

A black and white photograph of a person silhouetted against a bright, starry sky, standing on the edge of a dark, angular structure. The person is positioned on the left side of the structure, looking towards the right. The sky is filled with numerous bright stars and a prominent, curved light streak or nebula. The overall mood is contemplative and vast.

# 4-Seasons

Martin  
Bogren

## LOWLANDS

Photographed 2008-2011. Published by Max Ström 2011. I grew up in this village. When I was a child I used to long away from there. To something that was bigger, something that was more. The village was limiting and the world beyond was a waiting adventure. I've returned now with a camera in my hand as an excuse to search for my memories. To understand what this longing was really about.

And I photographed. The kids on their mopeds, the surroundings, the people. I wanted to tell about the village, about narrow-minded villagers, and about my need to leave all of that behind. But along the way a more personal story came to shape and in the meetings with the people a reconciliation appeared. Stories from the past made themselves heard. About dreams, about longings and about myself. A tender farewell to my childhood, to youth and to the village took over.

“On the outskirts of the village there is a hill. From the peak you can see the road stretching away. I walk the path up counting two hundred and five steps. When I was a kid this was a mountain. Two hundred and five steps. That's all it was til you could see the world.”

*Martin Bogren*

## ITALIA

Photographed 2013-2015 and Published by Max Ström 2016. Italia begun as a journey and a portrayal of the country and its people, but soon reshaped to a narrative of a state of mind and a self portrait. In a time of changes and in the search for something new I traveled through the country during four years. But parallel with a geographical journey through the country, there was an intense ride going on within myself.

Italy showed me a zest for life and a temperament I have been starved of during winters traveling northbound, and an other pace and energy attracted my attention. An impulsive and emotionall releaf opened up within me. A pulsating, vibrant life was going on here and gave sustenance and meaning to it all.

And I photographed! An Italy that I do not claim to be a true depiction, and not even fair, but an Italy that somehow fitted in to my thoughts, memories and emotions.

*Martin Bogren*

## AUGUST SONG

Photographed during summers in 2013-2018 (Published by L'Artiere 2019) in rural areas in Sweden. These occasions take place on primitive open air dance floors, often hidden in the woods on the outskirts of villages. A winding road following a path in to the forest, hidden away on its own and divided by a fence from the world outside.

At the back a small stage with an orchestra playing patiently all through the night. Two slow dances and two quick - again and again. Song after song, dance after dance; all of them about love and all about the conditions of love - night after night, while the crowd moves slowly turn after turn around the floor.

Surrounding it all the fence and on the outside a parking lot a place hidden underneath the trees. A place for getting dressed, putting make-up on, making love, fighting and drinking. Above the it all, the dull summer night light witch never completely hide the goings on in the hollow.

*Martin Bogren*

## HOLLOW

Photographed 2008-2020 and on own Publishing (Adamantea Publishing) 2020.

It is the moment when you feel your heart and your throat swell or your stomach tighten, it depends. And, for just one moment, you are no longer anything else than this bite in your heart. Like a winter paleness, a thick coat of snow or of night that cushions everything. And all is silent. It is the moment when you close your eyes to slip into yourself and yet in which you no longer belong to yourself. Something escapes, leaving an emptiness that is impossible to fill.

Suddenly dizzy, you would watch yourself almost disappear. It is the moment when your eyelids half open. A path takes shape. A horizon, a dream, a gesture, a love, an elsewhere. A promise, the first signs of a resurrection. Like a summer, a glint of light or an illumination that embraces everything. And all is silent. It is the moment when you open your eyes. A fading shadow. A lightness within, like a dance just begun. The dizziness, this time, of surrendering to in the world.

*Caroline Bénichou*

Martin  
Bogren

4-SEASONS

16 JANUARI - **KONST  
28 FEBRUARI HALLEN  
2021 HISHULT**



LOWLANDS







ITALIA









AUGUST SONG







HOLLOW





## Martin Bogren

Född 1967 i Malmö och bor för närvarande i Berlin.

