Yrjänä Levanto in Finnish

The wooden box, made of mahogany and wenge wood, contains individually toned photographs. They are mounted in horizontal mats, one, two or three per mat. The meticulously composed images show the Japanese landscape, temple gardens and the imperial villa Katsura in Kyoto. There are some larger vistas, but mostly the landscape is limited. The viewer is led through the gates of the temple, along stone paths, up to the edge of a garden pond.

Pienen pieniä eläinkuvia, Tiny Pictures of Animals

Opus 25, Helsinki, 1993

9,3 × 11,8 cm

Soft cover portfolio

13 black and white photographs

Quattrotone offset

In this work Sammallahti concerns himself with one of his favourite subject matters. The portfolio is dedicated "to the friends of animals and to animal friends". The images are not photographs of animal species. These animals are individual actors. Cats drool over dried fish, dogs chase a crow, a huge pig is sticking his head in a bucket and kitten find shelter in the arms of small boys. The spirit of the portfolio is close to that of a children's book, with a streak of warm humour.

Sacri, Photographs as Lithographs

Opus 29, Museet for fotokunst Danmarks grafiske museum Odense, 1995

30,5 × 15,5 cm

Soft cover portfolio

8 black and white photographs + 9 sample pictures illustrating the tone separation method and the effect of the printing paper

Quattrotone offset

Edition: 300 numbered copies

Text by the artist in English

This work is on the one hand an artistic entity, on the other hand a technical description. The portfolio includes eight panorama images from holy places around the world. The overtone is pantheistic; spirituality can be found in nature. In the booklet with the text, Sammallahti explains his method of printing and his attitude toward printing photographs with ink. The sample pictures clearly illustrate the content of the text.



Swayambhunath, Nepal 1994

Venäjän tie, The Russian Way

Opus 31, Helsinki, 1996

27,5× 48 cm

Soft cover portfolio + hard-bound special edition

16 black and white photographs

Quattrotone offset

Edition: 1000 copies, printed on Mohawk Cover paper + 200 copies special edition printed on Tumba Daumier paper (the special edition includes a silver print)

Preface by John Berger in English, Finnish and Russian

In Sammallahti's images Mother Russia opens like an immense panorama. Her seemingly endless roads are inhabited, not only by peculiar vehicles, but also by stray dogs. "This is Paradise for dogs", says Sammallahti. Russia, as portrayed in this portfolio, is far away from the luxury cars and fashion shops of the nouveau riche in

Moscow and Saint Petersburg. It is decrepit and threadbare, but friendly and good-humoured.



Vuokkiniemi, Karelia, Russia 1991

Al-Madina

Opus 39, Helsinki, 2002

Together with Kristoffer Albrecht and Joakim Eskildsen

39 × 72 cm

Hardbound portfolio

6 black and white photographs (Fuji Archive Lambda)

Editions: 45 numbered and signed copies + 10 artist's copies

Text by Cia Rinne in English, German and French

The labyrinthine quarters of the old North African cities are called medinas. There are two panorama images each by the three creators of this portfolio. The photographs depict the narrow streets of Moroccan cities. The everyday scenes of the dark street corners sometimes resemble the winding turns in an oriental story.

Archipelago

Opus 41, Helsinki 2004

15,5 × 19 cm

Hardbound book

80 pages, 57 black and white photographs

Six-tone offset

Text by the artist in Finnish, Swedish, French, German and English

This book is partly based on the same material as the portfolio *Rannalla*. In this work the quality of printing is at its peak. The six-tone offset has made it possible to freely alternate between images of very rich tones that are either warm or cool. The matte inks make the images an organic part of the materiality of the paper. The landscape of the archipelago lives by the seasons and the weather changes the picture. In this small book the basic elements of nature are sensibly present.

Staden · Kaupunki · La ville · The City

Opus 45, Helsinki 2006

18,6 × 15,5 cm

Hardbound book

168 pages, 51 black and white photographs

Seven-tone offset

Poems by Bo Carpelan in Swedish, Finnish, French and English

This book is Sammallahti's and the poet Bo Carpelan's melancholic portrayal of their hometown Helsinki. The oldest photograph in the book is from 1963 and the most recent from 2005. Many of the scenes in the early pictures have later on disappeared. The still remaining views are often on the side of the main routes. Carpelan's poems have been written especially for Sammallahti's photographs. In the book the poems become pictures, the pictures poems.



Helsinki, Finland 1982

**Opus 46 & Galerie Camera Obscura & La Fabrique du Pont d'Aleyrac,
Helsinki 2006**

22 × 19 cm

Hardbound portfolio

17 black and white photographs

Pigment ink jet prints

Edition 50 copies numbered 1-50, 50 copies numbered I-L and 30 copies hors commerce numbered H.C. 1-30

Poems by Caj Westerberg in French

The digital techniques have offered new methods also for the serious book artist. Sammallahti applied his thorough knowledge and sense of photography's tonality to create this portfolio by the means of ink jet printing. Each image was individually and carefully treated, and then printed on a paper that was not made for ink jet printing. The theme of the portfolio is birds, but the birds are not dominant. Instead they are decisive accents in the photographs, which together with Caj Westerberg's poems take us flying all around the world.

Huoneita · Chambres · Rooms

Opus 52, Helsinki 2009

20,5 × 22 cm

Hardbound book

36 pages, 8 black and white photographs

Six-tone offset

Poems by Caj Westerberg in Finnish, French and English

A room is closed by its four walls, and a book by its covers. By opening this book we enter rooms, all with their very own character. This work, with only eight photographs, clearly shows how a very limited space can constitute a whole and complete book, an artistic entity. Westerberg's poems and Sammallahti's photographs of interiors that humans have built for themselves are opening windows for a universal experience.