

SANNA KANNISTO

born in 1974 in Hämeenlinna, Finland

lives and works in Helsinki

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In a self-portrait from 2000, we see Sanna Kannisto sitting at a table in a dark wooden house. She is looking into a brightly lit display cabinet which contains a toad, or maybe a large frog. The back of the cabinet is lit up but its sides are covered in black, which makes it look like a stage, with the artist watching the performance. She in turn is being photographed from one side by a camera on a tripod. As a composition, its dense atmosphere and reference to science are reminiscent of genre painting. Here, as in Vermeer's *The Geographer* (1669), the scene takes place against a curtain in a stage-like room. If this were indeed a genre work, one could well imagine it having a title like *The Scientist*, and indeed this would tie in with Kannisto's other photographs.

'My work,' she writes, 'explores the relationship between nature and culture.... I aim to study the methods, theories and concepts through which we approach nature in art and in science. As an artist I am attracted by the idea that when I am working in a rain forest I am a "visual researcher".' In order to translate her approach into pictures, Kannisto has been on several expeditions to Latin-American rain forests. The result was various landscape motifs and photographs of strange scenes of scientific experimentation, as well

as odd-looking research stations. A good example is *65 Bats* (2000). Other photographs show snakes, frogs and tropical plants taken out of their environment and set against a white background, or graph paper, or next to measuring instruments in a display cabinet.

Kannisto's compositions are like a theatre for science, but although the scientific name of each species is given in the title, the artist is not interested in delivering objective knowledge by way of systematic taxonomy. Science, too, is subject to changeable perceptions, and the study of nature remains just as open-ended as it ever was. Reflecting this, Kannisto's photographs always lay emphasis on a vividly subjective approach to methodology, and in this manner she creates her own pictorial worlds. This is particularly clear in the series *Act of Flying, Amazilia tzacatl* (2006). A colourful tropical humming bird, photographed in flight, is shown in individual pictures against a white background. The focus again is not on a study of movement, which is a common subject in scientific photography, but on the aesthetic momentum brought about by the interplay of the flight of the bird and the artistic process that has captured it.

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