

Pictures of Life

by Anna Krogh, curator, AROS Aarhus Kunstmuseum

It is as if we've been there. There is an indefinable familiarity about the places the Danish photographer Charlotte Haslund-Christensen embraces with her camera and presence. The visual fragments in the series JUMP cannot be pinned down geographically. Haslund-Christensen consciously omits the signs that could identify places. Instead she focuses on the universal and typical and the viewer is forced to accept that the places cannot be named. But they evoke memories. Memories of a place one has been – the emotions it left in its wake. JUMP is a journey through personal memories – the photographer's as well as the viewer's.

The work emerges as a visualised diary, a sensuous journey that reflects the photographer's own movement from place to place. Most of the pictures are taken at night without a flash. This makes the contours of the images blurred and diffuse – the subject is often hard to decipher. The grainy aesthetic and apparently haphazard framing underline the overall impression of spontaneity and immediacy. Each individual image is like the blink of an eye: rapidly sketched impressions that unfold as a kaleidoscopic map of the world.

Meeting the work is a bodily experience : bending and stretching to come close to the images, constantly aware that the work continues to unfold beyond the field of vision. Curiosity is aroused. The work reaches beyond its own universe and into the world of the viewer: our existence is shaped by the events and people we have met – they may not form a well-planned whole, but they are with us, are part of our being in this world.

As in the photographer's earlier works, including *Inner City* (1999) and *Heroes* (1998), the apparent chaos of the works reflects the accumulation of the experiences that constitute one's own life. Nothing is too insignificant, too small or banal - a hairbrush, a hand or a plate with narrow lines of coke. The photographer's own passions are made visible and it is often the body and its unique expressive language that re-emerges. Surprising, often provocative fragments – a stomach, a crotch, a navel – that create an intimacy and privacy in the work. Photographs of daily life, private moments, wherever they may occur, are pictures of life, pictures of existence, and Haslund-Christensen possesses the rare ability to make her world ours.

The images are made anonymous, thus becoming relevant and universal – a subtle commentary on the familiar in the intimate. Unlike the standard-bearers of documentary photography, photographers like Henri Cartier-Bresson and André Kertész, JUMP consists of blurred, colour photographs. Whilst effective as individual images it is in interaction with each other that they gain substance and meaning. It is within the grid of the work as a whole that an inner dynamic and nerve is generated.

The visual diary reflects the photographer's way of being in this world – it is the tool she uses to engage in the places her journey takes her. Haslund-Christensen thinks in images. She has a strong eye for the evocative detail. There is a palpable, hushed pensiveness in the individual image, and

therefore in the series as a whole. Like fleeting dots each single image expresses the atmosphere of the work as a whole. One is stricken – in the view from a hotel room or in the snow-clad landscape – by an indefinable feeling of loneliness behind the fast, fleeting registration. The photographer lays what she has seen in front of us, shares her experiences, but is in the end alone with her image. The viewer is confronted with this basic human condition. The photographer becomes a kind of middleman, pointing at what she sees and inviting a sense of belonging and communication with the world around her.

The images are spread over time and space. It is the photographer's gaze and personal angle that creates the visual continuity. Haslund-Christensen's personal presence and intense sense of perception form the foundation of the work. We are looking at a conscious choice of material emerging from a feeling – an unconscious sense of the image. As a viewer one is aware of her familiarity with her approach to photography, the world and life as a whole. The series is the result of the photographer's personal quest for significant moments and the expression of one woman's belief in the artist's intuitive, sensory presence in the world, a presence capable of spontaneously grabbing 'now'.