

spectator and spectacle by filming the fans of a soccer game rather than the game itself. She films the spectators of both the winning and the losing teams, and projects both videos onto the two adjacent walls of a corner. One wall screams with cheers and elation, while the other simultaneously declares visible heartbreak.

Photography was originally used solely as an art of identity, and transported personal images between people who might never meet. Dutch photographer Rineke Dijkstra's beautiful large-scale colour photographs draw on this tradition. From 1994 to 2003, she photographed a young Bosnian refugee met in a refugee camp in the Netherlands. However, this series of six portraits does more than simply document physical appearance. Together, they also document the assimilation of an identity into a new culture. In the first picture, taken of a girl at age six, we see the subject wearing the clothes of her homeland. With each subsequent picture she begins to incorporate the clothes, make-up and mannerisms of her adopted land. This represents a process of shaping and erasing identity. A similar idea is found in the photos of

American John Schabel. These images were taken at night around tourist attractions in New York City. Schabel focuses his camera onto amateur photographers as they prepare to take a picture of their posing friends. By taking his picture at the exact moment that their flashes go off, he creates a white explosion in the middle of his images, erasing the very person he was photographing. Schabel's photos obliterate identity at the very moment that another photographer was attempting to capture it.

Chinese photographer Chien-Chi Chang documents the intimate interactions between strangers in a temple in Taiwan that also serves as an asylum. Those who run the asylum are opposed to the use of medications as treatment; instead, they use six feet of metal chain to bind pairs of residents together. They believe that this action will enable the more stable patient to bring the other to a higher level of sanity.

As in any other medium, these artists demonstrate the ability of the creative mind to expand photography and video in new directions, and to deal with developing social issues. With the constantly evolving sentiments regarding unification, alienation and globaliza-



© Rineke Dijkstra. Courtesy of Ellen Kern Fine Arts, New York

Rineke Dijkstra. *Almerisa, Alsymucetner Leiden, The Netherlands, March 14, 1994.* Part of the ongoing series, *Almerisa*. Chromogenic print (12 cm × 100 cm).

tion, these works demonstrate common themes from across the globe and reinforce the idea that even strangers can always find common ground.

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Room for a view

The red toque

Alexei sits in a chair wearing a red toque pulled to his brow. His eyes are slits. He has worn the toque each session these two months. Sometimes he says a single word, a short staccato, a grunt.

"We got new toys this week," the therapist says. "We got trucks and a doctor's bag. We got paints and modeling clay."

It is a warm April day.

Alexei pulls the red toque over his face past his eyes. He stands up and walks forward, blind. He stumbles over a box of blocks. The therapist catches him and walks him to his chair. He

pulls the toque over his ears.

"Can you hear me, Alexei?" the therapist asks.

Alexei shakes his head.

"Can you see me, Alexei?" the therapist asks.

Alexei shakes his head.

This will turn into a game, the therapist thinks.

"Let's make a house," she says. "You can put in whoever you want."

Alexei pulls the red toque past his lips and chin. The toque covers his face and jaw. Alexei is blind, deaf and dumb. He grows still.

The toque becomes a death mask.

"How about I draw a picture," the therapist says.

Alexei sits motionless. He can sit this way for the entire session.

"How about I draw you?" the therapist says. "I will draw you with your toque over your face, like you are playing hide and seek."

Alexei shakes his head.

"Yes," the therapist says. "I will draw you. Too bad you will not see my picture."

"But I have X-ray eyes," Alexei says.

The therapist takes a drawing pad and a scented felt marker. She begins to draw Alexei.

Outside the playroom where the therapist draws Alexei in his red toque, Mrs. Antonov sits in the waiting-room. Rarely does she come with Yuri, her husband, a draftsman, who is studying nightly to regain his profession as an architect. Elena is blue-eyed, pretty in a pale way, with hair too shiny to be real. She worries that Alexei says little to her and less to Yuri. Why he does not talk, not Russian, not English? She asks Alexei why he hides things under his bed: frogs, bugs, food. They are in bottles. Sometimes a bottle is left open and the room smells bad.



