

ARTISTS

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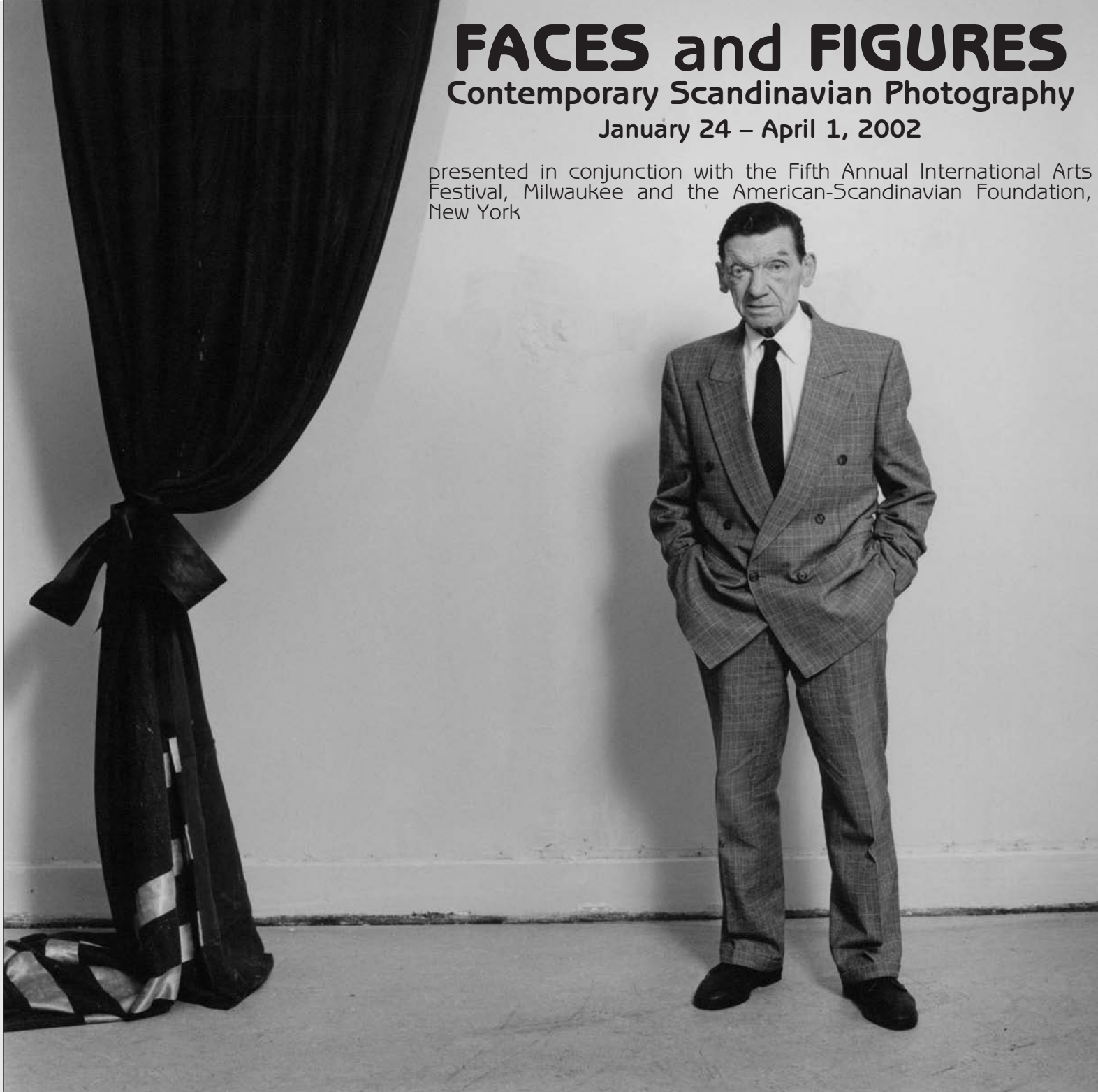
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FACES and FIGURES

