

## Finnish photography [1950 – 1980]

- > June 21 th ... September 28 th 2008
- > Opening:  
Friday June 20 th 2008  
at 7.00 pm



© Ari Jaskari, *Pau kelluu*,  
1982

100%  
Finlande



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www.museeniepce.com/dossiers\_presse

**Open**

every day  
except Tuesdays and holidays,  
9.30 ... 11.45 am  
and 2.00 ... 5.45 pm  
July and August  
10.00 am ... 6 pm

**Entrance fee**

free entrance

**Access**

By the A 6,  
exit 25 Chalon Nord  
or 26 Chalon Sud  
SNCF train station in Chalon  
Close to the TGV station  
Le Creusot-Montchanin  
(20 min. from Chalon by car)  
Lyon-Saint-Exupéry Airport  
(an hour from Chalon by car)

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## [1950 – 1980]

**As part of the « 100% Finlande » season run by Culturesfrance (Ministère des Affaires étrangères and the Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication), the musée Nicéphore Niépce is organising an exhibition of Finnish photography from the fifties to the eighties.**

**It is being held in tandem with the Finnish Museum of Photography in Helsinki and is a chance for a French audience to get to know a little known facet of the history of European photography; black and white, essentially documentary photography a thousand leagues from the contemporary “arty” scene.**

**The exhibition also highlights the importance of amateur photography clubs and press reportage in the development of post-war Finnish photography and into the seventies.**

Friday, June 20th 2008,  
**Press conference**  
at 2.30 pm

As is the case in a number of other countries, photography has only recently come to be regarded as an art form in recent years in Finland. If today a generation of young artists are making a name for themselves abroad — such as **Elina Brotherus** who was artist in residence at the musée Nicéphore Niépce in 1999 and had a huge exhibition there in 2006 —, Finnish photography, more than most, remains in debt to amateur photography whose practitioners claimed artistic recognition for their work.

Like the rest of Europe, Finland was bled dry by the Second World War. Photography clubs, the only place where technical training was available and that organised exhibitions based on competitions, slowly restarted their pre-war activities despite the penury of material. This is one of the main characteristics of the history of Finnish photography, it grew up around the alliance between professionals and amateurs, perfecting their craft and exhibiting together. These photography clubs were often far from purely artistic. They enabled many people to fulfil what was then considered to be just a pastime by putting them in contact with professional photographers and studios notably with in-house competitions. The standard of photography was thus measured with awards and other trophies. These clubs occupied a huge place until the sixties, promoting a normative photography that reflected the country itself. Traditional themes were covered: well-behaved young girls in head scarves, children playing, symbolic, sparse landscapes, with no superfluous details. The reference was clearly pictorialism. The light took precedence over the subject, it was treated as a metaphysical phenomenon with marked contrasts. These images give off a melancholic, meditative, evocative atmosphere, typical of the natural introversion of the Finns.

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*“Life, the gracious lightness of rhythm, supported by the richness of tone in meridional photography are unknown to the Finn who above all is in search of calm harmony”* (Santeri Levas, 1946).

It is a photography that is above all centred on the treatment of a medium, and younger photographers like Mikko Savolainen or Ismo Hölttö tried to free themselves from 1966 onwards giving their work a more documentary feel.

Major changes appeared in the fifties due to contact with Swedish and German photographers, through publications for exhibitions and the rare press available on the subject.

The abstract and introspective experimental work on Subjective Photography (Subjektive Fotografie), whose followers claimed the status of artist revolutionised Finnish photography. The images remained stark, showing the essential and eliminating the overabundance of details using filters or reducing contrast in the printing process. Composition and intense black and whites were what most photographers concentrated on.

The sixties saw Finnish photography submerged under a wave of humanism. An exhibition entitled *The Family of Man* was first shown in Finland in 1959, four years after its creation by Edward Steichen. It brought together over five hundred so called “reportage” photographs taken by two hundred and seventy three photographers of all nationalities and it was built around a profound belief in the universal and positives values of humanity. It highlighted the daily themes common to all peoples: birth, childhood, work, love, death... Its impact on the Finnish public and photographers was immense. This exhibition led to the real popularisation of photography in the country.

The humanist and narrative character of the resulting images is nonetheless subject to quite traditional compositions. The subjects dealt the social and rural history of the country; the photographers, from then on closely associated with journalists in this booming period for reportage, reached out to those living far from the capital, the families that were left behind and the poverty-stricken minorities (see *Mustalaisraportti*, a series on gypsies by Mikko Savolainen in 1967-1971) ; they bear witness to the economic and industrial reconstruction of Finland, one of the fastest in terms of urbanisation in Europe; they followed the important demographic movement that accompanied these big changes. In the seventies, Ben Kaila and Risto Vuorimies thus documented the emigration of Finnish workers to Sweden (*Siirtosuomalaisia*). Photographers travelled to the neighbouring countries of Karelia, Iceland or Poland, to draw the portrait

of a population where all trace of osmosis between man and nature, so popular a few decades earlier, was abolished in favour of a “warts and all” authenticity. At the same time Jorma Puranen explored Lapland and met with the Saamis (*Marf leu'dd*).

Photography became more radical. The images became more and more stark (Pentti Sammallahti) and the subjects affirmed, definitively, in black and white, the melancholic and dark vision of an original people and landscape.

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Over 150 photographs are presented in this exhibition bringing together the artists listed below. They come from the collection of the Finnish Museum of Photography and from the photographers themselves:

- / **Bert Carpelan** (born in 1932)
  - / **Fredrik Hackman** (born in 1925)
  - / **Trond Hedström** (1917-1982)
  - / **Pauli Huovila** (1916-1969)
  - / **Ismo Hölttö** (born in 1940)
  - / **Ari Jaskari** (born in 1958)
  - / **Ben Kaila** (born in 1949) et **Risto Vuorimies** (born in 1948)
  - / **Ismo Kajander** (born in 1939)
  - / **Birger Lundsten** (1898-1977)
  - / **P.J. Lundsten** (born in 1930)
  - / **Kristian Runeberg** (born in 1934)
  - / **Matti Saanio** (1925-2006)
  - / **Mikko Savolainen** (born in 1933)
  - / **Märtha Söderholm** (born in 1928)
  - / **Stagge Söderholm** (born in 1929)
  - / **Jukka Male** (born in 1954)
  - / **Jorma Puranen** (born in 1951)
  - / **Pentti Sammallahti** (born in 1950)
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## [1950 – 1980]

### **Curators of the exhibition:**

**François Cheval,**

Head curator of the musée Nicéphore Niépce

**Elina Heikka,**

director of the Finnish Museum of Photography

**Leena Saraste,**

Photography historian from the Finnish Museum of Photography

### **“100% Finlande” is organised:**

In Finland, by:

the **Ministry of education**, the **Ministry for Foreign Affairs**  
and the **Finnish embassy in France**.

In France, by:

the **Ministère des Affaires étrangères et européennes**,  
the **Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication**,  
the **French embassy in Finland** and **Culturesfrance**.

### **General curator:**

**Iris Schwanck**

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### **With the support of the following foundations in Finland:**

Wihurin Rahasto, Svenska Kulturfonden, Niilo Helanderin Säätiö,  
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SKR – Finnish Cultural Foundation

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