Art Explosion

“Why do you keep your room such a mess? Why do you keep dead animals?” Alexei does not answer.

Alexei has a collection of spiders in bottles. He collects bugs and grasshoppers.

In school Alexei is a good student. He is pleasant, blonde, blue-eyed, like Elena, and speaks English fluently with a slight accent. All the teachers like him.

“Do you want to see the nice picture I drew of you?” the therapist asks.

Alexei shakes his head.

“Do you want to draw a picture of me?”

Alexei shakes his head again.

The therapist’s office is on the hospital ground floor. There is a window that looks out to a downtown street. When the siren of an ambulance passes, Alexei tilts his head upward like a telescope. He focuses far away but his eyes are closed.

“What do you see, Alexei?”

Alexei pulls his toque over his eyes and ears and mouth. He goes stiff.

The next session the therapist brings in a live frog. She has gone to the hospital research lab and borrowed the biggest, most vocal frog she can find. This is not quite professional, the therapist thinks, carrying the large frog into the outpatient department.

The frog sits in a bottle and bleats.

Alexei lifts his toque. He stares at the frog.

“Do you want to play?”

Soon Alexei and the therapist are on their knees. The frog is Olympian, jumping on the carpet, landing on play tables, bounding onto a desk.

“What shall we call him?” asks the therapist.

“Can I take him home?” Alexei asks. “His name is Arnold, the Terminator.”

“What does the Terminator do?” the therapist asks.

“He kills bad people. He keeps good people alive.”

“So we are safe with Arnold?”

“He won’t hurt us,” Alexei says.

“Good. He is our friend.”

“Can I take Arnold home?”

“No,” the therapist says. “You can draw his picture and take that home.”

It is the most Alexei has said in two months.

Alexei draws Arnold’s large hind legs, the small forearms, bulging eyes. Something is not right with Arnold’s head. The session is almost over.

“What is that?” the therapist points to the head.

Arnold has a dark spot there. It is a big dark hole.

The following week Alexei’s mother speaks first. Yuri has come as well; the two sit heavy-eyed. “Alexei was impossible last week,” Elena says. Her hair is no longer bright-coloured; it is dull, short-cropped, like a young man’s. “Alexei got in fight at school. He wanted to bring a dead bird home. He didn’t sleep.”

The therapist listens. After Elena returns to the waiting-room, Alexei appears.

“Where is Arnold?” he says. Prepared, the therapist releases Arnold into the room. Everyone scrambles on the floor. Arnold is agile, perhaps gifted. A secretary is called, then a resident, until finally Arnold is cornered.

Arnold is returned to his bottle and the therapist produces Alexei’s drawing.

“Where does Arnold go?” Alexei asks.

“We put him in the lab with other frogs,” the therapist says.

“I hope Arnold doesn’t die,” Alexei says.

The therapist points to her head, fingering the dark spot. “That spot worries you?”

Alexei is silent. She draws a picture of herself and hesitates. Alexei marks the dark spot in her head.

“That’s bad,” the therapist says.

“Bad,” says Alexei. “Arnold will kill it.”

The therapist erases the spot. “Look. I got rid of it. Just like the doctors.”

Alexei stares at the picture. “I don’t want Mommy to go away.”

“Your Mommy is here. She is better now.”

After two more sessions Alexei talks about the operation. *Astrocytoma, grade II.*

It is never easy to talk of cancer in his mother’s brain. It is a terrible thing, the cancer. No one can talk about it for several months after the operation. His mother lost her beautiful long hair. Alexei sees her in bed, too weak to move. She wore a toque for weeks. Alexei must be strong, like his father. But Mommy is getting better. Soon she will be as strong as her old self.

The therapist sees Alexei for several more sessions. One day Arnold gets loose and leaps out the office. It takes an hour to find him under a desk.

“He can go back to his family,” Alexei says. “We are safe now.”

“Yes,” the therapist nods. “It is good to have everyone back.”

Alexei talks about the cancer now. He hopes it will stay away a long time.

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