

ON ORPHANS AND EDEN

I can do what only a true artist can do - pounce upon the forgotten butterfly of revelation, wean myself abruptly from the habit of things, see the web of the world, and the warp and the weft of that web.

Vladimir Nabokov. Pale Fire. 1962



Nathalia Edenmont. Force of Nature, 2015. C-print mounted to glass.

LIMIT OF BEARABLE

Lately our eyes have been trained by mass media to become immune to the images of pain, violence, victims of terror and refugee crisis, corpses of children included. Daily portion of suffering is served for breakfast by a morning postman and is consumed somewhere between the first sip of coffee, a bite of croissant and mineral enriched cereals. We glimpse at the spread photo of another torment, skim through the article, turn the page and proceed to jam and cheese.

After Saturday morning meal one heads to a contemporary art gallery to satisfy cultural hunger, in this story, to Wetterling Gallery in Stockholm. What happens to a visitor there? 'It is so hard to look at', I hear, 'Unbearable'. Beyond the limits of acceptable.

Hence, the title of the exhibition. 'Beyond. Nathalia Edenmont.'

The roots of mental mechanisms of hypocrisy are traced in adaptations that serve contradictory functions in the human brain. Confronted with Edenmont's triptych, consisting of the photographs entitled 'Holy Ghost', 'Conscious Mind' and 'Lost Soul' (2015), one seems to have forgotten the easily absorbed doze of blood from newspaper pages and tends to convict the artist of cruelty. "Human beings are a species splendid in their array of moral equipment, tragic in their propensity to misuse it, and pathetic in their constitutional ignorance of the misuse", wrote R. Wright in his book on the moral animal. Overwhelmed by the powerful images, I keep on looking at the photographs, while the co-visitors have left. Do we prefer effortless? Do we fail to capture the butterfly of revelation?



Nathalia Edenmont. Holy Ghost, Conscious Mind, Lost Soul, 2015. Triptych. C-print mounted to glass in black wooden frame.

Parts of the triptych, each depicting the same seated model in slightly varying poses, draped in a single piece of fabric, under which the contours of a child can be noticed, suggest a reference to madonna's. Similar to 'Madonna and Child with Grapes' by Lucas Cranach the Elder, the one by Edenmont is juxtaposed to the black background, which enhances the contrast with the incarnadine shade of clothing. But in the work of the photographer the drapery has just received a colour: it is soaked in what we perceive to be blood. The hands of the mother, glittering from the fluid, are carefully supporting the covered child's body. The beauty of the woman's face plays a trick upon the viewer – it can belong to the genre of fashion photography. Her glance is serene and somewhere heroic. 'With beauty as a shield', as one of the art critics wrote about Edenmont, she covers the loss. It is a tragedy of childlessness, rooted in personal experience. The recurring motif, seen in the other works from 'Beyond' series, in 'Daughter', 'Baptised', 'Fulfilment' (2015).



Nathalia Edenmont. Beyond. Solo exhibition at Wetterling Gallery, Stockholm, SE. Exhibition view



Nathalia Edenmont. Beyond. Solo exhibition at Wetterling Gallery, Stockholm, SE. Exhibition view



Nathalia Edenmont. Fulfilment. C-print mounted to glass.



Nathalia Edenmont. Flowering. 2015. C-print mounted to glass.

Interested in decoding the plots, appearing in Edenmont's work - rich floral compositions, seeming to speak more about sadness than joy, Renaissance beauty of a female seeming more tragic than harmonious - I go on to study materials on artist's life.

Nathalia lost her father at the age of 12 and mother at the age of 14. The proximity of death is something that does not leave your mind if you have faced a loss of a parent at an early age. Orphan is a diagnosis of the state, which is never healed. You are indoctrinated into orphanhood like into a closed club, where only those, who have experienced it, can understand the weight you carry. With every knock of the nail going into the coffin - the view and the sound you would like to forget, but can not ('What are they doing to her?!') - your personal Eden, put in that wooden box, wrapped in the red fabric, gets tightly shut.