Martin Bogrens visuella värld omfattas av ett personligt och poetiskt anslag. Han har gett ut ett flertal böcker med stora internationella framgångar. Tidigare utgivningar inkluderar Ocean 2008, Lowlands 2011, Tractor Boys 2013, Italia 2016, August Song 2019 och Hollow 2020.

Hans arbeten har visats och visas på utställningar i Europa, USA och Asien. Är inkluderade i samlingar vid bl.a. Bibliotheque Nationale De France, Oregon Fine Art Museum, Moderna Museet i Stockholm och Modern Art Museum i Rom.

Även om Martins tidiga arbete kan kategoriseras som dokumentär fotografi, har ett personligt och poetiskt skrivande alltmer utvecklats och personifierats. I sina imaginära drömlika och ibland trevande vandringar, genom ljuset, i mötena, i subtila toner och nyanser, finner han en känslig och ömsint bekräftelse på sina subjektiva visioner.

Boken har en viktig plats i den kreativa processen. Italia, publicerad av Max Ström 2016, har hyllats av kritiker och hans senaste arbete August Song om utomhusdansbanor på den svenska landsbygden bekräftar både utvecklingen av hans konstnärskap och den nära relation som hans arbete har med boken.

I det nyligen avslutade New York-baserade projekt tar uttrycket en ny riktning med ett första skifte till färgfoto i kombinationer med det svartvita. Färgerna kan likväl beskrivas som monokroma och förstärker upplevelsen av det överkliga, det drömlika och det isolerade individuella tillstånd som ofta upplevs i en mångmiljonstad. Martins egensinniga blick för ljuset, sökandet efter närhet, igenkännandet i porträtten och i tillåtelsen att förlita sig på fel, gör han ett avstamp i ett kraftfullt och febrigt arbete.



**The first time** I met Martin Bogren was many years ago in a Paris bar, somewhere in the Bastille. There was a contingent of Scandinavian photographers; Anders Petersen, Lars Tunbjörk, JH Engström, amongst others, drinking, raucous in song, and showing each other prints and books on wine-stained tablecloths. That night, Bogren presented me with a modestly sized book with a blue cover, titled *Ocean*, a beautiful photographic document telling the real tale of a band of Indian friends who arrive at the sea for the first time. Bogren had captured their trepidation, awe and acrobatic joy in very few, yet meaningful monochromatic pictures. Since that early example, Bogren has had four more books published, each one developing a personal visual approach, moving tenaciously away from the inextricable lexicon of Swedish photography and into his own aesthetic. His latest, *August Song*, published by L'Artiere Editions, was launched in tandem with an exhibition at Galerie Vu in Paris in November.

*August Song* spans a period of seven summers, when Bogren began to document dance balls in the woods and forests of Skåne in his native Sweden, beyond the edge of villages and small towns. These balls originated in the mid 1950s when a genre of Swedish rock'n'roll, called *dansbandmusik*, boomed. For just under a week, the spaces where these gatherings take place, called *dansbana* ('dancefloor' in Swedish), are filled with people drinking, dancing and celebrating life.

"I almost can't remember how this series started," explains Bogren. "Like most projects it was vague, just like most of my work is at the start. But I've learned to understand that if I continue, and find the excitement and a kind of pleasure in it, it will eventually begin saying something." He adds, "In the end, which pictures will be a part of a series or a book, and which will be just a step on the path to something else, is very much by chance." Bogren's nonchalance of not knowing the focus of his project propels him forward and makes him dig deeper to

find results that, in his mind, form poetic documents of people connecting. In black-and-white, through the twilight haze, we witness intimate moments of the old and young together in one ceremonial place. Bogren has captured the beautiful embrace of elderly couples as they gaze nostalgically into each others' eyes; with the youth, a sense of longing and nervous anticipation for future rites of passage.

Diane Arbus once said that, "A photograph is a secret about a secret. The more it tells you, the less you know." Her words are particularly apt as regards to Bogren's *August Song*, a collection of photographs that celebrates the verve of life, yet are tinged with a melancholia. Photographs show older couples dancing, younger couples kissing, some engaging in sex in the fields, and in others sweating, intoxicated men are locked in passionate embrace. Here is where the rigours of everyday society are allowed to disappear, where the primal instinct manifests in the overgrown nature of the forests.

