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**DEVELOPMENTAL PROCESS OF AN ARTIST
- A PHOTOGRAPHER WHO TELLS STORIES
ABOUT LIVES OF ORDINARY PEOPLE**

MASTER'S THESIS

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Abstract /Rationale

This essay is part of a final project in the Master of Culture and Arts, Entrepreneurship in the Arts and Photography at The Novia University of Applied Sciences. The other part of the final project is an artwork that will be exhibited during graduation in December 2022 in Jakobstad. Diana had an idea to create photographic work from two personal stories that are very different. She thinks it is very important to give a voice to ordinary people who fight against injustice or have been subject to injustice, violence or faced trauma, create photographic works from their stories and thus draw the attention of others to stories that traditionally go untold in our society. In her opinion, these are the stories that need to be brought to our attention and discussed in society.

I will first be telling the story about the search of the family of a 11-year-old boy who has an incurable disease for a treatment, I intended to take photographs only, but the work then developed into video recordings. The idea was to make a short documentary about the injustice the young boy faces when denied experimental treatment in his home country Iceland and his family's search for a drug treatment that could help slow down the disease. During this time, the family goes through a roller coaster of emotions, constantly alternating between hope and disappointment. I took documentary photos and videos of the family and followed them in their daily life, both in good and bad times.

In the second story I tell about an ordinary woman who has suffered great injustice in life, been subject to violence and beatings from early childhood and battled cancer. In my photographs I lend the woman a voice to tell her story of the traumas she has suffered since childhood and in her adult life. I took photographs which I then developed into a video so that the photographic work was both a flow and a whole with a musical composition underneath.

In order to create photographic work from these stories, I had to start gaining the trust of the people who are the subjects of my stories. I also had to show them patience and respect throughout the work process. Once I had gained their trust and they were ready to share their life experiences, there was an opening. They started talking openly with me without any inhibition and their life stories flow out just like water. I made sure they got enough space (time) and freedom to tell their stories.

I felt very empowered telling these stories just as I have felt in my artistic career as a photographer in recent years. In 2017, I did a documentary photography in one of the most remote areas in Iceland, where I photographed the daily life of my family. The place is Galtarviti in Vestfirðir and the work is called *Timelessness* (2017). Also in the year 2017 I did a documentary project about a young girl with a rare disease called Alternating Hemiplegia of childhood, *Living with a rare disease* (2019). Her parents are desperate about her condition and their emotions visibly flow in the pictures. I was like a fly on the wall for almost three years photographing them behind closed doors but only a selected few could be in their lives. I was well aware when I started working on the photographic projects in this master's program that trust, carefulness, patience and good preparation are all equally important ingredients of good photographic work.

The primary aim with the photographic work I did during my studies was to help people develop the important skill of empathy - the ability to put themselves in the shoes of others - nurture their own empathy and through that their humanity. At the same time, the aim was to spark hope among those who have stories similar to my subjects and want to break free from the clutches of helplessness. By telling personal stories, I thus want to spark hope in people who are struggling in life and at the same time give back something positive to society. Stories that at first sight seem full of ugliness can indeed convey great beauty and foster empathy.

Because of interest in teaching photography, I also developed and taught a photographic workshop the aim of which was to help people interested in photography appreciate the potential of the art form, particularly in telling real stories

Keywords:

Injustice, Empathy, Hope, Ordinary, Photography.

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Introduction

“A picture is worth a thousand words” is a phrase many of us know, a phrase many of us also believe conveys considerable truth. The photographer has a camera to record what he wants to express in his work. In an interview with a journalist Sigrun Sigurdardottir, well known Icelandic photographer Einar Falur Ingólfsson says: *“The camera doesn't decide what to document, but there is some awareness behind each picture. Today's focus in many media is to paint some kind of glossy picture where the reality is some kind of an artificial world ”* (Sigurdardottir, 2022). These words of Einar Falur are still very relevant today although spoken some 15 years ago. Since then, major societal changes have occurred that have impacted greatly the use of the photographic medium. Social media has become an inherent part of our lives. It is a medium many people use to constantly photograph themselves, albeit in an artificial world. I often feel that reality is hidden in photographs on these media. That's one reason why I place a lot of emphasis on telling normal people's real stories with my photos. Through real stories, the story itself, the subject and the creative process are placed in the forefront. The photographic work I created during my studies, *“There is hope”* and *“Red tangles”* aim at creating empathy among people. As Einar Falur says on the aim of his own work in the aforementioned interview: *“to demonstrate the potential of photography to speak a language that everyone can understand, no matter what race, nation or profession people belong to”* (Sigurðardóttir, 2022).

