

IRMA PUTTONEN

BACKLIGHT 08

Photo Festival reached deep and far

■ A good metaphor to illustrate the Backlight Photo Festival is an octopus. The Backlight 08 Tickle Attack, the event's main exhibition, was a network of several exhibitions, featuring the works of 56 artists. Branching out into a number of chapters, the exhibition opened simultaneously in autumn 2008 in 13 galleries and museums in four different countries. Smaller-scale satellite exhibitions toured around Europe and Russia during the winter, until most of the photographic projects came together in a major festival that took place in Poland in May. During the ten months, 60,000 viewers saw the diverse ways in which humour, laughter, irony, paradox and absurdity can be discussed through photographic art.

Tickle Attack continued the social themes of the triennial. The event discussed the global sense of community and confidence in the future through the means of photography and humour. The international call for artists announced at the end of 2007 resulted in proposals from 572 artists from around the world. The curators, Martin Breindl, Alessandra Capodacqua, Krzysztof Candrowicz, Ulrich Haas-Pursiainen and Alla Räisänen, each representing a different nationality, convened in Oulu to select the best of over 12,000 photographic and video works. Florence, Helsinki, Lodz, Luxembourg, Oulu, Pori, St Petersburg, Tampere, Turku, Valkeakoski, Vienna, Warsaw and Wolkersdorf were chosen as locations for presenting the works and artists selected by the jury.

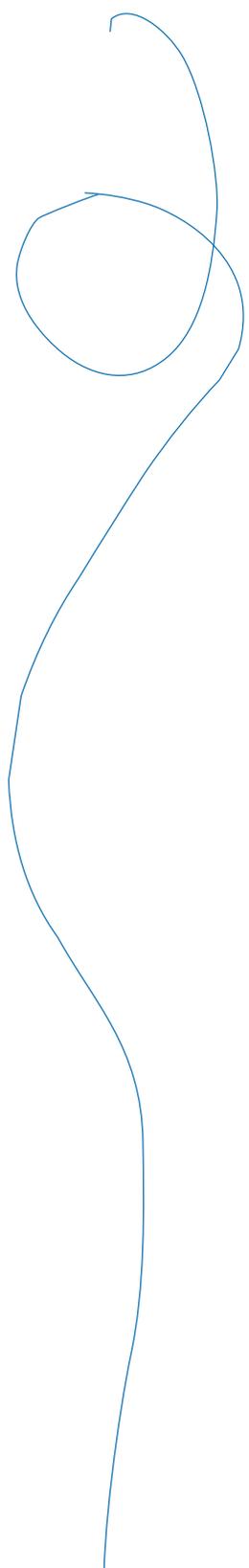
This however, formed only some of the many tentacles of the Backlight octopus, one of which reached as far as China. Backlight was represented

at the Pingyao International Photography Festival, where Backlight artists, including Tatu Hiltunen, Jorma Mylly and Anu Suhonen, featured. In this respect, Backlight was linked into a third network of photographic festivals.

Extensive educational programme

The audiences know Backlight mainly through its extensive series of exhibitions, but the event also includes the Backlight Symposium, which has a strong educational dimension. Although the educational tentacles of the "octopus" were contributed to by all five Backlight 08 organisers, most of the education activities took place in the Tampere region in Finland. In the portfolio review, eight European curators evaluated dozens of work portfolios. Photographers and art students were offered specialisation courses and workshops led by Backlight artists in collaboration with TAMK University of Applied Studies in Tampere. The workshop exhibitions attracted more than 3,000 visitors. The general public were invited to attend artist meetings and panel discussions. In addition, a special photography competition was organised for enthusiasts. Academic lectures and seminars were given in cooperation with universities in Tampere and Pori. The two-day Light Touches seminar in Helsinki adopted a combined photographic, philosophical and cultural studies approach.

"Dear Backlight-Super-People! Truly and honestly I had one of the most amazing and inspiring times in Tampere and Voipaala at the residence, when I stayed for a week at the old museum situated in incredible count-



ryside and with the best weather and lovely warm people and fellow artists! - - There is no way that I will ever forget all the picked mushrooms, berries and home-made apple tarts... Not to forget the great exhibitions, discussion and work we created at that time! YEAHS! Thanks to all for it all. Yours, Jan von Holleben”

Four artists were invited for a residency at the idyllic Voipaala Art Centre. One of the artists in residence was the German Jan von Holleben, who gave photography workshops for schoolchildren in Valkeakoski. One of the main target groups for the Backlight 08 Symposium was children and young people. Together with the City of Tampere cultural education programme Art Arc, the symposium organised workshops during the 2007-2008 school year. The target group was mainly schoolchildren with an immigrant background. The photographic works produced by the students were compiled into an exhibition of a very high standard, entitled “Looking for a Giggle”, which was seen by over 1,000 viewers. In addition to the Photographic Centre Nykyka in Tampere, the Oulu-based Northern Photographic Centre also organised workshops with its partner schools. The works of children and young people from Tampere and Oulu were displayed at Vähäx valot-

Jorma Mylly: Happenings.



taa, a children's photographic festival in Pori, the theme of which had been produced as part of Tickle Attack in co-operation with Backlight.

True co-operation on a European level

Backlight is regarded as a high-quality and innovative photographic event among European experts. Intercultural dialogue using art as the communications tool is one of the most significant dimensions of Backlight. The contribution of five organisers, their local partners and other international partners to help make the event a success was more than the sum of its parts.

The Tampere-based Photographic Centre Nykyka has organised the international triennial since 1987. The event was international from the start, but thanks to support from the EU, available since 1999, Backlight events have been planned and implemented through genuine

European collaboration. The two-year project received support from the EU CULTURE Programme. The 8th International Photographic Triennial event was also supported by the City of Tampere, the Ministry of Education and national arts councils, as well as cultural institutes in the different countries. Backlight 08 was realised by five organisers. In addition to the main organiser, Nykyka, Finland was this time represented by another Finnish contributor, the Northern Photographic Centre from Oulu. The other organisers were Lodz Art Centre (Poland), which was another first-timer, and the more familiar Fondazione Studio Marangoni (Italy) and Fluss (Austria).

“Participating in Backlight 08 was an enriching experience. The opportunity to show one's work at so many locations all over Europe in a travelling group exhibition and as part of such a good international selection of artists is quite unique. I am especially pleased that the curatorial team was willing to communicate with me regarding the

ideal form of the presentation of my work.” - Paula Muhr.

Each Backlight forms a new, unique entity. Feedback from artists delighted the organisers and will motivate them to develop the triennial even further. The Backlight 2011 will be like a bride: involving something old, something new, something borrowed and something blue. The structure and the theme of the event will be new. The current collaboration partners are still interested in joining in, so we will be working with old friends. We will secure funding, even if we have to borrow. And as for the blue, the Photographic Centre Nykyka is intent on flying the blue and white colours of Finland in the international network of photographic festivals.

Irma Puttonen is executive director of Photographic Centre Nykyka.