Bogren explains that in many ways, the work is autobiographical. "These open-air dance events provided me with all of their possibilities, but also limitations," he says. "The dancefloor with everything going on there, the people I met, the fence surrounding it all, the parking lot with all the goings-on, the never-ending dull summer-night light, particular to Sweden, that hides or suggests more than it shows. But all these things are just other factors. What's more important is what's reflected inside oneself from the surroundings, and within the other story taking place; in one's memories, senses, thoughts and emotions. *August Song* is about this longing, about the search for togetherness and for this difficult and fragile search for the meaning in life."

Bogren is represented by Galerie Vu in Paris where *August Song* was exhibited late last year. The prints for the exhibition were lovingly reproduced by master printer, François Le Blond, at Moon-Prints in Berlin, who interpreted the images, in collaboration with Bogren, via a unique and complicated process

that the photographer wishes to keep a mystery. The director of the gallery, Caroline Bénichou, believes that the series has "an extremely strong and delicate way of photographing the women, especially middle-aged women, and their desires. Martin shows the passion wonderfully and a certain form of disillusion, without any despair. Some of the portraits are of stunning eroticism and they contribute to the strength of the series, which is like an evocative allegory of the urgency to live before everything is consumed and to abandon oneself to love – to get lost in the arms of the other". She adds that there is "exultation and melancholy that is often mixed in his work, perhaps even more in this series. *August Song* has a very particular rhythm: a form of vertigo, a whirlwind of life and dance links the images together".

Bogren's visual aesthetic has developed strongly in recent years. His book *Italia* (2017), for example, is a lyrical exploration of the streets of Italian cities, photographed in his distinct grainy black-and-white expression. *Italia* was the first book where Bogren fully embraced this spectral style, where the texture and process of the work began to play a part in the storytelling. The photographer integrates his personality in the very fabric of the medium. "When you are a young photographer, just beginning, I think you easily adopt and absorb what you like, and push away what you don't," Bogren explains. "This search is coming from something deep inside ourselves... We take all these things and blend them together. In this early stage we are very influenced by the pictures we look at, who we meet, what music we listen to, and so on; all these things that form who we are. After a time there is something shaped within that we consider to be 'us' and we don't think so much about how we do things. We find a process, a tool, a way of doing things that match our inner vision somehow and that makes sense and can be recognised and understood by ourselves – not so much on an intellectual level as on an emotional level.

"The enduring quality of Bogren's work is down to his ability to convey a real sense of intimacy regardless of his subject matter, from *Ocean* through to *August Song*. His eye is sensitive to the way in which people move and interact in space; small gestures are transformed into bigger meaning. Bénichou recognises that, "In his early work, which was already remarkable, there was a restraint that has now disappeared. There is no dodging. He has a very intense way of not avoiding, not betraying himself and letting go. He develops his projects over long periods of time. It is not a question of slowness, but of patience, which is very different. Martin knows how to take the time to seize his path, he is very self-demanding. When we work together on his edits, I greatly appreciate his ability to get to the heart of the matter, to reduce the selections to the most beautiful, but above all the most meaningful, not to be fooled by those that are easily seductive and 'effective'."

At first *August Song* may seem like a romantic project, but Bogren achieves a balance between the real and the romantic. His otherworldly aesthetic seduces the viewer into his story to achieve a symbiotic relation between obscure technique and subject matter. We enter into a condensed microcosm, a psychological story of human emotions.

Photography can provide a contradictory tool towards understanding, or not understanding, the reality in which we inhabit. Bogren agrees: "Yes, I think photography is about searching. But when we have found what we were looking for, we will automatically stop looking for it, right? I don't know what I'm looking for. Probably a recognition of myself in others, and others in myself – a community with others and a togetherness. This mirroring, this reflection, I believe is an ongoing process in our lives – with or without the camera in our hands. I believe this search is the main reason for us being here and photography can be a wonderful thing for it."

By MICHAEL GRIEVE for *British Journal of Photography* 2019.

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