In this essay I discuss how photos can have a great impact on people and help us to feel empathy by putting ourselves in other people's shoes. I share my process in creating realistic photographic stories about ordinary people and their life experiences that are important to share to others. I also touch upon how the study programme has strengthened me, both as photographer, but also in the creation of photographic art that was developed with both patience and passion. I believe it is important to promote education about photography –

help people who are interested in photography increase their knowledge and understanding of the profession. The photography course I developed and taught during my studies was based on my passion for photography and the art form. I will discuss that project in more detail in the essay, and in the appendix of the essay I will include comments from several students who attended the workshops.

The research methodology

In my two photographic works I used a qualitative research method based on open interviews. Garðar Gíslason Sociologist says that a qualitative research method consists among other things, of *"looking at individuals and society in a broad context, putting oneself in the shoes of others and thereby gaining a further understanding of their situation"* (Gíslason Garðar. 2016). In both works I used photography as a tool to record people's life experiences in a realistic way. Before I started, I put out a call for people to participate in the project – to bring me their personal stories. I received five very different stories from people who had one thing in common: they felt they had faced injustice in their home country, Iceland. After reading all the stories, I decided to pick two, analyze them further and develop into artwork. Following the decision on which stories I would tell I formulated a research plan for each and subsequently research and collection of data began. I decided to use a qualitative research method (interviews). I spent considerable time preparing questions for in-depth interviews that were recorded on the phone. Following the interviews, substance analytical work began. This work revolved around writing up and reviewing the data collected through the interviews. After examining the data I decided which techniques within photography would best suit the stories.

The two stories are quite different in content and one occurs in the present and the other in the past. The first one *"There is hope,"* about a 11 year old boy who has an incurable disease and his parents who are fighting for a better quality of life for their child and clinging to the hope of a cure, was evolving as I was photographing it. I decided a short documentary would be the best form for this story. The boy was supposed to go to the United States for treatment shortly after I started filming his story in the summer of 2022. When the work was almost finished a situation arose with the pharmaceutical company sponsoring the drug trial for the little boy to. It demanded that I would not reveal anything publicly about the boy and his story until the trial was finished in three years time. At that point in time, I had taken a large amount of photos and videos that will come in handy later because the parents requested that I

continue photographing the family in the trial process I was frustrated and felt hurt but instead of seeking cover I turned directly to the other life story – a story of a woman who has suffered a series of traumas in her life. The timing turned out to be perfect because precisely at this moment she was ready to tell me her story and make it public. Few months earlier when I first contacted her she was not ready to come forward and be visible but now the tone was different. The reason why she didn't want to tell her story initially was to protect her children. Besides that, she felt ashamed. It was my luck that she changed her mind, found the strength and freedom to share her life experiences and help others. While she was willing to be seen in the photos, she did not want her name to be published.

For the next few weeks, I devoted myself to research and prepared for the task by reading books and articles related to the topic of home violence and abuse to be able to put myself in the shoes of the woman. We also had many conversations, and I visited her several times before interviewing her. I recorded her story on the phone. A few weeks later, filming began. I had to stage scenes to show the violence she suffered, in similar way as it is done in the movies. The difference is, however, that she is not an actress but a person who was actually abused. It is not documentary photography, but narrative photography that I create in a poetic way. All shootings were decided in advance and the film structure was organized in pairs. The colors are also important in the work, and white and red, which are dominant, make the workflow. The red color signifies the blood, nature and her traumas, and the white color is a symbol of hope. The photographic work developed into poetic images where the woman's story is told in a graphic way. I put the photographs on video so that they can roll continuously in a graphic way and become a single entity with the composition K/Half Noise composed by the band Múm, sounding under.

The methodology I used during the photography workshop was to teach students to examine their own photographs and those of others in a useful and constructive way.

Project development

At the beginning of the master's programme, many interesting options opened up for me in photography. I wanted to make my own photographic works, I wanted to be a curator and I also wanted to teach. It is interesting how the studies led me forward on my path, encouraged me to take on challenging tasks and dig deeper into the subjects in the world of art and photography. Meeting many different artists and photographers and talking to them about the art world had a great impact on me. Networking is very important. It helps reminding yourself of the importance of being active in the art world. For example, belonging to a group of artists can help a lot in taking space and attracting attention, which is a big factor in the success of artists. The workshops across Europe that I participated in during the studies helped to expand my understanding of art and further develop my artwork. Photographs that show humanity have always fascinated me. I unexpectedly went on that path in the world of art and photography, although it does not surprise me now where I am. I have been led forward and the subjects I have tackled I have not taken for granted. However, I was very grateful to have been trusted with the projects I have worked on. Susan Sontag in the book *On Photography* quotes Helmut Gernsheim who says: "*Photography is the only "language" that is understood in all parts of the world and bridges all nations and cultures. Photography truly reflects life and events, allows us to share in the hopes and despair of others, and illuminates social conditions. We become eyewitnesses to humanity and inhumanity*" (Sontag Susan, 2008). I think Gernsheim describes here very well what photography is. I discuss this in the photography works I developed during my studies. In the end, I decided to do two photographic works, on the one hand "There is Hope," a story of a 11-year-old boy with a rare disease, and "Red Tangles," a woman's story of domestic violence and other traumas. In addition, I created and taught several photography courses where I mentored different groups of students.

