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The Belt of Venus And The Shadow of the Earth

Inka & Niclas Lindergård



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Our day-to-day life is saturated with stock photo junk food: inspirational quotes framed by mountain panoramas, picturesque wall calendars of exotic ocean views, the rugged forests and floral gardens of cosmetic packaging, tree bark-printed notebooks, cases, and bags. These complacent and pretty landscapes are unavoidable and these images quietly generate an important message—you do not experience or fear nature, you decorate with it. So, what happens when these landscape clichés become dark, primordial, and start challenging their complacency?

Photographers Inka and Niclas Lindergård create images that connect to our larger psychological relationship to vast, uninhabited places. Often mistaken as timeless landscapes, viewers can't help associate these photographs with the feeling that there is something in the world that is monolithic and untouched by our existence. Add glowing lights and formless entities to these landscapes and they become dangerous, otherworldly and irresistible.

Inka and Niclas discuss the inspiration and process behind their mystical photographs, their relationship to landscape cliché and they share exciting news about their upcoming book project, "The Belt of Venus and The Shadow of the Earth."

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COURTNEY SIMCHAK: Phenomenon is imperative to your photographs—light, color, wind movement, season. What joys and difficulties do you have, when working with such an unpredictable subject?

INKA & NICLAS LINDERGÅRD: You are right. When working with photography outside, reality

is always going to mess with your ideas. For us it more and more drifts towards works that have their very base in the irregular circumstances of the outside. It is such a great feeling when everything lines up perfectly and the work becomes. It has always been a constant negotiation between where we want to take the work and what reality decides to do with it.

It is impossible to be in total control and instead of fighting reality we have learned to go along and embrace chance. We get something more than what either one of us could have planned for. We treat our actions, be it throwing powder into the wind, building a sculpture out of branches, or by briefly coloring some rocks with light, as performances done in alliance with the landscape, the elements and the camera.

SIMCHAK: In a time when nature imagery is unavoidably cliché and overwhelmingly prolific, a landscape's "prettiness" can be a tremendous obstacle when trying to make thoughtful, photographic work.

I&N: We totally understand what you mean. We have found ourselves in situations and places where there are so many cameras that we've felt that if anyone takes one more photograph of this scene the whole landscape will break into pieces. But, our work stems from an interest in photography and photographs. The generic saturated landscape imagery that is everywhere now, since everyone has a couple of cameras, is a great resource for inspiration and reflection for us. We are interested in how a certain phenomenon or a certain landscape is supposed to be depicted.

Just do an image search on "beach" or "sunset" or "grand canyon" and the first 100 hits or so will be very similar to each other and share very specific aesthetic attributes. When looking at the results from the "sunset" search for example, many of the photographs either contain a palm tree or a dolphin, hence the perfect sunset photograph must be one that has both. That is interesting and would be something for us to have as a loose base for further inquiries when working. We make a distinction between the photographic reality and our physical reality and we see the camera as a transitional device between the two. We are interested in the act of taking a photograph, the moment of exposure and the transition into the photographic reality.

The photographic reality very much resembles and connects to the physical one, but it is very much its own [reality], with its own set of rules.

On a personal level we can feel that our own memories and sense of places can be foggy when it comes to what is physical—real world experiences—and what comes from experience through photographs.

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SIMCHAK: How do you think the energy and composition of your work avoids the commodity of "pretty" while still retaining beautiful and thought-provoking imagery?

I&N: Thank you! Well, first of all we do like our photographs to be balancing on an edge, either tipping towards the fantastic on one side or towards the vulgarly over-romanticized on the other. Sometimes we do not know ourselves what side a photograph is leaning towards. Visual clichés are one aspect we work with and consider—either we incorporate them, rework them or try to get

away from them. Either way, we are not going to just portray them straight up without reason or a conceptual discourse. Also, quite often we try to sneak a little evil in there so it doesn't get all cute.

SIMCHAK: The emotional context of the landscape you photograph is mystical and reverent, but it is also stark. Your work carries a feeling of physical and spiritual aloneness. What do you think inspires this feeling? Do you think this feeling comes directly from the landscape or is it cultivated in your composition?

I&N: We have always been fascinated with the mystique we feel is surrounding the view on nature. We have searched for sources and proof of the mystique everywhere from Norse mythology to pagan religions, from contemporary popular culture to spiritual postcards in gift shops. An interest in the aesthetics and the ritualistic spirit connected with the occult has brought us to make photographs that somewhat hook onto our associations with all that. We often refer to a photograph or a landscape as being Death Metal, and meaning that in a very positive way. We haven't consciously thought about aloneness as much as we have been after a certain kind of darkness. Maybe it's the same.

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SIMCHAK: Where did you both meet and how did you decide to work together as a team?

I&N: We met and became a couple while studying photography in 2005 to 2007. After graduation we wanted to make a project together and decided to spend three months in a small house on Kilimanjaro Mountain in Tanzania and try to figure out what Inka & Niclas would be doing. The starting point for our project "Watching Humans Watching" came from that period. After that it felt more and more pointless to go back to working individually again. It's been about 8 or 9 years now and we don't know any other way to work but together; two is better than one.

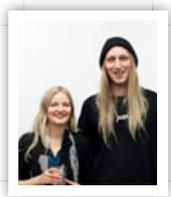
SIMCHAK: Tell us about your upcoming book, "The Belt of Venus and The Shadow of the Earth"?

I&N: We started the process some months ago with a weekend-workshop together with designer Sepidar Hosseini (who is otherworldly skilled.) We collected a lot of inspiration, did moodboards, and started drawing up rough guidelines for what the book is going to be.

It's nice to be working on a book again and we are really excited because, looking through our sketches, we feel the book is going to be great. "The Belt of Venus and the Shadow of the Earth" is going to include and tie together different bodies of work of ours made from 2012 until now.

We are currently editing and finalizing the image material. Since a lot of the material has never shown before it's a lot of printing, editing, printing again and then again, until everything is perfect. We are still in the early stages and we have a lot of work ahead of us but a goal is to hold the book in our hands in the beginning of September 2016.

If anyone would like to follow our work with the book from start to finish, they can do so on our brand new instagram account [@inkaandniclas](https://www.instagram.com/inkaandniclas) where we will try to update and share the process as much as we can. It will be a big and bold book!



Inka (b.1985, Finland) and Niclas (b.1984, Sweden) Lindergård live and work in Stockholm, Sweden.

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