

**A FREE MOMENT
BY CHRISTOPH OTTO**

**THE PORTFOLIO HAS BEEN PUBLISHED IN
LEICA FOTOGRAFIE INTERNATIONAL, ISSUE
3/2005; FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE
HAVE A LOOK AT WWW.LFI-ONLINE.DE**

**ALL RIGHTS ARE HELD BY THE AUTHORS AND THE PUBLISHER.
DOWNLOADING ALLOWS ONLY PRIVATE USE. ANY REPRINT, PUBLICATION,
COPYING, TRANSMISSION, ARCHIVING OR DISTRIBUTION NEEDS A PRIOR
WRITTEN AUTHORISATION. ALL TRADE MARKS, PHOTOS AND TEXTS ARE
PROTECTED. ANY VIOLATION WILL BE PROSECUTED.**

LEICA FOTOGRAFIE INTERNATIONAL

LFI

3/2005
MARCH/APRIL



LEICA FOTOGRAFIE INTERNATIONAL

CHRISTOPH OTTO

ESTONIA –
SNAPSHOTS FROM A
COUNTRY IN TRANSITION

LEICA 2005

INTERVIEW: LEICA'S
PLAN TO ADVANCE
TO THE PROFIT ZONE

MYSTERIOUS BOKEH

DEFINING LEICA
LENSES BEYOND THE
SHARPNESS PLANE



A FREE MOMENT

Photographer Christoph Otto has a feel for the fateful in daily settings. He seeks out the poetic moment in which the past is not quite over and the present remains open. His pictures from Estonia show an entire nation at a turning point: where yesterday is outgrown and tomorrow not quite there yet.

PHOTOS: CHRISTOPH OTTO





Can one be both narrator and poet at the same time? In Christoph Otto's visual temperament, both forms of expression unite as one. His series of pictures, often dedicated to extreme human lifestyles, spawn stories with cinematographic force. But Otto's unusual way of seeing things holds an understanding that every image is a concentrated version of a complete story. The relationship of individual frame and sequence resembles that of poem and prose: it contains the highly concentrated cipher of a reality that cannot be understood, but merely observed.

Christoph Otto, born in Berlin in 1966, earned his diploma in photo design and a Masters Degree in photojournalism at the Centro de los Estudios de la Imagen in Madrid. Following that he went freelance, working as a reporter photographer for magazines 'Geo', 'Merian' and 'Figaro Magazine'. He is also a celebrated artist who has participated in several solo and group exhibitions. In 2004, together with Gerhard Richter, Wolfgang

Small fortune: many live in housing estates. A few apartment blocks, a power station – surrounded by the vastness of a great natural world

One third of the Estonian populace is Russian. Excluded from voting and often unemployed, the former occupiers are stateless in the eyes of the government, like this man and his daughter





Winners: those catapulted to the top of the new information society like to align themselves with wealthy Scandinavians

Moments of Hope: many young Estonians greet the future full of optimism – though the EU bureaucracy reminds many of the older generation of the big brother from Moscow

Tillmanns, Rebecca Horn, Thomas Struth, Andreas Gursky and others, Otto was invited to take on an exhibition at the newly opened Museum of Contemporary Art at the Kanazawa in Japan.

It was almost inevitable that Christoph Otto, and the way he approaches his work and perceives the world, would absorb the evident possibilities in Europe's new rupture zone with a sense of enthusiasm. In 2003, he took his Leica M6 and M7 cameras (mounted with either a Summicron M f2,8/28mm, f2/35mm, or f2/50mm and using a winder and a Leica flashlight) and travelled to Estonia several times. The most northern of the three Baltic States had ambitions to liberate itself from the burden of the Soviet era with an incomparable plan of modernisation.

Estonia was virtually made for an eye like Christoph Otto's: a land of disruption and disavowal and an unusual sense of melancholic creativity. Here, outhouses coexist with the latest in electronic management systems; the president is treated





Lakes everywhere: there is always time for the Estonian national sport, with a quick plunge in cold water



Distance and closeness: president Arnold Rüütel was once the General Secretary of the communist party. His Premier, Jühan Parts, likes to settle conflicts on the football field: here at halftime during a friendly match, Cabinet versus Artists

Life is not a game: Russian children rise to an uncertain future. In 2007, schools will discontinue to teach in their mother tongue

with informality; an elderly lady fuels her only oven no different than her ancestors did 300 years ago. In this piece of Europe, situated between Finland and Russia, the archaic meets the globalised world. Here, life reinvents itself anew on a daily basis. Amid pain and delirium. Here, existence infinitely expands to nothingness, in the soap bubbles Elizabeth blows before the dreaming eyes of her boyfriend: success before transforming into failure, in the dazzling abeyance of an instant.

Before his travels, the Berlin photographer was inspired by the work of another wanderer drifting through a foreign country: Robert Frank's 'The Americans'. In the same way that Swiss born Frank drew, in symptomatic scenes, a melancholic yet sober picture of the social realities in US postwar days, Christoph Otto saw his subject from a remote position with a clinical accuracy only poetry could be capable of; at least without harming anyone. He speaks of grief, of an incurable





wound. He does so with a sensitivity which, next to the promise of constant new beginnings, does not fail to recognise the melancholy of valediction. At the sight of the Tartuan beauty in front of the sprayed Moskwitch, the viewer can balance his gaze on a tightrope in an inner cosmos. What kind of girl is it, peering into the promising night, thereby anchoring this moment in ultimate reality?

The viewer can meditate infinitely on split-second images like these: life in a European rupture zone as seen by the keen instinct of an artist. What his lens captures is not archived, but born. Every one of his pictures is a shot that does not kill, but brings to life. ANDREAS WEBER

EXHIBITION: Christoph Otto, The Estonians:
 16.6. – 30.7.2005: 7. International Photography days Mannheim;
 1.8. – 31.8.2005: Leica Gallery, Oskar Barnack-Straße 11, Solms, Germany.
 In 2006, the exhibition can be viewed in metropolises throughout Europe.

Grey Eminence: Estonia's First Lady waits in a Parliamentary Bank, while her husband Arnold Rüütel takes his guests on a tour through the House of Parliament on the day of independence

Time stopped in some places, while it went by all the faster in others. Meanwhile, Estonian creations, here at the National Fashions Awards in the State Opera of Tallinn, have become export items