Since then you can not stand the plastic flowers with their indifferent to your grief colourfulness, the decorations of the last journey. If only you don't have the inner strength to rework their vibrant imprint on retina into art. Reuniting them with forget-me-nots and daisies, which you were drawing in childhood, when your lips could still address the two simple syllables 'ma-ma'. Nathalia found that strength. Myriads of flowers

would appear in her oeuvre, covering bodies of her models like Renaissance or Art Nouveau gowns, in 'Not Amused', 'Requiem', 'Mana'. In one of the portraits 'Only Me' (2011) the artist appears herself in an assemblage of calla lilies. The elaborate composition, elegance of the flowers' stems forming Issey Miyake-like folds of the skirt (Edenmont's favourite fashion designer, whose garments she wears) delays for a while, or might be purposefully, while a viewer keeps on looking at the details, the arrival of the thought: these are funeral flowers. Dressed in sorrow. The gloss and the style of the work can puzzle - from a far it could be perceived as a fashion photograph, unless you by closer inspection decode the personal meanings elevated to the universal level. The expression of the face makes me think of the words by Chuck Palahniuk: "The truth is you can be orphaned again and again and again. The truth is, you will be."



Nathalia Edenmont. Only Me. 2011. C-print mounted to glass.



Nathalia Edenmont. Requiem. 2011. C-print mounted on glass.

The topics of loss, motherhood, growing up, covered in the series 'Requiem' ongoing since 2011 can be found in artist's earlier works. 'Family' (2007) shows a seated teenage girl in a mourning dress, the folds of the fabric spread out in a wide circle. Two white chairs, right and left from her, contrasting the otherwise black image, clasp the skirt to the floor. The weight of the double loss.

"I was an infant when my parents died.
Thye both were ornithologists. I've tried
So often to evoke them that today
I have a thousand parents. Sadly they
Dissolve in their own virtues and recede."

Vladimir Nabokov. Pale Fire. 1962



Nathalia Edenmont. Family. 2007

'The dress is a visualisation of my tremendous grief in becoming an orphan at the age of 14. My parents should be sitting on the chairs. Family is my family portrait. The chairs are empty, but stand on my dress, meaning I still am not free from my childhood experiences and my parents', says Nathalia in an interview.

Edenmont describes in details the day, when the news of the irreversible were told to her. In the work 'Devotion' (2009), the edges of the artist's red dress appear to be burnt. The girl was ironing, when the door bell rang and a neighbour announced that her mother, the last relative, died. By returning to the room, she discovered a large hole in the dress prepared for art school graduation. The critics Ingela Lind wrote: "When I allow myself time to stare, the splendid finery of the subject is suddenly pushed aside to be replaced by her gaze and its corollary: a virtually imperceptible trembling around her mouth. Now they dominate every inch of the room". In the work 'Self portrait (Deathbed)' (2007) Edenmont becomes her own mother, and the red-haired model Caroline, aged at the moment of the photo exactly 14, becomes the alter-ego of the artist. The scene of farewell, the touch of the hand, which in reality her mother never received. The scene disturbing on a very personal level.



Nathalia Edenmont. Self Portrait (Deathbed). 2011





Nathalia Edenmont. Morning. 2007.

Adolescent girls, depicted by Edenmont, would be called 'Lolitas' by a viewer, tempted by habit of putting labels. Although, I have up to now met very few Western readers who have understood the loaning of the best known Nabokov's character. Surprisingly, and ironically, even those who have not read the novel, carry out their verdict. Hypocrisy of the moral animal. Specially strange in the times when physical love of youngsters, starting from 14 years old, has become a norm, and mothers supply their Doloreses with all necessary medication. Before labeling any of characters in Edenmont's works as Lolitas (notable is the eagerness with which we wish to label and sort all art subjects like bottles in a pharmacy) I would advise to re-read the masterpiece, to find the passages about the soul of a boy, hurt by the premature death of his childhood sweetheart, the ideal he was searching ever since. 'Poor Gumbert Gumbert!'

Despite some commentaries, I don't see Lolitas in Edenmont's models. Apart from the similarity of their status, the orphanhood of Dolores Haze (her mother is killed by a passing car when the 12 year old girl is in a summer camp) and the imaginary orphanhood of Caroline, the alter-ego of the artist, the literary and the photo-portrayed characters differ. In 'Morning' (2007) the adolescent in short nightgown is studying herself in the mirror. Asked if the viewer spies what he or she hopes to see, the artist explains that the photograph is based on viewers thinking they will see something, which is not shown in the mirror. What is actually seen from the model's perspective remains a well-kept secret. There is no self-awareness of a nymphet in any of the models. In 'Purity', 'Libido', 'Humble' (2010) girls' bodies are decorated with condoms or tampons, objects, which contrast with their innocent look. This is a story of being fragile at the tender age. The titles of works suggest it: 'Do Not Break' (2010), 'Fragile' (2010). There is no Lo.

