

Anders Troelsen

## Focusing on the World

*On Janne Klerk's Photographic Reading of Nature, Landscape, and Architecture*

### Photography and Focus

“Reading the garden” – that is what Janne Klerk thought she was doing as a child when she would go exploring among the flora. And it was the same with other things that captured her attention: she wanted to “read” them. Klerk was born with a visual impairment that made reading an entire book exceedingly difficult for her. However, she grew up in a literary family where reading was a common activity. For the little girl, reading became synonymous with being enthralled by something, being engrossed. And, to a certain extent, that is what Klerk still does: she studies the visible world, reads architecture, reads the landscape. Vision is a condition for knowledge, the camera a source of understanding – she uses her eyes and her camera to gain insight; knowledge and visual perception are closely linked. Klerk has an eye for detail in all that surrounds her; she possesses a visual foundation that can paradoxically be developed precisely when vision fails, as was the case for her later in life when she had to have several difficult eye surgeries. All ended well, fortunately. However, at one point, she experienced some beautiful but also frightening light phenomena. These had internal physiological causes but ultimately were crucial in the development of her acute sensitivity to shadow in real-life light phenomena.



My impression is that Klerk wants to see clearly and chooses her lens, aperture, and exposure time accordingly. But in a broader sense, she also strives to put the subjects she chooses to engage with in focus. She wants to know something about them. A constant curiosity drives her work, and I believe it is this thirst for knowledge that makes her enlist experts to contribute to her projects: a geologist explains coastal forms in *Denmark's Coasts* (Merete Binderup); an astrophysicist illuminates the role of water in the processes of life in the book *Reflections* (Anja C. Andersen); and a historian puts the Ertholmene archipelago into perspective relative to different periods of time (Rasmus Voss). Another historian expounds on the royal summer residence of Klitgården (Kristian Hvidt). A writer (Gitte Broeng), an art historian (Hans Edvard Nørregård-Nielsen), and a meteorologist (Jesper Theilgaard) have also been among her many collaborators in various contexts – not only on independent projects but also for assignments she completed as a photographer. Early in her career, Klerk was a commercial photographer, and she has a background as a still photographer in the film industry.

What photography is – and thus more generally what it should be – has almost from the beginning been the subject of keen debate among the medium's pioneers. What was the nature of this invention and how could it be used? Was the new medium simply a skill that was only good for mechanically recording the facts of the world, or was it a new potential artform that could be exploited and utilized creatively? Most people initially believed that it was a mechanical medium, whose strength lay precisely in its technical origins. This was the opinion of the Englishman William Henry Fox Talbot, who contested the Frenchmen Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre and Nicéphore Niépce for the title of the inventors of photography. A few weeks after Daguerre's announcement in January 1839, Fox Talbot proclaimed his own experiments in the field. With a little help from a friend, he was able to capture and reproduce an image he regarded as traces of nature's pencil. The *Pencil of Nature* is precisely the title of his groundbreaking publication, the first issue of which was published in 1844 and continued for a few more years. The title suggests that it is nature itself that does the writing – directly, without intermediaries. But since nature neither knows vocabulary nor syntax, it does not require literacy in the ordinary sense from the viewer: to read the book of nature requires other abilities, and the same applies to the viewer's perception and understanding of photography.

Talbot's first two plates featured architectural photographs, where the author is heavily focused on describing the subject matter, but not the image as such<sup>1</sup>. He notes the weathering and aging of the stones of an Oxford building and explains that a dark streak on a street in Paris is caused by a water cart that has just passed by. While this may seem superfluous, Talbot's point appeared to be to emphasize that these features were not due to flaws in the photograph itself. They are connected to the subject, not the medium. These

traits cannot be attributed to the insufficiency of the image: on the contrary, it is the medium's meticulous representation of the subject that includes these details. Photography is characterized by the completeness of detail, whereas a draftsman or painter would choose what to include and omit what they deemed insignificant.