Photography workshop/Taking better photos

I received encouragement from Dr. Paul Bevan, my tutor teacher during my programme of study, in the beginning of my studies to create my own photography course. I developed and organized an 8-hour course that I divided into two 4-hour sessions. I held it in the living room of my home, where I created a homely environment. The aim of the course was to encourage photography enthusiasts to delve deeper into the world of photography in a useful and fun way. The course discussed image structure, creative thinking, light and shadow, both natural and artificial light and how different light works together. I also taught about the difference between portraits and landscapes. The difference between good and bad photographs was also discussed - what to watch out for and what to focus on when taking photos and what makes a good photo even better. Participants get many benefits from attending a course like this, such as taking better photographs, activating their creativity, developing ideas graphically, examining photographs in a useful way and, most importantly, enjoying even more taking photographs. The format of the course was both lectures and practical exercises. I also took advantage of the use of diverse photo books in the course. In total, I held eight workshops over a course of one year, from the fall of 2021 to fall 2022 with 50 participants in total attending. Ljósíð, a rehabilitation center for cancer patients in Iceland, heard about the course and invited me to hold the course with them in October 2022. The participants were 14 women who are battling cancer. The course was a good platform for them to meet and learn photography together in an uplifting way.

The writer Susan Sontag is one of those who has written a lot about photography and her books have been taught in many universities around the world. Knowledge of photographs has increased greatly in recent years, especially with increased discussions about how a photograph can affect others by both evoking both empathy and fear (Sontag, 2008). To address this, I had my students look at photographs that are in the photography books of female photographers Diane Arbus (Arbus Doon and Israel Marvin, 2011-2012) and Dorothea

Lange (Spirn Anne Whiston, 2008). The work of Lange generated a lot of discussion but these are photographs from the Great Depression in the United States that she took in the nineteen thirties. Diane Arbus's photographs are on the other hand of people who were hardly or not seen on the streets and were marginalized in society during the last century. The participants were very surprised how much the photographs moved them emotionally, especially when looking at the story behind the photographs.

There is hope

There is hope is a photographic work about a 11-year-old boy with a rare incurable disease. This is also the story of the boy's parents, who are holding on to the hope that their son will be allowed to participate in a trial of a new drug that could potentially slow down his disease. The boy has an incurable and fatal muscular dystrophy that destroys his muscles. Eventually they stop working and his quality of life will decline. The mother says: *"I had fought a lot for my son because he had the chance to get drugs that were supposed to slow down the progress of his disease. Unfortunately, our request to have the drugs for him was not approved. The drugs are approved in the United States but not in Europe and since Iceland is part of Europe's single market, my son was refused the exception to have it. As a parent, I experienced great anger but at the same time was filled with enthusiasm to fight for my child. I fought hard to find treatment for my son. I wasn't going to give up even though we didn't get help at home. He had hope and I had to fight for him"* (48-year-old woman, 2022). It is true that the family could have bought the drugs themselves in the United States, but these drugs are very expensive and it was and it impossible for them to pay such an amount. When the boy was diagnosed with the disease only 4 years old, the doctors said that there was nothing that could be done for him in Iceland. Due to the small size of the country, there are no clinical trials in progress and therefore no help to be had. The USA, on the other hand, is at the forefront of drug trials for this disease, but it is very difficult to get into trials with them. The family's only chance for keeping their hope for help alive was to move to the United States. That meant they had to

leave their two older children at home. The father is a fisherman and has to work for his family in Iceland but will have one foot in the United States for the next few years. The mother, however, moved with the boy to the United States and is looking for experiments for him there.

The mother is a unique person and a great fighter against the injustice she believes her child was subject to in Iceland. The mother says: "*Living in a country where there is no help, looking for clinical trials so that one's child can get some help and having to relocate to look for such an experiment. It's a big emotional rollercoaster and I think it's very important that this story is said and heard. Chronically ill children are so hidden in society. Because of their illnesses, they and their lives are often not visible. We need to focus on this group to improve their lives and uphold their rights*" (48-year-old woman, 2022). I know the mother, we were childhood friends. It helped both in building trust and to get permission to film their story. However, I did not know the son, who is the main subject of the story, the father, nor the two older children. I had to earn their trust and with time and patience I succeeded. I have great respect for the life stories of my subjects and with the cooperation of the family, and their respect for my project, the work proceeded very well. I accompanied the son and mother to the United States and was there with them in the process when they said goodbye to their home and family and friends who stayed behind. Relocations can be complicated and difficult, and although the outcome will hopefully be positive for the life of the whole family, I left I felt a lot of pain when I left them. Their case is a case of "computer says no." Because the Icelandic authorities did not approve experimental drug to slow down his disease a very sick child and his mother had to leave their home to keep their hope alive for a better life. There was hope in the USA that the boy could be included in a trial of a new drug and that hope was realized. He was approved for a 3-year trial.

