



Sanna Kannisto

b. 1974 | Works and lives in Helsinki

IN 1997, SANNA KANNISTO WAS OFFERED A CHANCE TO join a group of scientific researchers from the University of Turku on an expedition to Peru, to explore the rain forests of South America. For Kannisto, who was then a photography student, this was the first step towards her future work with photographic art, in which, over the next 15 years, she would develop her own individual model for research work and imagery.

Previous spread : *Nocturnal visitor*, 2008. C-print. 70 × 58 cm.

Kannisto's photographic works and series delve into the documentary-photograph tradition and reflect precise, scientific, objectivizing scrutiny and registration. With remote rain forests as her setting and biology researchers as her workmates Kannisto, nevertheless, managed to preserve and accentuate the tone of wonder and enthusiasm of the artist's gaze. The camera and technology are transcended by pushing the limits of technique,

Act of Flying, 1–25 (11), 2006. C-print. 42 × 56 cm.



and in place of mechanical representation there emerges something else, as if by visual magic.

Right from the start, an essential tool, alongside the camera, has been a photographic studio specially designed for fieldwork. This portable box has served as a form of laboratory and stage, which helps to make, and does make, the plants and animals placed in it more visible. With its lighting, curtains and structure, this space

Act of Flying, 1–25 (22), 2006. C-print. 42 × 56 cm.

that creates three-dimensionality has also in itself become the subject of photographs when the camera has been turned onto the artist and the working process. The situation in which a pictorial illusion arises is revealed to the viewer as a piece of production apparatus and opens up into an interesting process and subject of observation.

Kannisto has been fascinated by biology, forests and animals ever since she was young, and some of her first



Oporornis formosus, 2009. C-print. 74 × 94 cm.



Leptophis ahaetulla, 2006. C-print. 74 × 93 cm.



toad portraits were already made during her foundation studies in art. Over the years, she has accumulated more knowledge and made use of natural-science research practices, from species identification to reading the signs in a terrain. She has also learned how to capture bats and birds with nets, and how to use flight tents, becoming increasingly professional at all of this.

Her eight research and photography trips to the rain forests of South and Central America have resulted in some carefully chosen image material, whose subject matter has been modified and whose series have been augmented with each trip. The long-term nature of the working process is reminiscent of an on-going research project, whose end is not in sight, nor are there any definitive answers. The most important thing has been to spend sufficiently long periods in the forests, two-to-three months at a time, so that the gaze, mind and rhythm find the right degree of receptivity. The planning



is given almost concrete form, at the same time as they serve as comments on all human observations and on questions related to the thirst for knowledge. In contrast, the series *Taste of Nectar* (2008) and *Act of Flying* (2006) can be understood in relation to the scientific concept of animal behaviour. In them Kannisto has also worked largely on technical and pictorial issues related to movement and lighting. Luring a nectar bat or a hummingbird into the staged set (or situation) constructed for the photograph involves dramaturgic design, and interaction with another species. The behaviour of a bat that lives in the dark must be known, and its language of movement and path of flight have to be observed. Photographing the flight of a hummingbird that flaps its wings 80 times a second cannot be anything other than a process of trial and error. An aesthetically and visually successful photograph cannot be hurried, assured, or even expected. It is simply necessary to trust in adequate preparation,

in managing the circumstances, and in maximum refinement of the collaboration with the camera technology.

Sanna Kannisto's current life situation has kept her in more homely surroundings for several years now, and her interest has, of necessity, switched to northern primeval forests. Finding ancient forests is no longer easy and, apart from Finland, the aim is to chart the possibilities for visiting landscapes in Russia, Poland and Belarus. The idea of primordiality is the same as with rain forests. The northern forests are more familiar, but just as alien to the observer, especially when the constituent parts of the forest have changed so radically during the age of economic exploitation. We don't necessarily need to look so very far afield to find an amalgam of exoticism and strangeness. The artist's intent gaze is again embarking on a voyage of discovery.

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of the shooting situations, the preparation, and the taking of the final image requires patience and time. It is also important to get to see beyond the exotic, to wonder in an everyday fashion, so that the object appears as a parallel being.

The choice of what to photograph becomes evident on the basis of visual properties. The shapes, colours and consistencies, whether they be plants or animals, must be made to work in the space and light of the field studio. At best, the object takes on an almost still-life-like form, whose alienness startles with its strangeness. The characteristics of a living creature are modified as though into a sculpture, while, in contrast, the structure of a plant can be turned into something that feels alive. The atmosphere can come from photographing a situation, from the artist averting her own gaze, or from a physical gesture.

Wondering at the alienness of the rain-forest environment and assimilating its diversity have served as an endlessly rewarding foundation for artistic work. In *Private Collection* (2003) and *Close Observer* (2010) this



Left to right:
Zona antisismica, 2010. C-print. 105 × 130 cm.
On Forest floor, 2006. C-print. 74 × 95 cm.
Close Observer, 2010. C-print. 130 × 160 cm (105 × 130 cm).