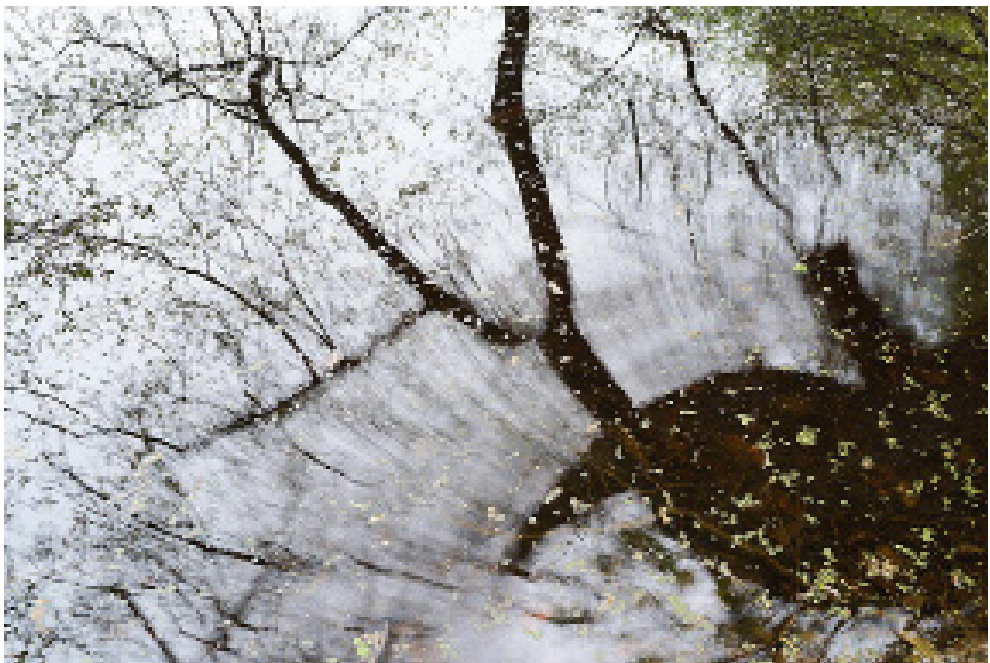
Later, Talbot became more inclined to identify picturesque features in his own pictures; for instance, he might compare them to the Dutch art. However, like other early photographers, Talbot had to contend with a slow process, as it took time for the silver nitrate to be darkened by light and produce recognizable images of the world. For this reason, he, like many photographers, preferred subjects such as architecture and landscape, which he chose to portray without people. For some time, most photographers did not even try to capture fleeting phenomena that were subject to rapid changes.

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, once the photographic portrait and the camera became more accessible, artistic ambitions became vital to a number of photographers who sought to make their craft more than just a technical and routine occupation. Their efforts were aimed at creating something special, transcending the limitations of photography as merely a medium for recording impressions. Pictorialism is a broad and somewhat imprecise term for a movement that aimed, until the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, to fulfill its artistic ambitions by "refining" photography with techniques borrowed from painting, particularly from Impressionism. The camera stand was elevated to a modern-day easel. Photography was imbued with atmosphere through intentional blurring – sharp lines were softened, transitions between light and



shadow made imperceptible or gradual. The immediate reference of photography to reality was weakened. The compositional whole, not the sharp details, was what mattered.

Janne Klerk is an art photographer – there is no doubt about that. However, blurriness is not part of her strategy. Like the early photographers, she has a preference for landscapes and architectural subjects and with patience she has submitted to the subject in her efforts to capture its essence. However, the need for patience is no longer due to the extensive exposure time of the mechanical medium, where one had to wait for the image to emerge and develop through a chemical process. In her technique, she mentally retains the frugality observed by photographers before the advent of digitalization. Previously, photographic film was not to be wasted; the number of shots was economized. Today, one can fire off an aggressive barrage of shots in quick succession at no additional cost and make selections later. However, Klerk arms herself primarily with patience: instead of restlessly capturing an abundance of images, she waits for the moment when the subject comes to life in a particular way, illuminated by a sunbeam or fleeting reflections. Vigilantly, she embraces the patience of bygone eras. But what she waits for is the moment when the subject finds temporary rest. She is on the spot when it momentarily settles into a composition, captured by the attentive camera lens. Her photographic endeavor is concentrated in fieldwork, not in computer post-processing. This also applies to her many landscape depictions in panoramic format. They may be electronically stitched together, but they are actually predetermined and preconceived when she set up the capture. The cropping, the framing are not done after the fact.



If Klerk's photographs have blurry areas, it is due to the subject itself – perhaps not always, but most of the time. They might be reflections in which the images appear distorted or blurred. As I see it, the same applies to mist and fog. They do not commonly appear as independent subjects for representation to the same extent as clouds. Instead, they relate to the changing conditions under which specific subjects appear. Degrees of indistinctness appear to modify the subject. Nevertheless, these are all aspects of what is seen: the haze is part of the subject and does not stem from the mode of representation. And no matter how sharp the focus, it is a fundamental truth that the subject can never be a pristine object belonging to a realm different from what we see with our own eyes.

