

# In Between The Shifts

*Sheyi Bankale  
in Conversation  
with Ingrid  
Fischer Jonge*

BIOGRAPHIES

**Ingrid Fischer** Jonge is the director of Museet for Fotokunst (The Museum of Photographic Art), Odense, Denmark. She holds a MA in Art History. She established The National Museum of Photography at The Royal Library in Copenhagen, Denmark where she was Head of the Museum, Head of Cultural Activities and in charge of The Department of Maps, Prints and Photographs from 1994-2007. She has curated many exhibitions and has written numerous books and studies.

**Sheyi Bankale** is the Curator of Next Level Projects and Editor of Next Level magazine. He has acted as judge and nominator for The Art Foundation, Google Photography Prize, Photography Festival BMW Prize, The Pix Pictet and Next Level Awards, and as an expert at many international portfolio reviews such as Houston Fotofest, Les Rencontres D'Arles, Finnish Museum of Photography and Scotiabank CONTACT. He is Visiting Professor of Photography at the

University of Derby and has lectured in Photography as Contemporary Art at Sotheby's Institute of Art, University of Westminster, City University - London, University for the Creative Arts and Centre of Contemporary Art - Lagos. Sheyi Bankale is renowned for his curatorial work in recent years at Next Level Projects, as well as curating an extensive touring exhibition on contemporary photography, *Alice in Wonderland*, for the European City of Culture 2011, Finland.

## **Sheyi Bankale (SB):**

It is interesting to visit Copenhagen because photography-as-art is still a relatively new phenomenon and that is something I am keen to explore. Why do you think this is the case? Do you see potential for its growth?

## **Ingrid Fischer Jonge (IFJ):**

Your point that it is a relatively new phenomenon is very true. This is something that has happened within the past ten years. There have been endless discussions as to why it has taken so long for photography to be taken seriously on the Danish art scene compared to other neighbours such as Sweden, Finland and Germany. One reason is that photographic education here in Denmark has privileged photojournalism and press photography. Young people seeking another kind of education usually study abroad, or they disappeared in the movie world. A few people persisted in pursuing photography as fine art but it was difficult for them to make a living. No

galleries were interested, no public institutions – only Museet for Fotokunst in Odense which started in 1987, and it didn't have much money to buy photography. It was almost impossible to make a living as a photographic artist until five years ago.

**SB:** What about Galleri Image in Aarhus?

**IFJ:** Yes, Galleri Image was the very first photography gallery – founded in 1977 - and it is a non-commercial gallery. They had Duane Michaels and all the important names back in the seventies and eighties. And we could have bought all that exciting work, but nobody did.

Statens Museum for Kunst (National Gallery of Denmark) didn't consider photography as art. It didn't begin to collect photography until very recently. There was one conservator called Jan Würtz Frandsen, who collected a little because he was interested in contemporary art and came across

some interesting photographs made by Danish artists. What we see here today is mostly because of him, however, Statens Museum for Kunst considered photography interesting, but not fine art. Instead, they made an agreement with The Royal Library that the librarian was given the task of collecting photography. A librarian, Bjørn Oschner, who was head of the Department of Maps and Prints, became our first photohistorian, but there was no budget and no acquisition plan to determine what kind of collection The Royal Library was building. The collecting policy at The Royal Library was somewhat arbitrary and the resulting collection is uneven. It has a strong collection of nineteenth-century French and Italian photography, but from 1900 onwards it is quite weak.

In 1994 I became head of the department at The Royal Library and I bought a lot of contemporary international and Danish photography. So it now holds some images by e.g. Andreas Gursky, Thomas Ruff, Rineke Dijkstra and Paul Graham.

**SB:** The Royal Library is still seen as one of the most important collections...

**IFJ:** This is because of Bjørn Ochsner. He collected all kinds of photography. He encouraged people to donate old photographs, so when people were moving and emptying their basements they came to the library with material. As a consequence, they have a huge collection of what you might call cultural historical photography. Amongst that, you can find a Catier-Bresson. For example, when I was working at The Royal Library one of my pleasures was to go into the archives and look at the portraits of - let's say - Jean-Paul Sartre. A lot of well-known photographers have taken portraits of him, but they were not registered. So I moved them from the Portrait collection to the museum collection and voila now the library have a photograph made by Gisèle Freund, for example.

**SB:** How large is the collection of Danish photography held at The Royal Library?

**IFJ:** Quite a lot, because photographers had nowhere else to go if they wanted to secure their work for the future. So they donated a lot.

**SB:** So the emphasis is to produce an archive to form a Danish legacy?

**IFJ:** Yes. It is very similar to the Bibliothèque Nationale de France. For historians it provides a very interesting social and cultural history archive. But, in terms of the history of art-photography, the collection is weak.

**SB:** Was there a defining moment in contemporary photography in Denmark?

**IFJ:** I would say it started in the nineties when young press photographers began securing international prices for their work. People started to be aware that this generation was important and that photography is something we should be interested in. At the same time more and more young people who wanted to work as an artist chose to work with photography as fine art. It was part of

an international movement. I mean, you have the Düsseldorf School, you have Cindy Sherman, you have all the people from the eighties, which was a boost. In Denmark we are a little late - ten years after everybody else, so in the nineties The Academy of Fine Art picked up on this trend, and Fatamorgana, a photo-school in Copenhagen was founded. A lot of well-known Danish photographers have studied there; They discovered art-photography there, and after Fatamorgana - because it provides only a short course - many of them continued to study in British or Belgian art schools.

