Exhibit | (Un)livable: Janet Biggs & Kari Soinio

The two artists explore the concept of civilization, progress, and their relationship to the environment, on view at Station Independent Projects through September 6, 2015.

by Miss Rosen Sep 1st, 2015


As the earth becomes exponentially more crowded and populations push the limits of natural endurance, the simple but essential right of dwelling becomes an increasingly fragile notion that is not guaranteed. For many around the globe today, people struggle to live with challenges that come from both nature as well as man-made sources.

Janet Biggs, a video artist, and Kari Soinio, a photographer, both make their artwork in environments we might consider uninhabitable. Biggs travels to extreme sites, like the mines of Svalbarden and Indonesia. Soinio contemplates the rapidly changing cityscape of New York: its streets, its highly contested air space, and the routes underground used by millions but noticed by few. Both are concerned about the effects humans have on
nature, seeing a strange beauty in the harshest of environments, careful not to over-aestheticize what they see and convey the feeling of survival against the odds.

Kari Soinio, "City of Ghosts", Rivington Ludlow, 2015, color photograph.

Curator Leena-Maija Rossi has selected works by Biggs and Soinio for (Un)livable, now on view at Station Independent Projects, NY, through September 6, 2015. Says Rossi, “Janet and Kari are artist friends and I have been keenly following their work for a long, long time: Kari’s since the late 1980s and Janet’s since mid ‘90s. They share a lot of interests in terms of topics—gender, power, environment, meaning attached to landscape and place—and they have been talking about showing their work together.

“As a curator, I find the combination of their approaches quite interesting: the other one travels to remote places and the other looks really close, but both basically deal
with the same issue, the ramifications of human life and livability. You might say that they are asking: how and why are people doing this to one another and themselves?

By juxtaposing the works of the two artists, Rossi gives us a new way in which to view the state of humanity in the new millennium, as we push further along the edges of existence. (Un)livable raises questions about what we are conditioned to believe, understand, and accept. It asks us to consider if "progress" might not be an amoral act.


“Kari has studied the urban frames of living in New York, the city’s rapidly changing socioeconomic structures and the possibilities and impossibilities the City sets for its inhabitants, depending on their backgrounds. For him the juxtaposition of the crumbling infrastructure and constructions of ‘luxury’ form a constant conundrum.

“Janet constantly finds remote places where the circumstances for life and work are quite extreme, either because of what humans are doing to their environment, or because of natural forces, or both. She has also been interested, actually much longer, on human performances striving towards perfection.”

There is a darkness here, a darkness that cannot be ignored, though we often do our best to avoid considering the larger implications of so many of our thoughtless choices.
Yet there is also a light that shines through the dark, a humble yet heroic triumph of wo/man against the odds.

As Rossi observes, “There are days when I think the human species might very well make itself extinct and leave the other species alone... Janet and Kari’s work definitely can be looked at as criticism of the way humans impact their environments. And then again, there is so much beauty in the works, they are visually extremely rich and definitely also give tribute to the people surviving in these circumstances.”

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All images courtesy of the artists @ Station Independent Projects, NYC. Janet Biggs, "Brightness All Around", 2011 courtesy of the artist, Analix Forever, and CONNERSMITH.