Klerk's approach is a far cry from the speed of photojournalism, where dramatic events are captured in the moment and the photographer's immediate involvement results in unfocused, randomly composed, yet precisely dated images. Klerk's photographs require patience and she often returns again and again to the same subjects, which continuously reveal themselves in ways.

She takes time to linger, look around, and observe. She lowers her gaze, fixating on the earth which we so often overlook and take for granted as our natural foundation. She sees the periphery, incorporating surroundings that would otherwise be pushed aside as a vast but more diffuse field. Where a sharp focus serves to reveal depth in a forward-moving and determined motion, Klerk's formats often aim to include what is not normally at the center of attention.





Klerk's works are not rushed. Her approach reminds me of the Czech author Milan Kundera's perception of slowness: Speed disrupts human sensuality and presence; in contrast, haste prevents the memory from becoming a fixed recollection<sup>2</sup>. The Italian futurists also cultivated a vital *velocità* in their photographs, which in restless propulsion diminished the world, leaving it as abstract acceleration lines. Less rapid and breathless is the scene in a Rome image by Klerk, which precisely addresses our contemporary impatience to constantly move forward. Scooters – perhaps Vespas – are passing by the ancient Temple of Vesta where vestal virgins were thought to guard the sacred hearth. The round temple's naming is erroneous, but its columns are echoed by the bars of an iron gate framing the foreground; both contrast with the suspended, horizontal flow of traffic that pays no attention to the temple<sup>3</sup>.

The speed and drive of the metropolis are conveyed in the composition and manipulation of disparate images in photomontage. Klerk's photographs from New York's Times Square may initially appear as photomontages, but they are not. The city reveals itself here simply as the montage it actually is, in its juxtaposition of dissimilar elements and architectural forms. It is the city itself, the subject, which inherently promotes its character as a visual montage, where forms obstruct or intersect each as they overlap. The cacophony of the city is simply a genuine montage of glass reflections, insistent traffic signals, and enormous billboards, outlined against divergent windowpanes. It is within this colorful context that we see Paris Hilton in a Marilyn Monroe pose advertising her Tease perfume, or are confronted by

a towering Sean John aggressively marketing his fashion brand by raising a fist towards the skyscrapers – a gesture perceived as a response to a red stop light, where a palm commands pedestrians to halt. In Klerk's sharply focused images, coquettish femininity and male potency are but a couple of examples among many in the urban jungle of signs and signals.

## Landscape, Peace, and Change

It is unlikely that Janne Klerk mirrors herself in the hectic city and its chaotic image composition. Her existential habitat is nature and landscape. At least, these are her primary visual subjects, although I will argue in the following that they are more closely linked to her architectural photographs than one might initially think.

Landscape paintings of the past inevitably influence both Klerk's and the viewer's perception of the landscape, but Klerk's nature is of a different kind than that of the Danish Golden Age painters – and this cannot solely be attributed to the different media.

Within painting, the depiction of natural landscapes long served as background scenery for mythological or historically significant scenes. The representation of nature was not treated with the same care as figure painting and thus was a domain easier to wrest from conventions. The genre emerged from an aestheticization of the surroundings that were no longer a natural foundation of life. Viewing nature in the form of landscape actually requires being outside of it, living in a civilization that has moved beyond the compulsion of nature. In the 19th century, it would appear as the bourgeoisie's utopia of a state of equality and freedom. Nature became a lost paradise – or a reservoir of utopian aspirations. Facilitated by the rise of nation-states and Romanticism's linking of people, language, and nature, landscape painting achieved an unprecedented autonomy and status that commanded large formats. In the spirit of Romanticism, landscape and history became organically intertwined characterized by a pervasive spirit of the people.

It is against this background that the national landscapes of the Danish Golden Age painters should be seen. Much has changed since then – and many of the natural motifs of the Golden Age have changed quite literally – some have even disappeared. Cliffs, for example, have collapsed into the sea, but the sea is not alone in encroaching upon the Danish coasts; they have also been largely incorporated into the same social development observed elsewhere in the world. Harbors and holiday areas around the world are resembling each other more and more, and in this way Danish landscapes have become less domestic. Nevertheless, the same place names continue to mark the perimeter of Denmark's near and visible outer boundaries. And perhaps a subdued identity is still built upon and embedded in



the landscape and coastlines that create both soft transitions and magnificent collisions between land and water. These are places that can be sensed from a distance because the light intensifies with the sea's reflection against the sky – a light that so unique, for example, as reflected off the cliffs of Møns Klint, that many Italian travelers among the Golden Age painters felt transported to the southern climes they so longed for. One might discern a nature romantic tradition flowing through Klerk's landscape photographs, but her nature is decidedly more sober and observational: the sky and sea do not just expand and open towards infinity along the coasts; the geological layers of the earth's crust become visible, the land exposes itself and bears witness to time scales of a history far greater than any nation.