**SB:** So international schools are favoured by Danish students?

**IFJ:** Yes. Today we have a very talented group of young photographers - the generation born in the seventies and eighties. It is as if the young people who want to work with art have discovered that it is possible to do so with photography. They can now even make a living out of it, and some of them are also working with video. In that way we have caught up with the rest of the world. In addition, we can see that Statens Museum for Kunst is now buying photography, as are other Danish museums.

**SB:** So is there a market for photography in Denmark?

**IFJ:** Yes. There is a growing market, although, still, there are not many private collectors, but they are increasing. We still have the problem that some of the private collectors haven't discovered what good photography is. They tend to like the spectacle of photography, preferring a kind of aesthetic or romanticised image, so I think we still have to "train" the private collectors. But I also think that the galleries are doing a good job in general. The problem or danger with the galleries is that they are driven by a commercial impulse. That is how it is.

**SB:** Obviously the economic situation has closed many doors, so it is not a straightforward path from graduate to gallery any longer, so in that way it is

good. But on the opposite side it reduces change because a lot of the work I have seen in galleries, as you said, has a kind of aesthetic content. Maybe one or two galleries are experimental in terms of what they are showing. How is the actual market in Copenhagen? Is it old money? Or is it new money?

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**IFJ:** It is new money, and they say that buying has dropped fifty percent since 2009. So there is hardly any money, I would say. You can feel this crisis in the art market, of course. It is new money and it is also the young generation who is collecting and that is good for the photography market. But the museums are only interested in the wellknown photographers educated from the Academy of Fine Art in Denmark or other international art schools. So we have the more traditional trained photographers left behind with no contact to galleries and no interest from the museums. I think that this is a sign that we are not mature enough. I think it will come. I mean, you see it everywhere else; you can create exhibitions with Gary Winogrand on one wall and Andy Warhol on the other wall in the same space with no problem, and no one will dispute it or find it difficult. No museum in Denmark is doing that today.

**Sh:** So is there a specific style here?

**IFJ:** Yes, the Düsseldorf style, the Danish way of the Düsseldorf style! I would also say that Paul Graham - in recent - years has inspired photographers with his work, for example, *American Night* (1998-2002), where you have hardly anything visible in the photographs,



Krass Clement  
**Untitled**, 1999  
C Type print, 115 x 116 cm  
Courtesy of the artist



Elisabeth Toubro  
**The Wandering Woman's  
Momentum**, 2012  
Courtesy of Galerie Mikael Andersen,  
Copenhagen, Denmark

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## Krass Clement, for example, doesn't have any pictures in any art museum in Denmark

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where it is a white-out and the picture is disappearing. Young Danish photographers are using a similar conceptual approach to the medium.

**SB:** How do artists support their practice? Is there a support mechanism? For instance, as the director of The Museum for Photographic Art do you display emerging Danish artists? Do you acquire work?

**IFJ:** Every second year we make an exhibition, which we call *This Way*. Here we have the opportunity to view photographers who we think are important. And yes we acquire works to the collection. We just have a small budget but with help from different foundations we get along. We concentrate on modern and contemporary photography, both Danish and international.

**SB:** It appears there is a high level of funding for visual arts. Is this evenly



Eva Koch  
**June's Lace**, 2011  
Museet for Fotokunst, Brandts Klaedefabrik,  
Odense, Denmark. Out-door projection,  
documented by Maroinca Lauridsen



Kirsten Klein  
**Snow cloud over Livø Bredning**, 1990  
Gelatin silver print, 44.1 x 76 cm  
Courtesy of the artist

distributed or are the usual suspects regular recipients?

**IFJ:** Artists from The Royal Academy have more chance of getting grants from the Danish Arts Council, for example. A short semester at Fatamorgana doesn't give you the possibility to get grants and photographers from the classical photoworld have also problems getting grants from the Art Council and other funds. Krass Clement, for example, doesn't have any pictures in any art museum in Denmark. No Danish museum buys his photographs, because somehow the question remains, 'is he really a photographer'? It is weird. But he belongs to the old generation, outside the academic world - as does Kirsten Klein.

**SB:** But they are, nonetheless, important within the medium?

**IFJ:** Yes, they are both born in the forties and have insisted on only doing

their own work even though they didn't earn anything. They have been a kind of light for the young people: 'if they can, we can'! So in that way, too, they have been important.

**SB:** Going back to the Museum. I'm trying to understand the role it plays in terms of supporting the acquisition and display of national art. Do you have a strategy regarding the percentage of national and international exhibitions?

**IFJ:** We have an exhibition programme where we try to have, lets say, the 'cold' and the 'warm' exhibitions, that is contemporary, which have a small audience, and modern exhibitions which have a large audience. We show both Danish and international photography. We are not only working with Danish photography, but we give a platform for the young Danish talented photographer. We do support the young talent with a show or acquisitions or a portfolio in our magazine KATALOG. So

yes, we are working after a strategy. In addition the museum is part of a group of five Nordic museums of photography that are producing touring shows.

**SB:** Is the group supported financially?

**IFJ:** Each museum finds the budget. We don't earn money from the shows we're producing. But we have the satisfaction of knowing that they are shown abroad, and that we are supporting Danish photographers worldwide. Our contacts are different, so we can promote artists who are not represented by the commercial galleries, enabling them to find a space and public through our endeavours - like Katya Sander, for example. And I think the work we do is important. In addition, the institution arranging a festival called Fototriennale.dk. Fortunately, it runs only every third year, otherwise we would die of exhaustion!