Contemporary Scandinavian Photography

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Spessi (Sigurtór Halbjörnsson), *Heroes*, gelatin silver print

Photography had an early start in the Nordic countries with the contribution of the little-known Danish-Norwegian lawyer and publicist Hans Thøger Winther (1786–1851). He started experimenting with photography in the summer of 1839, inventing his own process for fixing an image on paper. He published articles on his findings in 1842 and a book in 1845. Another early photographer who is usually recognized as Scandinavian—this time a Swede—is Carl Gustav Rejlander (1813–1875). He lived and worked in England, and little else than his name seems to connect him to Sweden. Apart from these early pioneers, few Scandinavians have managed to work their way into the annals of photography. This does not mean that photography is of little importance in the Nordic countries—here as elsewhere photography has been a major instrument of documentation in all fields of society and science. Not least has photography played a major role in producing an image of the Nordic countries—especially Norway—as an exotic and tantalizing tourist goal. Norway has a great tradition of landscape photography. Anders Beer Wilse (1865–1949), the foremost Norwegian landscape photographer of the period 1900–50, started out making surveillance photography in the U.S. in the late 1880s, and lived in Seattle from 1890 to 1900. The website of the Seattle Museum of History and Industry offers an online exhibition of the work made in Seattle by Wilse, who is by far the most published Norwegian photographer. In 1916, Wilse toured the U.S. lecturing about Norway and showing his hand-painted lantern slides.

The end of the 19th century saw the rise of a movement of amateur photographers based on affiliations of gentlemen and women of means. Camera clubs were organized all over Scandinavia and were part of an international community of photographers with artistic pretensions. Through the activities of these amateur societies, the idea of photography as fine art got a foothold in the Nordic countries. Pictorialism attracted a substantial following, and some important professional photographers, among them Henry B. Goodwin, had lasting influence. In Sweden, this movement was reported and published in the magazine *Fotografisk Tidsskrift*, and in Denmark in *Amatørfotografen*. From about 1900, amateur photographers from the Nordic countries attended international exhibitions in Germany, Italy, and England, where photography was heralded as a new medium of high art.

Before the Second World War, the cultural links between Germany and the Nordic countries were very strong and some of the most well-known photographers, such as the Swedish photographer Christer Strömholm (b. 1928) and the Norwegian Kjell Sten Tollefsen (b. 1913), studied in Germany in the 1930s. The expressive style of the Norwegian documentary and press-photographer Kåre Kivijärvi (1938–1991), based on studies with the German Otto Steinert in the late 1950s, is outstanding. The focus of most Nordic photographers, however, shifted to France and the United States. Several Swedish photographers studied in the US from the 1950s onward, and some of them worked as assistants to well-known photographers. The famous exhibition **The Family of Man**, created by Edward Steichen for The Museum of Modern Art in 1955, toured Europe in the late 1950s, and was also shown in Sweden. The humanistic idea at the base of Steichen's selection of works, that all men are one family, made many photographers turn to portraying people in surroundings stripped of local identity, underlining what is common to all men. **The Family of Man** included several Swedish photographers: Hans Hammarskiöld, Lennart Nilsson, Hans Malmberg, Karl W. Gullers, Pål Nils Nilsson, Karl Sandels, but only one from Denmark, Wermund Bendtsen, and none from the other Nordic countries. Caroline Hammarskiöld made the portrait of Steichen that follows his introductory essay. The photographs of Christer Strömholm, Sune Jonsson (b. 1930), Kåre Kivijärvi, and all the others included in this can be interpreted as a reaction to this search for a dominating idea of mankind as one big family. These photographers looked for local qualities and the relationship between people and their immediate environment. This has created a tradition that is still vital, and some of the most interesting contemporary photography in the Nordic countries gain distinction from this tradition.

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