BUTTERFLIES

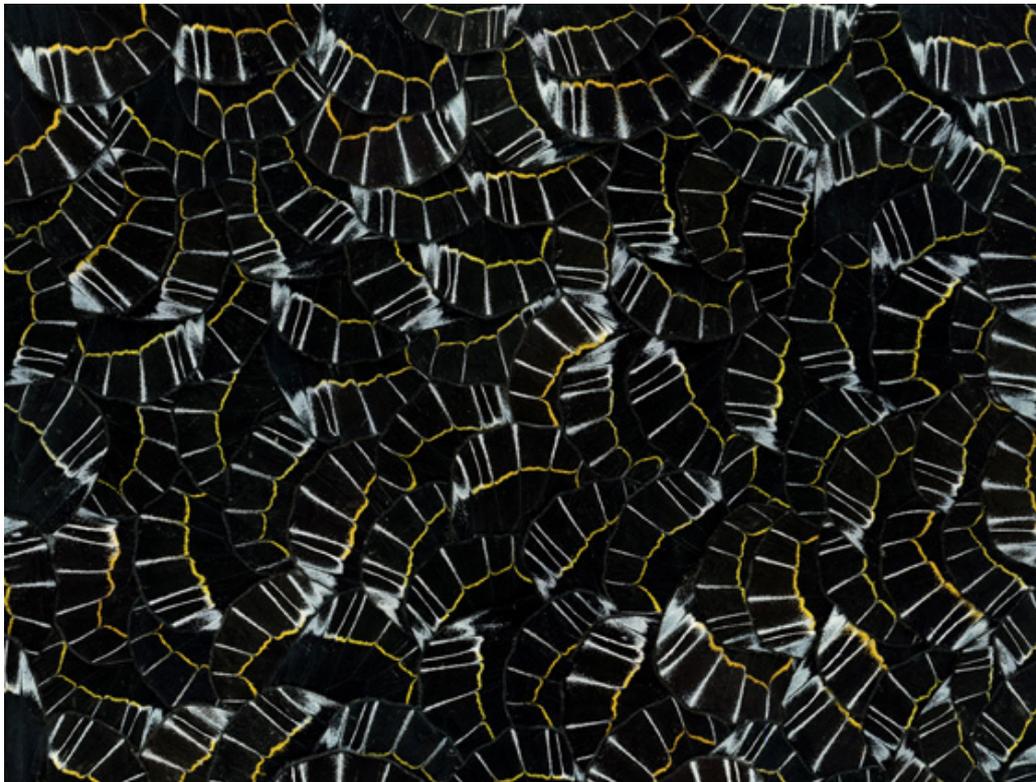
"...photographs of girl-children; some gaudy moth or butterfly, still alive, safely pinned to the wall." Vladimir Nabokov. *Lolita*. 1955