As mentioned, I was saddened to hear that the pharmaceutical company that wanted to pay for the drug trial for the boy demanded that I could neither show pictures nor talk about the story of the boy and the family for the next few years until the trial was over. At this moment

I felt a certain hopelessness - that all my work had been in vain and that the master's programme was coming to nothing. I also began to doubt that it had been right to delve so deeply into this story and form such a strong bond with the boy. However, I had a lot of passion for the project and I wanted others to see and feel the injustice they had been subjected to. Was it a mistake to put my heart and into creating a realistic story with my photos? Was it worth it, especially considering the story was getting away from me? The parents talked to me soon after I came from the United States where I photographed the mother and boy in a new country. The family has great respect for the project and want their story to be told in the future and requested that I continue to photograph and work on this project with them. With this encouragement my heart filled with hope and my strength rose again. The parents agreed that the photo project "*There is hope*" should be made into a documentary film about the search for help in a new country and hope for a better quality of life for their boy. While this was happening I found it comforting to read what the Icelandic photographer Spessi said about his teacher when he was studying photography in the Netherlands and his own reflection on mistakes "*If you are confident in what you are doing, you don't have to do it*", said the art teacher. Spessi says later: "*I have come across it throughout my life that the insecurity and the unexpected lies in what you don't know. That's where the adventure is and that's where something new is created, something brilliant. Mistakes encourage you to find a new way*" (National Museum of Iceland, 2021). The unexpected occurred with this project. Instead of being finalized, it has become a long-term project. With the help of one of the most experienced documentary filmmakers in Iceland, Hrafnhildi Gunnarsdóttur (Ifri, 2022). it will become a documentary film.

Photos from the Artwork There is Hope
by Dána Júlíusdóttir 2022.



Red Tangles - a story that couldn't be told

There has been a great awareness in Iceland in recent years about domestic violence, its seriousness and long-term impact on people's lives. To bring light to its seriousness, it is important to talk about it openly and not behind closed doors, as has been done for decades. In Iceland, reporting to the police about domestic violence in the first six months of 2022 were higher than ever before. In total 651 reports of domestic violence were received, compared to 451 in the first six months of 2017, five years ago. As stated in the report of the National Police Commissioner from 2022, an average of 205 reports of domestic violence are received per month, or 7 reports per day. (The Police, 2022). In view of the increase in reporting of domestic violence in recent years and the lack of discussion about it in Icelandic society I found it my duty as a photographer to draw attention to this issue which is carefully hidden in most societies. Domestic violence affects everyone, it is a plague infecting all societies. We need talk about what is uncomfortable and sideline those who do not want to address domestic violence, those who want to continue keeping the lid on the discussion. I made a decision to make a work of art based on the difficult life experience of an Icelandic woman who was subjected to domestic violence for years, later got serious cancer but worked herself through her trauma.

When I took the photographs for this story, I used my imagination before I shot the pictures and had already drawn the subject into the pictureframe before I clicked and the picture was created. In this way I had created the picture in my mind before it was created. I realized that I couldn't film the violence itself so I had to carefully prepare each shot individually to tell the story in a sincere way. Her story should be seen and felt in the pictures. I decided that we would try to go deep into her mind and emotions when the violence happened. She went back to her memories, her mind wandered and sadness and fear overwhelmed her. A case in point is when we went to the place where the most serious violence took place, a small country

hotel just outside of Reykjavik where her then spouse almost. He beat her and thrust his fingers into her mouth. She managed to escape into the next room where she huddled in one corner of the shower and there the blood dripped from her. She was very afraid for her life at this moment. It was then that she realized that she had been living in constant fear in the relationship. Her body and soul was broken and her heart crushed. She saw no future and hoped for death. She had thought the man she loved loved her back. Soon after this serious attack, she was diagnosed with breast cancer and subsequently had to undergo 15 operations and a mastectomy. She lay in bed for weeks and just wanted to die. She was desperate, no hope for a better life. She survived and a few years later found the strength to face the trauma and began a healing process. She meditates, surrounds herself with water in nature listens to music and paints. She also pains nature and the mountains where she finds strength.

It took a lot for her to tell her story - go back to those difficult feelings and negative energy. But her will to tell her story was strong. She felt it was important to be able to encourage others who have a similar trauma story as her own to come forward. We agreed that if one person leaves an abusive relationship after seeing the work, then our goal has been achieved.