Before the 19th century, history painting tended to be purely mythological or heavily inclined to place historical events in the celestial realms of mythology, where powerful men were steadfast participants in a mythological masquerade or costume ball. Since then, the party has been canceled or the masks have fallen, as the genre has grown increasingly more realistic – at least on the surface. Nevertheless, established art academies still claimed history painting to be the noblest genre – even well into the Impressionism period.

Typically, historical painting revolved around pivotal – often warlike – events where great men brought about change by carving deep scars on the map. enormous formats, both tall and wide, proved idea for this purpose, providing space for grand epic depictions. With their cinema-scope-like format, they could literally accommodate “the greatest story ever told,” as Hollywood parlance goes.



The extensive panoramas that characterized the emerging entertainment industry, particularly in the late 19th century, often featured urban vistas, but also colossal battle scenes where the images surrounded the powerless viewer. Tourist attractions, such as spectacular natural views, were also put on display for the viewer to experience standing amidst the scenery, surrounded by grandeur that pressed in from all sides with no room for dividing or cropping. The panorama as a means of landscape representation was warmly endorsed by the well-traveled and world-renowned geographer and naturalist Alexander von Humboldt, whose major work “Kosmos” (1845-62) was an important source of inspiration for contemporary American landscape painters<sup>4</sup>. And there is little doubt that Claude Monet was influenced by the fashionable panorama in his water lily paintings, although without following the same path regarding subjects and illusions of reality<sup>5</sup>. Instead of lifting his gaze to heroic heights, he lowered it to the water’s surface in his own garden.

It is tempting to associate Janne Klerk’s natural scenes – especially the more intimate ones – with Monet’s water lily paintings. This comparison is quite common, and to some extent, I find it justified for several reasons: Both share a fascination with the panorama without the ambition to grasp grand, warlike history; a focus on a micro-universe not charged with nationalism. This is a Japanese inspiration that I would argue points toward an aesthetic reminiscent of Japanese hand scrolls. In Klerk’s case, this applies in particular to her *Denmark’s Coasts* project, which features large panoramic formats: The landscape itself dictates the guidelines for its depiction; the subject sets its own boundaries for photographic representation. However, the Monet parallel in terms of subject matter is most evident in “Reflections at the Foot of the Sky,” without being a direct source of inspiration.

Monet does not narrate a warlike story – nor is it a nationalist one, at least not directly. The garden that serves as Monet’s subject does not exhibit characteristics of a distinct national landscape. The peace that marked the end of World War I seemingly instilled a close alliance with nature scenes that only have something to tell within the larger context of which they were part. During the armistice that marked the beginning of the end of the war in 1918, Claude Monet asked his friend, Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau, to convey a gift to the French State in the form of what he persistently referred to as his “grand decorations,” on which he had worked for most of his life. Together, they constituted a sort of monument to the achieved peace – at least that was his intention<sup>6</sup>.

It was not until 1922 that Monet’s donation was legally sealed, after it had grown in size and scope over time. At one point, Monet was impeded in his work due to cataracts, which an operation partly remedied. However, throughout his life until his death in 1926, he continuously fine-tuned his monumental paintings. Prior to his death, he had collaborated with the chief architect of the Louvre Museum to design a plan for the layout of the Or-



angery in the Tuileries Garden in Paris, intended to house these colossal paintings. They were installed in 1927, attached to the walls of two oval rooms. They vary in length but are all approximately 2 meters high, allowing the viewer to experience the paintings placed lower on the walls in continuous movement. Skylights, together with the room's bright surfaces, provide a diffuse light, which changes throughout the day and with the seasons. Similarly, the intensity of light in the paintings on the long sides of the ovals peaks towards the center, while the paintings on the short sides correspond to the east-west orientation of the architecture. Positioned along the Seine River, the light in the former greenhouse or conservatory thus mirrors – both realistically and symbolically – the cycle of nature as it unfolds in the southern part of Monet's garden, watered by the Epte River, which joins the Seine at Giverny<sup>7</sup>. It is at this convergence that the water lily pond and the Japanese bridge are located.

