

## NIINA VATANEN / Statement

### **A Room's Memory** (Text by Andréa Holzherr)

Niina Vatanen's photographs resemble notes from a personal diary. Not those notes written to describe exact events, but those written to describe certain feelings or moods. Unlike a diary, however, her discreet entries do not follow a specific timeline or sequence. Inscribed by light, they become traces of moments past, little stories that trigger memories.

Niina Vatanen finds the narrative for her subjects either in her own experiences and observations or in novels and movies. The images are little stages in which she combines her different inspirations in order to create "possible events" that happened in time and in memory. The images are both contained and open, each one telling its own little story. Depending on arrangements or sequencing, they may suggest a multitude of different narratives.

Details, lights, deserted spaces or empty rooms play an essential role in Niina Vatanen's photographs. They confine the mood and the emotion that the artist wants to convey. The images are balanced between the boundaries of dream and reality, but also between memory and flux of time. "I try to depict emotions and moods that are recognizable, yet not precisely defined", states Niina Vatanen.

Niina Vatanen's photographs tell a tale of longing and fleeting memories. Her tales, intimate and fragile, give the viewer the impression that he or she is participating in something that is at once personal as well as universal.

### **Grey Diary** (Text by Katrin Hiller von Gaertringen)

Niina Vatanen's "Grey Diary" documents a photographic search for traces, a quest for what is left of the mortal remains of someone dear to you. The result is a multifaceted, but also splintered portrait of the artist's deceased stepfather that at the same time includes multi-layered reflection on someone's absence.

To do this, Vatanen made use of different forms and media; she photographed documents, such as postcards, pages from a calendar or a map, old passport photos of her father, and places where he often stayed. She then collected the targets that she shot at with his rifle; the result is 157 Wounds, a formally and strictly composed installation on the diversity of the pain of loss. The importance of each single picture in the series is not determined by its aesthetic sensation, but by the personal memory it can conjure up. The most worthwhile of memories can be linked to something as simple as a clearing in the woods.

A special role is played by the target pasters, small stickers marksmen like her stepfather apply to close off the bullet holes in the target so they can use it again. As for their role in the series, Vatanen says: "They are an attempt to mark memories and places, but they also work like a patch: they cover scratches and scars. Attaching the target pasters is also doing the same act my stepfather used to do. There is a wound in a landscape. I want to repair it." Band-Aids close wounds, but simultaneously make them all the more visible.

“Grey Diary” highlights the complexity of memory and loss. The place that photography occupies in this context was described by Roland Barthes in the following: “With the childhood photo of my mother before my eyes, I say to myself: she will die: I shudder ... in the face of a catastrophe that has already taken place.” Photography in this sense takes death as its theme: if something is photographed, the moment has already passed.

**The Red Letter (and Other Confessions)** Text by Niina Vatanen

“The Red Letter (and Other Confessions)” is a photographic artwork that is composed of my personal letters. By covering the text with correction fluid, pens and felt tips, I wanted to make the letters unreadable and transform the text into images. From the hundred sheets that I worked with during the process, I photographed 60. The destroyed letters have been grouped according to their context and colour.

The hidden text forms a varying rhythm on the surface of the paper. In some letters the pen has left deep marks. Some letters have been opened and closed so many times that the folds of the paper have deepened and the corners have all become brittle. As writing is concealed, the marks and layers on the surface, emerged in the course of time and from handling the letters, increase in significance.

“There are few events which don't leave a written trace at least. At one time or another, almost everything passes through a sheet of paper, the page of a notebook, or of a diary, or some other chance support (a Metro ticket, the margin of a newspaper, a cigarette packet, the back of an envelope etc.) on which, at varying speeds and by a different technique depending on the place, time or mood, one or another of the miscellaneous element that comprise the everydayness of life comes to be inscribed.” - Georges Perec