There are two photographers who have moved me in particular in relation to pictures on domestic violence. They are Donna Ferrato, who is a photographer and activist, and Valérie Mesquita, who is a photographer and actress. The three of us have one thing in common: we want to break the silence about domestic violence and feel it is necessary to tell the stories of those who have suffered violence. We are from different countries and continents. Ferrato is from the USA, Mesquita is from Brazil and I'm from little Iceland. What I found interesting to discover when looking at their work is that we photograph the subjects and stories in different ways. Ferrato films when the violence takes place in people's homes (Newman Report, 2022) and is like a fly on the wall, while Mesquita films the stories of the violence and tells about 15 women and their testimonies who were subjected to domestic violence in Brazil, using actresses and herself to play victims of domestic violence, Mesquita says it's striking how

many stories there are about domestic violence, and most often it's someone close to them who perpetrates it. (Lenculture, 2022).

Music is very important to me in my daily life and one of the reasons why I wanted to have music in my photography work. Finding the right music for the work was, however not without problems and I had to go through many hurdles to get the music I wanted. One composition by Jóhann Jóhannson, a well-known Icelandic composer who died young a few years ago, touched the woman a lot and she has listened to it a lot in healing and recovery. I thought it was very important to have that music in the piece. I wrote to the copyright holders to get permission to use it in my artwork. It took a long time to get answers and from the start there was a lot of reluctance to let me use his music, I had to explain in great detail who was performing the work and also there was a demand for copyright payment every time I would show the work in the future. After several emails back and forth I made the decision that it was not possible to use a composition by Jóhann in my work. I was thus at a starting point and had to think about what music that influenced me could replace it. A composition by the Icelandic band Múm was the answer. It has a place in my heart and I listened to it a lot as I healed myself to deal with the traumas I have faced in life. The composition I chose flows well over the overall image of the photographic work in *Red Tangles* and my own emotions and traumas also reflect the work. I contacted the band Múm and they unanimously agreed that I could use their composition in my work. It was a great relief and I have a lot of respect for Múm for trusting me with their music. The piece of music that I play with the images in the piece is called K/Half Noise from the album FINALLY WE ARE NO ONE and was recorded in Galtarviti in the summer of 2002 (Wikipedia, 2022).

Me and the band Múm have in common that Galtarviti is very dear to us and we have stayed there for a long time in complete isolation from the universe. Galtarviti is one of the most remote places in Iceland with no electricity and no telephone connection, and no road. To get to this place of complete isolation where nature surrounds you and creativity flows one

needs to either sail or walk four hours over high mountains. Since 2012 I have spent many summers there with caring people who have changed my life for the better. I believe that Galtarviti found me and I it because of my passion for nature and the arts. There I saw the world in a deeper context and discovered that art teaches us to see what is important in life.

When my work was still taking shape, I travelled the countryside in Iceland with a small group of artists and got constructive feedback on the work *Red Tangles*. I showed the work to a selected group of people, both photographers and visual artists. Following the viewing, there were interesting and constructive discussions about the work. Everyone expressed their opinion, gave constructive criticism supported with arguments. I used the criticism to develop the work further and make it more wholistic. While I agreed with most of the criticism I disagreed with some but it was good to be able to talk about my work in this way. I thrive on listening to creative people talk about my artwork. Some people wanted me to have subtitles for some pictures because it brought the viewer down to earth to look at shocking pictures, but most of them were against it, because the pictures should be self-explanatory. I also became more confident after the feedback session how I wanted the result to be.

On the final day of the photography course, I held for 14 women in rehab for cancer, I invited them to watch the work *Red Tangles* and give me feedback. It was very interesting to listen to their feedback. They found the work realistic and could clearly see that the woman in the pictures was not acting. Everyone agreed to this. They also felt her fear and anxiety in the pictures. They all felt connected to the work, saw the hope and strength which was beautiful to witness. They also considered it a great honor to be asked to give feedback.

The photographic work *Red Tangles* is a poetic Video Slide Show Artwork, 6 minutes and 35 seconds long. It is about a woman who has suffered many traumas in her life, including domestic violence and dealing with a deadly disease, cancer. The blackness of depression is overwhelming but she refuses to give up and heals herself with the help of faith, nature and

art. She goes on to study art, reignites her spark of life and her hope grows. Finally she feels freedom, happiness and strength to face life anew. This work will be shown at the joint exhibition of graduate students in the Master of Culture and Arts, Entrepreneurship in the Arts, Photography at Novia University in Jakobstad, Finland in December 2022. Red Tangles will also be shown at the Rusk music festival (Rusk, 2022). in Jakobstad in November 2022 together with several of my fellow students at Novia University and it is a great honor for me to participate. The are work is designed to be enjoyed in an enclosed space where black walls surround it and one large screen fills an entire wall. There is one bench inside the space where people can sit and watch.