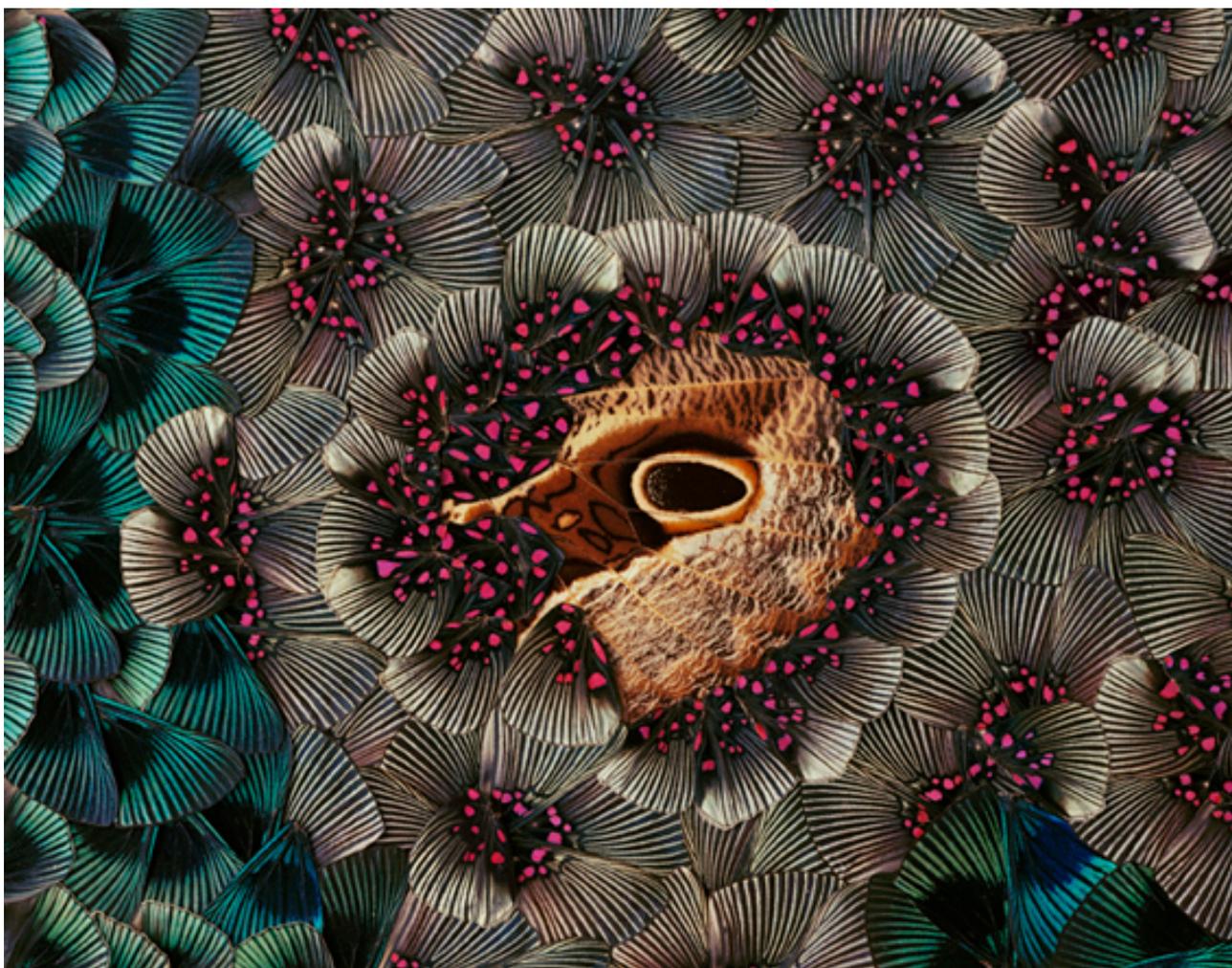
Nathalia Edenmont. *Evolution*. 2015. C-print mounted to glass.

Collages, meticulously crafted with butterfly wings, result in colourful, sometimes kaleidoscope-like, and definitely eye-catching abstract compositions. The artist collects butterflies all over the world, according to her words, to compensate now the fact that she was never able to catch a butterfly in childhood. Is it a reminiscence of the lost paradise? Edenmont's early memories are connected to Hieronymus Bosch's 'The Garden of Earthly Delights'; by coincidence, it is one of the earliest images imprinted in me, from looking at parents' wall calendar at the age of 5. 'Hell' (2007), which original I had a chance to see in the storage of Wetterling Gallery, a small scale collage of dark coloured wings, from which the analogue blow-up photo is taken, illustrates the artist's continuous occupation with 'death as the long perspective'. 'Evolution' (2015) in its colour arrangement reminds me of the central panel of Bosch's triptych. Edenmont paints with nature.

The world Nathalia Edenmont creates is multi-layered. It is anything but an easy one. It provokes our perceptions, challenges the limits, it is intimate and universal. There is no beauty to seduce, there is sublimity. There is no death as the opposite to life, there is death as the opposite to impermanence. It has existed before us, backwards in time, and will exist after. In the meantime we should 'wean ourselves abruptly from the habit of things'. The works by Edenmont give this chance.



Nathalia Edenmont. Hell. 2007. Butterfly wings, collage



Nathalia Edenmont. Ovary. 2015. C-print mounted to glass.

Author
Ekaterina Aksarina, 2015

ARTIST

NATHALIA EDENMONT

Nathalia Edenmont is working with analogue photography without computer any manipulation: 'I use a classic Sinar large-format camera and many lenses and 8x10 inch sheet film, which I import from the US. I use Portra VC and NC depending on the nature of the subject matter. I always work with flash, which gives me the required depth of field from F16 to F64 depending on the subject matter.'