## Janne Klerk and Japanese Culture

The bridge in Monet's garden in Giverny features prominently in many of the artist's paintings, hovering over the water without anchor on either side. Parts of Monet's garden have a more linear and formal design, as more commonly known from French baroque gardens. However, the heart of Giverny expressed Monet's Japanese inclinations, which he shared with many contemporaries as part of a broader Japonisme movement fostered by Japan's opening to the West in the late 19th century. Janne Klerk's specific interest in Japanese culture, however, has a personal background. Her grandfather lived in Japan for twenty-five years followed by five years in China (Shang-



hai), posted there by the Great Northern Telegraph Company. Returning to Denmark, he brought much of his Japanese lifestyle with him. Janne Klerk's father was born in Japan, spoke the language fluently, and arrived in Denmark at the age of 16, where he later became an architect. In the autumn of 1999, Klerk had the opportunity to experience Japanese garden and architectural culture firsthand, supported by the Toyota Foundation for an extended stay in Kyoto, Japan's ancient imperial city.

Many Japanese gardens invite viewing as if they were paintings, with pleasure gardens situated along winding promenades – almost scroll-like – or with views from skewed angles such as from verandas or pavilions, where a transition from large to small stones enhances a sense of greater spatial depth. An illusion of expansiveness in gardens is often achieved by visually incorporating the surrounding natural environment. Typically adorned with rounded stone lanterns and filled with streams that one can cross using stepping stones, these small, asymmetrical gardens also feature irregular ponds where trees bend over their reflections. They can also be veritable miniature landscapes, where water is replaced with sand raked into fine ridges, and stones representing mountains, cliffs, or islands<sup>8</sup>.

Like gardens – and in contrast to the more authoritarian-symmetrical Chinese architecture – traditional Japanese architecture tends towards asymmetry. Its colors appear less vivid compared to its Chinese counterpart, and the buildings are not designed for frontal facade effects that dominate from a distance. Raised above the ground for ventilation purposes, they are otherwise horizontally oriented – even multi-tiered pagodas, with separate roofs for each floor, can seem like mere stacks of horizontal building elements.



The Western tradition is, in several respects, fundamentally the opposite of the Japanese style. In Western Renaissance architecture, and well into later periods, roughly hewn stones (called *rustica*) imparted a sense of weight to the lower parts of buildings; the eye seems invited to penetrate the rough and rugged material. However, as the building ascended, it achieved greater lightness with the surface becoming progressively smoother and flatter with each floor. In Japanese architecture, this upward sequence of perception typically turns into a horizontal movement inside the house, with the increasing refinement and softness of the substructure, transitioning from stone to wooden planks and ending on floors covered with tatami – mats traditionally made from rice straw.

Western architecture tends to be more oriented toward walls or murals and stands in sharp contrast to Chinese and Japanese architecture, which exhibit many similarities – for instance, in the upward-curved eaves. However, while Chinese architecture concentrates much of its formal energy on external, complex roof structures, Japanese architecture is more oriented toward the floor in its interiors. Japanese lifestyle, in general, was heavily floor-oriented: cushions, not chairs, provided seating, and movement occurred along the floor, which also captured the eye’s attention. The viewpoint in “classic” Japanese films (e.g., by Yasujirō Ozu) was often low, and the sets did not strain the budget, taking advantage of Japanese architecture’s provisional and light character, with careful consideration given to frequent earthquakes and fires. In this tradition, large eaves attenuate direct sunlight, with shadow gathering under the low ceiling. Yet light can be extensively regulated through lightweight, movable screens. Instead of narrow door openings

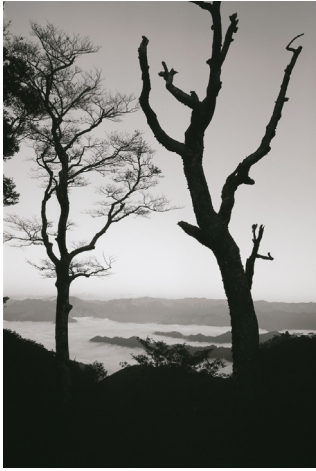


in the walls, the walls themselves offer variable openings. Screens permit shifting spatial overlaps and fluid transitions within the building's interior and between its interior and the external surroundings. Boundaries become porous and lose their definitive character: the orientation of movement and sightlines can be shifted and adjusted, framing the surrounding landscape in diverse ways.