Photos from the Artwork Red Tangles
by Dána Júlíusdóttir 2022.



Conclusion

Both the stories I used in my artwork have in common they are traumatic stories. Stories of ordinary people who have had to deal with difficult situations and make big decisions that change their lives for the future. The people want their stories to be heard and be visible in society in order to be able to influence others who are, or have been, in the same situation as themselves. The balance between injustice and justice can often be very complicated. The people have had to fight for justice and for that purpose have sacrificed a lot. Moving to a foreign country where you don't know anyone and tearing your son away from friends and family is painful. Being subjected to repeated domestic violence for so many years divides and always hides the pain because you have known nothing but violence since you were a child, it destroys your identity. Despite the beatings, she thought he loved her. The setbacks come like complications. The breast is taken because cancer is found there and injustice overwhelms her, but she holds on to the hope of a better life and heals herself and gains strength by drawing on nature and painting. Our collaboration was unique and our communication was sincere, warm and there was a great understanding that this was a story that needed to be told. In my mind, she showed great courage. She is a role model for many women and others who have a similar story to tell. Violence thrives in silence, but the work of art opens up what is uncomfortable. However, there is also beauty in the story because there is always hope that never disappears.

My aim with my artwork is to awaken empathy among people and make them think about the injustice that some people in the society where they live suffer. There are many untold stories out there that should be told. As an artist, I have the power to use stories in an artistic way and use different ways to convey their message and create discussions about subjects that most people find uncomfortable to see and talk about.

The subjects I photographed in the two art works had in common that they worked through the trauma in a positive way. They also experienced freedom in telling their story, despite the fact that the filming was often very difficult and very emotional. They had to dig deep into their feelings in order for the story to appear true to the audience. Photographer Mary Ellen Mark talks about how deeply she dives into the subject when she takes photographs and is telling a story to make the story true (Leica Camera, 2022). Being a role model for others, holding on to hope and never giving up was what motivated my subjects to tell their story. They found joy in the fact that the photographs would be publicly displayed and could become an encouragement for others that there is hope for a better life. They also experienced freedom in the fact that others knew what they had gone through in their lives in order to be able to look forward to the future.

I made a video slide show of Red Tangles where photographs and music from the music Band Múm flows together as a whole. The other work about the boy with a chronic illness and his family is still in progress. Both works had a profound and emotional impact on me. Photographic works frame certain aspects of reality that are important for others to see in order to feel empathy and open up to love. Photographer Vivian Maier took pictures of those who were overlooked, people who were aloof and invisible to others. Vivian loved photography more than being a nanny which she was for 40 years and took a lot of pictures of the children she looked after (Vivianmaierphoto, 2022). When I think of Vivian Maier I don't think only of the photographs she took but also the life she lived. I find it sad to think about it that no one knew about her photographs until she was dead. She never got to enjoy them with an audience. I share her experience in having worked full time as a flight attendant and being a photographer at the same time for many years. I did this even though I knew my passion was photography. I finally had the opportunity to change careers after working as a flight attendant for 20 years and now work as a photographer. I am grateful to be able to do what I have a passion for although it can also be very challenging.

My vision of art is to see what is invisible to others, to see the world in a deeper context and convey that vision to the audience. I want to explore what makes stories interesting and get to know the person behind the story. It was a true privilege to have the opportunity to do a master's program at Novia University under the guidance of Dr Paul Bevan. The program deepened my view of the art world, different art forms and methods. Participating in diverse art workshops across Europe, where the students and the teacher looked at diverse art together and met interesting people with whom we could talk about art and life, gave me an important insight into the (artistic) life. At these workshops, I had the opportunity to meet people I would otherwise would not have had access to if not for my studies. There, I also formed relationships with people that I can continue to develop in the future as an artist.

It is a strength that when you find yourself in a complicated situation to be solution oriented. It was truly a shock to have to cancel the project *There is* hope in the middle of the development process, but I made a decision to embrace the experiences I had already had with the project and focus on the future. I will continue with the project and will have more and stronger material to work with. I got Hrafnhildi Gunnarsdóttir (Iffr.com, nd), a very well known documentary filmmaker in Iceland, to collaborate with me on making the story into a documentary. We have started working on a budget, a project plan and looking for grants. Our estimate is that the work will take four years. I consider myself lucky to have Hrafnhildi working with me and am very much looking forward to working with her in the future.

