

ERNA AND VICTOR HASSELBLAD
FOUNDATION

P R E S S I N F O R M A T I O N

**Sune Jonsson is awarded the 1993 International
Photography Prize of the Hasselblad Foundation.**

The Erna and Victor Hasselblad Foundation Photography Prize of 1993 has been awarded to Sune Jonsson, Umeå, Sweden.

The prize consists of the Erna and Victor Hasselblad Foundation Medal and a cash sum of SEK 245.000. It will be presented to Sune Jonsson at a ceremony in Gothenburg, Sweden, on October 22, 1993.

The Foundation motivates its choice as follows: "For almost half a century Sune Jonsson has been depicting the loneliness and barren beauty of the landscape of Northern Sweden and the unglamorous, workaday lives of simple people. His quietly unobtrusive, living imagery has given us a panorama of a changing society. In many books, over the years, he has woven words and pictures together to provide a unique documentation in the spirit of the Farm Security Administration project in the USA."

The members of the nominating group for 1993 were: Photographer Richard Avedon, New York; Rune Hassner, Curator, Hasselblad Center, Gothenburg; Mark Haworth-Booth, Keeper of Photographs, Victoria and Albert Museum, London; Photographer Sebastião Salgado, Paris; Dr Karl Steinorth, Deputy Chairman of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Photographie, Stuttgart and Håkan Wettre, Curator, Gothenburg Art Gallery.

This is the thirteenth time this photography prize has been awarded. Former prize-winners are: Lennart Nilsson, Sweden; Ansel Adams, USA; Henri Cartier-Bresson, France; Manuel Alvarez Bravo, Mexico; Irving Penn, USA; Ernst Haas, USA; Hiroshi Hamaya, Japan; Edouard Boubat, France; Sebastião Salgado, Brazil/France; William Klein, USA/France; Richard Avedon, USA and Josef Koudelka, Czechoslovakia/France.

Focus on people and landscapes in Northern Sweden

Sune Jonsson was born in 1930 at Nyåker in Västerbotten county, west of the Gulf of Bothnia. After studying for his school certificate by correspondence course, he took his higher certificate examinations in Stockholm, the family having moved to the capital in 1946. He then went on to study English, History of Literature and Ethnology at the Universities of Stockholm and Uppsala.

Sune Jonsson's interest in photography was first awakened during his years in Stockholm. He met a number of photographers of his own age, and joined the Stockholm Photographic Society, whose younger members were influenced by current trends in the in-

ternational photography of the day. One such trend was to be found in the post-war photojournalism developed by the Magnum group and in publications such as *Life* and *Paris Match*. Another that caught their attention was the more aesthetic emphasis on photographs, a concept launched by the German, Otto Steinert, in books and exhibitions, titled "Subjective Photography". Of his own photographic experiments during this period Sune Jonsson was later to say that "There were a lot of black iron pipes against white snow. It was the fashion then, and thought to be really avant-garde."

On completion of his university studies Sune Jonsson was to return to his native Västerbotten county in Northern Sweden for good. However, he had in the meantime spent his summer vacations working as a journalist and photographer for a local newspaper, *Västerbottens-Kuriren*. By the mid 1950s he had already begun to find his way towards what was to become his life's work as a documentary photographer, author and cultural historian. He sought his way back to the surroundings in which he has grown up, and began in 1956 to depict the everyday life in the villages of Västerbotten and the disintegration of this pattern of existence. His aim, he said, was to "find again the village I remembered from my childhood and, with my camera, trying to recreate the pattern of life, which in the 1930s and 1940s was still characterized by self-subsistency and mutual exchange of services."

His efforts resulted in his début with the important *Byn med det blå huset* (The Village with a Blue House) in 1959. In his review of the book in *Aftonbladet*, a leading evening newspaper in Stockholm, Kurt Bergengren wrote that "This is one of the most interesting photographic picture books ever to have been published in Sweden, and one of the most necessary. In it there are pictures that will not be forgotten for a long time, because their grip on reality is so firm and yet so sensitive..."

In 1961 Sune Jonsson joined the staff of Västerbotten Museum as a photographer and field ethnologist for specific documentary surveys, becoming a permanent member of the staff in 1968. Parallel with these duties he has worked on picture book after picture book about the fading pietist movement and the pattern of life among smallholders of Västerbotten, many of them based on the documentary fieldwork he has carried out for the museum.

But he has also made occasional excursions outside his territory. He has published a book about Swedish missionary activities in Congo Brazzaville, and another about the crushing of the Prague Spring in 1968 - he happened to find himself in that city when it was invaded, on an assignment for *Vi* magazine, Stockholm. He has also produced an exhibition about Hay Lakes, a region near Edmonton in Canada, whose inhabitants are of Swedish origin, and has travelled around Sweden collecting material for *Bilder från bondens år* (A Farmer's Year in Pictures). He spent a year at Attsjö in Småland, putting together his *Minnesbok över den svenske bonden* (To the Memory of the Swedish Farmer). These two books provided an up-to-date and critical description of the situation of the Swedish farmer in time of agricultural crisis.

In cooperation with his wife Stina, Sune Jonsson has published two books about wild flora. In these he makes his first appearance with subtle studies of Swedish nature in colour photographs. He has also published *Hundhålet* (The Dog Hole), a collection of short stories, and two novels, *Brobyggarna* (The Bridge Builders), a story of the life at a bridge building site in Northern Sweden during the Great War, and *Stationskarl Albin E Anderssons minnen* (The Memoirs of the Railway Man, Albin E Andersson), depicting working routines and personal conflicts at a small railway station in Västerbotten.

