

Sanna Kannisto

Shooting exotic birds and rare species in her studio, Sanna Kannisto (b. 1974, Finland) exploits the properties of objectivity and theatricality that are inherent in the medium.

In Sanna Kannisto's latest work she swaps her normal shooting locations of Central and South America's rainforests for a nature reserve in the Hanko peninsula, at the southernmost point of mainland Finland. The title of the series, *The Days of Departure*, refers to this Finnish archipelago, which is the exact point where the birds leave from Finland and start to cross the sea. Having worked for many years with exotic species from the tropics, Kannisto's focus has now shifted to the long-tailed bushtit, which she borrows from their natural surroundings to photograph in her studio.

With an enduring interest in the history of still life painting, Kannisto invites the birds to perch on branches that have been taken from these Nordic forests in an attempt to reflect the effect of changing seasons on the environment. There is a theatricality to these images that emerges from the perfectly erected set ups and glaring lighting, which bestow these scenes with an implausible quality. "I think my studio gives me a neutral, simpli-

fied and well lit white space that is metaphorically similar to a museum space" explains Kannisto, who shows plants and small animals "like items selected to be in a collection or art works presented in a white cube." Kannisto's interest in the concept of photographic truth and the medium as a construct is reflected in the way that she brings art and science together in her work. "Photography and science have a shared history. As soon as photography was invented, it was co-opted into the service of science." Both photography and science present themselves as having "an inbuilt objectivity", but both bend the idea of objective truth. "Art and science both offer different methods, theories and concepts of how to approach nature and how to portray and represent it", and it is in her practise that Kannisto invites the viewer to explore the liminal space between an aesthetic that is both starkly real and dreamlike at the same time.

"The birds perching on the branches in these images have a similar feeling to natural history museum displays.

The still life images in my work are always inspired by old scientific models and replicas made for educational purposes and in museum dioramas where everything is carefully arranged" explains Kannisto. This interest has led to playful investigations into theatrical presentation and is explored through her incorporation of photographic apparatus and black stage curtains. In turn, these items draw attention to the staging and construction implicit in all forms of representation. "With a photograph people can feel a powerful urge to figure out how the image has been made", she explains. "What is interesting about photographic still life is specifically the relationship between the medium and the idea of reality. The things depicted in the images have actually been in front of the camera in some way, but what kind of reality is actually created by a photograph? With all its details a photograph can feel real, but on the other hand my pictures bring up the question of disbelief. Can the birds really have been photographed in that way?"

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