

# *Photography with a confident sense of the vertigo of the moment*

Published 2024-02-24



Anders Petersen, from "Back Home/Värmland", 2009. Photo: © Anders Petersen

**Anders Petersen is current at the Hasselblad center in Gothenburg with "City diary", 150 photographs from six decades. Dan Jönsson sees a romantic with courage and a hard-boiled macho aesthetic – it's very physical, intimate and very naked.**

**Dan Jönsson**

Text

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## Exhibition

"City diary"

Anders Petersen

Hasselblad Center, Gothenburg. Shown until 15/9

It takes a while before I grasp the organizing principle behind Anders Petersen's "City diary" at the Hasselblad Center in Gothenburg. Namely that there is no particular principle at all: the walls are covered with tightly packed blocks of greatly enlarged images where neither time nor place seem to matter.

Instead, this teems with moments. All a flickering flow of intense gazes, sore nudity, nightclub vertigo, street scenes. A man walks down the stairs on a train platform in Berlin, next to a woman who is seen squinting at the sun through the blinds in Saint-Etienne. The beer bottle miraculously floats above the weary festival goers in Hultsfred, next to a face caught through a rainy bus window in Hamburg sixty-two. To border on the other side a cloud of birds above a Roman twilight sky.

Of course, this chronological and geographical chaos only hides another, more intuitive order. A world of lyrical, visual correspondences where the wild cat's nocturnal wanderings are just an expression of the same irrepressible drive for life as the old couple's dalliance on the dance floor in Sunne. And where the tracks across the snow in the cemetery bear witness to the same existential rootlessness as the animals in the zoo.



Image 1 of 3

Anders Petersen, Hamburg 1968. Photo: Anders Petersen



"**Photography is not** about photography," says Petersen in the interview film shown in the exhibition. It is, if I interpret him correctly, about presence - or more precisely: about attention. The photographer's role is that of the witness, the mission is to be on the spot and ready at the exact second when reality bursts open and exposes its innermost, glowing core of desire, despair, longing.

So speaks a romantic. Naturally, this is also what an artist who almost instinctively masters his instrument speaks.

The one hundred and fifty images in "City diary" span six decades, from the early breakthrough with the series from the

nightclubs along Hamburg's Reeperbahn, to a suite of slightly tighter Naples images from 2022. In between, social reports from prisons and nursing homes, and trips to all corners of Europe. Everything captured with the same sure feeling for the drama of the details and the vertigo of the moment but also, it must be said, with a photographic language that is well rooted in the tradition that for decades formed the middle lane in both Swedish and European art photography.



Image 1 of 2

Anders Petersen, Paris, 2007. Photo: © Anders Petersen



**This romantic expressionism** is associated in Sweden primarily with Petersen's role model and mentor Christer Strömholm and stands for a view of photography as a slightly supernatural medium, with a unique capacity to break through the deceptive veil that everyday hides the truth about the world from our tired eyes. It prefers to seek out people on the fringes of orderly society, and its method is to creep close, not to stray.

Away with distance and analysis, away also with all moral qualms and guardrails – the photographer who doesn't risk himself deathlessly will miserably miss that wide-open, magical moment.

It is, one can safely say, a view of art that today feels quite out of date. A hard-boiled macho aesthetic that has with some right been criticized for its shameless objectification not least of women's bodies. This exhibition also contains a lot of that stuff - it's very physical, very intimate and very naked: mostly women, but also men and preferably in intimate, visibly exposed situations.

**That can be seen** as a problem. But you can also, even at the same time, see it as an asset. Because however it is, Petersen's uncompromising attitude leaves at least no one untouched. With his kamikaze aesthetic, he insecure not only the viewer's but also his own position. He never retreats into the safe corner of the voyeur. The gazes that meet the camera do so consistently at eye level.

Of course, I can think that here and there it gets a bit pressured, a bit mannered.

But Petersen's genius shows itself above all in the craftsmanship that despite all this manages to carry all this provocative visual rhetoric. The bold compositions, the confrontational, frontal perspectives, the depth of black and

the blinding intensity of light: all enhance the dramatic motifs  
and summarize a practice that contains equal parts artistic and  
human courage.

**Text**



**Dan Jonsson**

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