During some years' work at the Umeå studios of the Swedish Radio & TV, Sune Jonsson also began working with films. Subsequently, while on the staff of Västerbotten Museum, he established a joint project between the museum and Swedish TV and produced a series of innovative documentary films that has included *Ett småbrukarår i lappmarken* (A Smallholder's Year in Lapland) 1970, *Ett fiskarår* (A Fisherman's Year) 1978, *Ett bondeår i norr* (A Farming Year in the North) 1968, *Skidmakaren i Gielas* (The Ski Maker of Gielas) 1987 and *Fjällbonden* (The Mountain Farmer) 1992.

As a portrayer of people at work, at religious meetings, auctions or weddings, Sune Jonsson can be as quick off the mark as a reporter with his camera when it comes to capturing the fleeting moment - a facial expression, perhaps, or some sudden gesture. His memorable portraits of farmers and craftsmen, however, are the results of cooperation between the photographer and subject, strictly posed à la August Sander. Even when his subjects are boldly reduced to mere silhouettes, seen against the light from a window, for example, he manages to depict, and accentuate, the traits that are characteristic of them. The same applies to his working studies in saturated blacks of charcoal-burners, log rafters and tractor drivers.

In his landscapes, too, Sune Jonsson displays his mark and mastery, as in *Dagar vid havet* (Days by the Sea). Many of the illustrations in this book couple the element of timelessness with a sense of the ominous, leaving us wondering how much longer these natural surroundings will remain unspoilt. Beyond the horizons are expanding communities, motorways and factories with their environmentally hazardous discharges and waste. These low-key landscape photographs from the North appear also in *Jordabok* (The Farmer and the Rural Scene). In his winter scenes the steep gradation is often limited to a simple triple tone, consisting of a grey-white snowfield completely lacking in detail, a strip of woodland as black as night and a dark grey sky. Individual black rocks or barns, hay racks, trees and telephone poles stand out against the background of grey-white snow like calligraphic symbols. This is as far from glossy art photography as it is possible to come. Simplicity lends strength, and the message becomes ambiguous.

Sune Jonsson has formulated his credo in the following terms: "Documentary work may not appeal to aesthetic tastes or indifferent visual consumers. It addresses itself to people with a vital need to increase their knowledge, and convert images of the environment studies, epochs and nature scenes into a personal experience that will enrich their understanding of the world." Small wonder, then, that he has been deeply influenced by

the mass of social documentation created in the USA during the 1930s under the auspices of the Farm Security Administration, with photographers such as Walker Evans and Dorothea Lange. Both as an author and as an artist, Sune Jonsson's documentary ideology clearly owes much of its inspiration to the noted Swedish writer Ivar Lo-Johansson's pamphlets of the 1940s in which he formulated his views of the author's task in society.

Sune Jonsson was awarded the *Svenska Dagbladet* annual photographic prize in 1960. Over the years his work has been displayed in a number of group exhibitions not only in Sweden but also in Belgium, France, USA and Mexico. He has had personal exhibitions of his work in the Västerbotten Museum in Umeå on a number of occasions, and has also exhibited at the Museum of Photography and the Museum of National Antiquities in Stockholm, Malmö City Art Gallery and the Röhsska Museum of Applied Art in Gothenburg.

Among the many books he has published may be mentioned here *Byn med det blå huset* (The village with A Blue House), 1959; *Timotejvägen* (The Timothy Path), 1961; *Bilder av Nådens barn* (Children of Grace), 1963; *Bilder från den stora flyttningen* (The Great Migration), 1964; *Bilder från Kongo* (From Congo Brazzaville), 1965; *Sammankomst i elden* (Fire of Ecstasy), 1966; *Bilder från bondens år* (A Farmer's Year in Pictures), 1967; *Prag augusti 1968* (Prague August 1968), 1968; *Minnesbok över den svenske bonden* (To the Memory of the Swedish Farmer), 1971; *Jordabok* (The Farmer and the Rural Scene), 1976; *Dagar vid havet* (Days by the Sea), 1981; *Hemmavid* (The Journey Home), 1986; *Tiden viskar – en småbrukarfamilj 1960 - 1990* (Time Whispers: A Smallholders' Family 1960-1990), 1991.

Research and education

The Photography Prize was instituted by Erna and Victor Hasselblad, who donated all their assets to a foundation. According to the Foundations statutes, a Photography Prize and the Erna and Victor Hasselblad Medal are to be awarded every year or every alternate year, as means permit, to a person of particular merit.

In addition, the Foundation is to promote scientific education and research in the natural sciences and in photography. A number of projects are granted funds each year, totaling approximately 1.5 million USD.

In the Fall of 1989, the Foundation opened a Photographic Center in Gothenburg, Sweden. It operates a continuous exhibition and lecture program. A photographic research and reference library is also being built.

Gothenburg, March 11, 1993

ERNA AND VICTOR HASSELBLAD FOUNDATION

For further information please contact:

Rune Hassner or Birgitta Forsell, Curators, Hasselblad Center. Address: Box 53098, S-400 14 Gothenburg, Sweden. Telephone: Int +46 31 17 90 60. Fax: Int + 46 31 774 02 31