The lessons I learned from the photography courses I created and taught during my studies are manifold. The courses created an interesting and fun forum for discussions about how photography can influence people and what it takes to take good photographs. The participants learned to better appreciate the photographic form to tell stories and move people (show empathy) and how they could communicate their stories, and the stories of other people's lives through this art form. The Light, a rehabilitation center for cancer patients, has already requested more courses, including an advanced course in photography. The

representatives of Ljósid gave me the feedback that the course had fulfilled their patients' needs to learn something new and fun and created cohesion among them. I was grateful to hear how happy they were with the course. Their encouragement has strengthened my belief that I should continue teaching and creating photography courses. Photography can be a trigger for interesting and informative discussions, but also for people to come together and form strong bonds through photography. With the courses I have already created a job opportunity for myself, as the courses have started to be inquired about with good recommendations from the participants. A number of my students who came to my photography workshops were from an Association of Amateur Photographers in Iceland called Fókus (fokusfélag.is, nd). They often shared with me during the course that their association was mainly focused on technology in photography and that they knew little or nothing about what creative photography was. It was really gratifying to see how they experienced during the course how their own vision of photography became deeper and more interesting. In Appendix 3, you can see the reviews of several participants who came to my course. The Association of Amateur Photographers has hired me to be the curator of an exhibition that the association will hold in 2023.

I find the stories of ordinary people to be the most interesting stories. The people behind them are people who live a very ordinary life but have a past or present that has marked their lives - an important and often sensitive life experience that other people can learn from. As a photographer and an artist, I can influence that these stories are told and made public. In that regard, trust is key. The trust I formed with my subjects was the main reason I was able to create these stories in a realistic way. In addition, I emphasized patience to deal with the process itself and to deal with unpredictable changes that did occur and find solutions when needed.

The process of doing these artworks matured and strengthened me as an artist.

This experience taught me to never give up, but to find solutions when I hit a wall and take advantage of the opportunities that can arise from the unexpected. The study programme also taught me that out in the big world of art there are many and different opportunities that you have to take when they arise and approach them with full passion.

Thank You

Special thanks to the individuals who participated in my projects and trusted me to tell their stories and create projects based on them. Many thanks also go to those who attended the photography workshops I created at the beginning of the study. I would also like to thank my supervisor, Dr Paul Bevan, Artistic Director for his encouragement and guidance in the study, and Emma Westerlund, Head of Degree Programs in Visual Arts and Educational Designer is also thanked for her encouragement. My mentor, artist Rúrí, gets a very special thanks for sharing her insight with me and for all the support. Thank you, to my fellow students of the MA Photography programme. The biggest thanks go to my children, Theodór, Þórhildur Helga and Arnar Daði and my husband Ólafur Jónasson, who are supportive in everything I do and have immense faith in me to create in the artistic world.

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Interview Woman 43 years old. May 2 and August 22, 2022.

Interview Woman 48 years old. April 15 and May 5, 2022.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Letters.

Dear

I am very grateful to you for your participation in my master's project, which is the final project for an MS degree in Entrepreneurship in Art and Photography from Novia University in Finland. The supervising teacher of the program is Dr. Paul Bevan from Great Britain, but Novia University receives foreign guest teachers from various countries to teach at the school. My mentor is the artist Rúrí and she guides me in my master's project.

Information about my master's project, the photographic work is about injustice that takes place in Iceland, but little has been discussed or even information hidden by silence. The participants are a small sample of Icelanders living in Icelandic society. Although I am in a foreign university, I want to talk about my community. With this project, I hope to draw attention to the fact that in Iceland, people experience injustices that are not or are not talked about very much. I will take several photographs of each person telling his/her story graphically, and I will also ask you to answer some questions in writing and/or I will tape record your answers. I would like your approval for the photographic work to be published publicly, but the final part of the master's project is exhibitions in Finland and even in other countries, for example in Iceland.

The following are the questions I pose and ask you to answer sincerely.

1. What kind of injustice did you experience?
2. When in your life did you experience injustice?
3. Has injustice had a major impact on your life and how?
4. Have you been compensated in any way for the wrongdoing?

If you have any questions or want to ask more about the project, contact us by phone or by email below.

Mosfellbær, 14 February 2022

Thank you very much for your participation.

With kind regards, Dána Júlíusdóttir

email address: dianajul17@gmail.com

phone: 8688053

Appendix 2

A letter to request permission to use composition by Johann Johannsson.

2 October. 2022

Mute Song Publishing Scandinavia and 4AD Records

To whom it may concern,

With this request, I kindly ask permission to synchronize Jóhann Jóhannsson's work Part1/ IBM 1401 for my photographic Artwork, which will be my graduation project for a Master's degree in Art, Culture, Entrepreneurship in the Arts Photography from the Novia University in Finland. I am the sole author of the work. I will show this work at a Non-Commercial graduation exhibition in Jakobstad, Finland, along with other students' graduation projects, next December. I have also accepted an invitation to a joint exhibition in connection with the Rusk Music festival in Jakobstad 22-26.11.2022, Finland, in November this year, which will also be Non-Commercial. Furthermore, I hope the photographic work will be shown worldwide at exhibitions in museums and galleries.

