

## Fragments of Remembrance

Astrid Kruse Jensen's work with photography in recent years has been closely associated with an exploration of the concept of memory as a state of consciousness that bridges time and space. In this state her works are involved in constant motion between disappearance and appearance; between the discreet modelling of darkness and dazzling effacement by light. And within this field Astrid Kruse Jensen allows the chemical origins of photography to penetrate the subject and at one and the same time draw attention to its indispensability in the process of developing and its role as a filter that obscures, affects and forms the subject. The intrusive structures of the chemistry become an active, abstract visual processing of the fragmentary impressions of memory.

In Astrid Kruse Jensen's latest series *Fragments of Remembrance* and light are split into two parallel tracks. While the motivic starting point in the white drip-photographs was created from negatives that came from Astrid Kruse Jensen's family, the darker part of the series consists of photographs taken by Astrid Kruse Jensen herself – primarily with old plastic cameras from the 50s – from the same era as the negatives.

The drip-photographs arise in a process in the darkroom, where she exposes the paper, leaves it for a period ranging from minutes to days, then drips the developer on selected areas of the photographic paper where she thinks she remembers that something interesting happens – something that extends beyond the traditional family photograph. These fragments become a whole new subject, while at the same time the image is still dominated by the white areas which actually do contain the subject in its entirety, because the whole paper has been exposed, but some of it has remained invisible because the developer has only affected it in drips. The motivic totality thus endures as an invisible otherness in the subject.

Like small organic explosions, fragments of the subject are developed, but sometimes Astrid Kruse Jensen also, with more insistent and intense energy, applies the chemistry with a brush. The control of what is developed and what remains white lies in an indefinable field between the desire to recall something specific and letting randomness prevail, until the analog C-print is treated with concentrated fixer fluid and thus fixed as part of the analog process. Afterwards these analog prints are scanned and printed digitally in the final work.

The appearance of the darker photographs – the absence of anything in razor-sharp focus – is due to the limited capabilities of the simple camera, with no choice of focus and exposure time. The camera is here reduced to a lightproof box – without the same capacity and the same degree of detail. Here, as in her earlier works, the results are thus in various ways both defined and affected by imperfection.

In many of the works the reflections break up the subject – which spreads out over the rest of the picture and opens up to an infinity. Or at least to a time that is not ours. The ethereal appearance of the photographs and the chemical process mean that the photographs in no way seem fixed – processual, rather – both in their development and their fading-out. Astrid Kruse Jensen dissolves the now, goes behind the flash of memory and lets the landscape and the photographic medium wholly absorb the more or less unconscious memory.

The works have been created in two tracks – between control and chance, between the wish for the accurate recall of memory and the awareness of its impossibility, but are bound together by the way they revolve around memory as a kind of living, poetic displacement of reality.

And in this fusion of the selected and the uncontrollable, the works point to the processual character of memory; to the fact that memory is not something static or finite, but something that we continually process, recreate and construct.

### **The photograph and memory as image-generating focal point**

For the individual the photograph often functions as protection against oblivion – a wish to store memories for posterity. But the great majority of memories are left alone as an aggregate of variegated impressions. What one thinks one remembers is usually not pure visual expressions, but a conglomerate of emotions, sensations, moods and details. Such an assemblage inevitably involves something quite abstract that prompts us to question whether memories exist as anything but an imaginary space of recollection; a fusion of imagination and reality. Our internal memory images are thus part of an enduring process of dissolution and transformation where the projections of the present are mixed with emotions, sensations and fragments of reality.

At the same time Astrid Kruse Jensen's works make us intensely aware of their photographic origins, when she draws the photographic medium itself so far into the creation of the works that they form a unity and become an overall statement about the nature of memory. In her wordless, sensual images there is a sense of not being determined by time. Here, so to speak, horizontal gaps arise in the forward motion of time. And in these very openings – detached from time and space – her photographic landscapes stand as shimmering assertions of the transience of beauty and the intangibility of memory.

When she creates her drip-photographs, the chemistry works in a field composed equally of chance, memory, forgetting and rewriting. Parts of motifs are emphasized, other parts – and perhaps those that were originally intended as the central motifs of the picture – remain indistinct or entirely hidden. In her works the themes surrounding memory become the image-generating focal point. At the same time she lets the chemical splashes determine the extent of, and intensify – through the time spectrum – the close connection with the photographic material and memory.

There is a gently insistent aggression in the drips and the brushstrokes. They are part of a perplexed searching – not only back through memory, but also towards an unknown, screened-off content. The dark pictures of the exhibition, on the other hand, appear with an almost stoic calm. Instead of revealing its own depth, the dark water surface of the lake reflects back the surfaces of the surroundings, and the result is therefore an image that can almost be said to contain more surfaces and only hints of the depth in the darkness. The drip-works, by contrast, become small intense immersions in the depths – detached from a totality. In this way the drips come to represent memory as a dynamic form – a process that is never-ending, a process in which past and present are fused.

The dark photographs of landscapes and houses have reflections and the discreet play with backlight in common. They confuse the eye. It becomes difficult to know up from down – hard to distinguish reality from reflection. The reflection distorts and displaces, but at the same time is part of reality. In this way the subjects become abstract – the unreal becomes real, the reflections become the reality. When Astrid Kruse Jensen photographs through the window panes she allows nature to be present, but only as reflection, which creates an unrest and an unresolved wonder, a sense that other stories are inscribed in the present. When the reflections have the effect that one can no longer tell the real landscape from the reflection itself, the subject comes to mime the complexity of memory. The reflections become an image of the difficult distinction between illusion and reality – and question whether it is at all possible – and relevant – to make the distinction.

When the thickly vegetated forests with their slender, straight trunks stand as a uniform protection against penetration of the depths of the forest, and a tightly-meshed tracery of dark branches is reflected in the water surface and cuts off the gaze from intrusion into the picture, nature appears as abstract motifs, but also as images of mental spaces that remain closed. In the work *Inside*, everything stands out clear and technically impressive, but is dissolved in the reflection in the flooded floor. Not even with photographic precision can one penetrate the interior of the house.

Astrid Kruse Jensen has worked earlier with the house as a metaphor of the psyche, but whereas in those cases she has photographed it as part of a landscape, in this series she has entered the house and the place and – by means of reflections and water – has drawn nature in too. In some of the works the spaces are quite dissolved by the reflections, so it is no longer possible to know what is outside and what is inside.

The works thus arise from the feeling of not being able to distinguish the reality of the subject from the transitory sensory impression of the memories and the emotions. The subject breaks up, the mirrorings take over and create a universe all their own that can only exist for a brief period in this very light – in the reflection right here and now where the light burns through in exactly this way.

In Astrid Kruse Jensen's works landscape, memory and the photographic medium merge in a constant alternation between concrete and mental landscapes. Just as memory is a dynamic form that is never-ending, the photograph and the landscape are in perpetual motion.

And so the works contradict the notion of the photograph as a fossilized moment. Instead Astrid Kruse Jensen inscribes the medium in a living process in which the subjects, the photographic material and memory merge – and become part of a larger narrative of consciousness and living memory.

*Astrid la Cour*