Nathalia, 2004

Born 1970 in Yalta, former USSR.
Lives and works in Stockholm, Sweden

EDUCATION

1998 – 01

Forsbergs Skola (International School of Design), Stockholm, Sweden

1987 – 91

Simferopol State Art School, Simferopol, Crimea

1984 – 87

State Art School of Kiev, Kiev, Ukraine

AWARDS

2006 – 08

Konstnärsnämndens Arbetsstipendium

2004

Konstnärsnämndens Arbetsstipendium

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2015

Transformation, Rättviks konsthall, Rättvik, Sweden

Beyond, Wetterling Gallery, Stockholm, Sweden

2014

Force of nature, Nancy Hoffman Gallery, New York, USA

Eden, Galerie Michael Schultz, Berlin, Germany

Only Me, Sven-Harrys konstmuseum, Stockholm, Sweden

2013

Only Child, Halmstads konsthall

2012

Nathalia Edenmont, Artothèque de Caen, Festival Les Boréales, Caen, France

Reborn, Guy Pieters Gallery, Knokke, Belgium
Requiem, Wetterling Gallery, Stockholm and Gothenburg, Sweden
WhiteSpace, West Palm Beach, FL, USA
Only Child, Alingsås konsthall, Alingsås, Sweden

2011

Existence, Institut suédois à Paris, Paris, France
Galleri Stocksélius, Skövde, Sweden
Eternal, Borås Konstmuseum, Borås, Sweden

2010

No Feelings, Wetterling Gallery, Stockholm and Gothenburg, Sweden

2009

Icons, Wetterling Gallery, Gothenburg, Sweden
Galleri Leger, Malmö, Sweden
Konsthallen Hishult, Hishult, Sweden
Solo project booth at Palmbeach3 art fair, Palm Beach, USA

2008

Park Ryu Sook Gallery, Seoul, Korea
Still Born, Aidan Gallery, Moscow, Russia
Still Born, Wetterling Gallery, Stockholm, Sweden
Galerie Terminus, München, Germany
Örnsköldsvik Museum, Örnsköldsvik, Sweden
Flying Colours, Nathalia Edenmont, Gallery Eighty, Singapore, Singapore

2007

Guy Pieters Gallery, Knokke, Belgium
Samuelis Baumgarte Galerie, Bielefeld, Germany
Park Ryu Sook Gallery, Seoul, Korea
Kristinehamn konstmuseum, Kristinehamn, Sweden

2006

Galerie Hafenrichter & Flügel, Nürnberg, Germany
Immortal, Wetterling Gallery, Stockholm, Sweden
Galerie Forsblom, Helsinki, Finland
Nathalia Edenmont, Blasthaus, BOKA, San Francisco, CA, USA

2005

We're blond, we're blind, B&D Studio Contemporanea, Milan, Italy
Still About Life, Wetterling Gallery, Stockholm, Sweden
Nord Kultur, Backfabrik, Berlin, Germany

2004

Aidan Gallery, Moscow, Russia

2003

Still Life, Wetterling Gallery, Stockholm, Sweden
Still Life, Galleri Mors Mössa, Göteborg, Sweden

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2011

De/Constructing the Norm, Wetterling Gallery, Stockholm, Sweden

2010

I hjärtat av hjärtat av landet – samlingen i urval, Kristinehamn konstmuseum, Kristinehamn, Sweden

2009

Creating Identity: Portraits Today, 21c Museum, Louisville, KY, USA
Russian Costumes in photography. Metamorphoses. Moscow House of Photography Museum, Moscow, Russia

2008

The 30th Anniversary, PART III, Wetterling Gallery, Stockholm, Sweden

2007

Christmas Greetings, Galerie de Pury & Luxembourg, Zürich, Switzerland

Dance of Visions, Jordan National Gallery, Amman, Jordan

Kunst treibt Blüten, Schmuckmuseum Pforzheim, Pforzheim, Germany

2006

Animalworld, Borås Konstmuseum, Borås, Sweden

Biennale Internationale de l'image, Nancy, France

Lukas Feichtner Galerie, Vienna, Austria

2005

About Beauty, House of World Cultures, Berlin, Germany

2004

Wetterling Gallery, Stockholm, Sweden

2003

I Am A Curator, Chisenhale Gallery, London, UK

Wanted Dead or Alive, Winslow Garage, Los Angeles, CA, USA

Western Project, Los Angeles, CA, USA

Money Changes Everything, Whitney Independent Study Studio Program, New York, NY, USA

COLLECTIONS

Nathalia Edenmonts work is represented in numerous public and private collections worldwide, among them:

Borås Konstmuseum, Borås, Sweden

Kristinehamn konstmuseum, Kristinehamn, Sweden

Moderna museet, Stockholm, Sweden

Moscow House of Photography Museum, Moscow, Russia

Statens konstråd (The National Public Art Council), Sweden

WhiteSpace, West Palm Beach, FL, USA

21c Museum, Louisville, KY, USA

The Modern Art London Series

Elizabeth Xi Bauer: Art Consultancy London