The photographic work will consist of 27 photographs and will be shown on a large screen in a closed space where Jóhannes' music will be played in the background. The piece will take 6 minutes and 30 seconds to perform, and I would like your permission to shorten the music piece by two last minutes. I would use the music transfer from Spotify, Performed by Jóhann Jóhannsson, Mario Clemens, and The City of Prague Philharmonic.

This photographic work is about a woman who has suffered many traumas in her life, such as domestic violence and cancer. She is utterly broken as her physical and mental health fails. She faces death as traumas roll over one after the other and intertwine. But a miracle happens; she heals herself, turns to faith, and starts painting. Her spark of life ignites, and hope grows. She sees the light and feels freedom and happiness.

There is a strong connection in the woman's story with Jóhann's musical work because while she heals and paints, she listens a lot to his work. The piece of music greatly influenced her during the healing process, and today the woman is happy and free.

Most respectfully,

Diana Júlíusdóttir

Appendix 3

Reviews from several participants who have attended the workshops.

I want to thank you for the course this weekend.

It completely met my expectations because I was mainly looking to learn more about how to take better pictures, composition, light and shadow. You covered these points well and I felt like I learned so much from being thrown in the deep end to take photos myself and then get feedback on them. This deepened my understanding of how to take better photos. You also sowed various ideas and looking at all our pictures together was very useful - although it was quite uncomfortable at first.

The course was very well organized and the length was very nice.

You were also contagious with your interest and passion for photography and ignited a certain spark my self to keep trying new things.

Anna Sigurðardóttir

I came to the course because I felt so empty and directionless. Wanted to know if I was doing something right in what I have been doing. I also wanted to get out of my comfort zone and start photographing people and human life, which is a big step for me. During the course, I was guided in portrait photography (environmental portrait) during natural release. It is photography that fascinates me.

Images were viewed and scrutinized in a useful manner. A course where the focus was on the photography itself

Jon Bjarnason

"Finally, I found a course on image structure and the artistic approach to photography. The course was very well set up and organized and really tailored to each individual as each participant could send in advance their own focus and receive information and feedback

accordingly. Maximum number was kept to a minimum and as a result I felt I got all the help I needed. The course exceeded my expectations.

I'm a more confident and mature photographer and I'm looking forward to the next course."

Osk Ebenesersdóttir

The course is very well prepared with the active participation of students and teachers. Go into many aspects of how normal daylight affects portrait photography. Taking countless examples from famous photographers and pointing out what characterizes their photos and how we could try to approach portrait photography outdoors. Emphasis is placed on talking with the person to be photographed to form a relationship and remove normal/unnecessary "stress" during the photo shoot. Pointed out how to properly frame the picture.

Then we went to a photo shoot outdoors in strong winter sun with high contrasts under Diana's guidance, and on the second day we reviewed the success of the photo shoot and pointed out what could be done better for each one.

An excellently well prepared course, which will probably completely change the way I take portraits in the future.

Ólafur Håkansson

Many thanks for a content-rich and informative course, a concise and sincere presentation that boosts students' confidence in handling the camera.

Enjoy browsing your photography books that enrich the understanding of photography, not least the doubts they show and open new dimensions. Many thanks for a great course, Diana is sincere with a comfortable and sweet presence...

Pétur Gærdbo Árnason

"Shortly after I joined Fókus association of amateur photographers, I took an eight-hour (2 x 4 hours) course in photography with Dána Júlíusdóttir. I often attend courses on everything

between heaven and earth and almost without exception women are in the absolute majority. Now it happened that out of six students there were two women and four men. That alone was interesting and offered a new atmosphere. I have an MA degree in fine arts, so I have been involved in photography before, so in art history, art philosophy and then courses on photography, but I have lacked the confidence to adopt it in fine art. I have always wanted to take good photographs though.

Diana's course is basically divided into two parts. First of all, she entered academic material and went through the photographs of professional photographers and visual artists, both foreign and national. There we looked at what was inside the frame, image structure, originality, lighting, colors, background, foreground and wondered what was exaggerated and so on. Lively conversations often erupted and the group mingled quickly so that we felt comfortable together. Second, she gave us a task to solve. She emphasized that we prepare well for the photo shoot and try to arrange it so that we have to do the least amount of fixing afterwards, partly because some things are of a nature that cannot be fixed, but also to save valuable time. The next day we went over our projects. It was very useful and gave us all new things to think about and made us aware of our own working methods. An incredible amount of things happened in those eight hours.

Course was regularly useful and above all fun. The point is to practice and stick to what we learned, until it has taken hold and made you a better photographer."

I was very happy with the course and it managed to ignite a spark in me and a desire to learn more so that I can confidently use it as a medium in art.

María Hrönn Gunnarsdóttir