Nature is seen through architecture, but architecture that is not designed for long-distance impact is also embedded in nature. Often, buildings are more or less hidden in the surrounding vegetation, and in summer, humidity softens clear contours. It is interesting that the Imperial Palace in Tokyo, while centrally located in the capital city, constitutes an empty center shielded from and nearly invisible to the rest of the city.

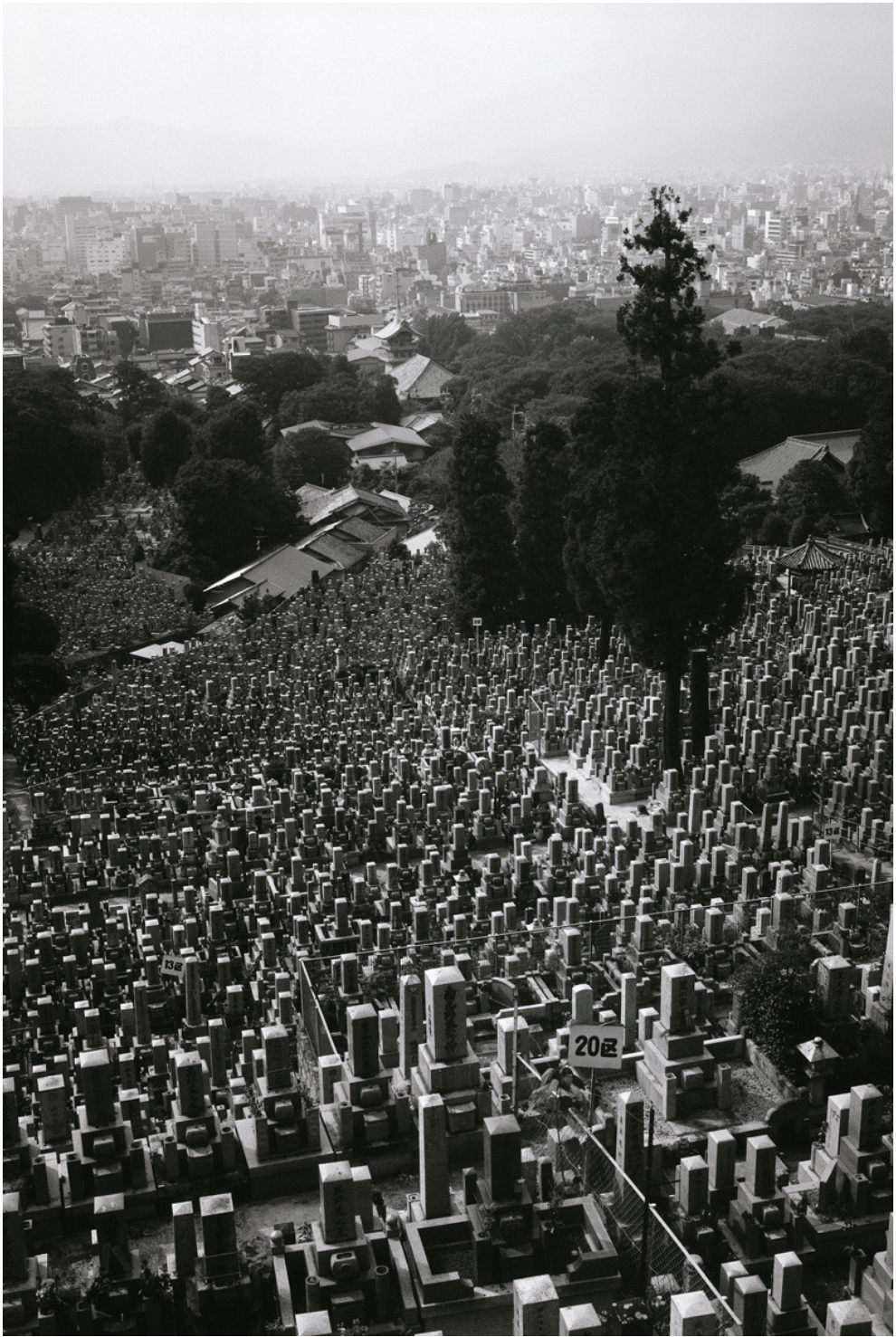
These features are evident in the black and white photographs Klerk published following her stay in Kyoto<sup>9</sup>. They depict buildings concealed by dense foliage, only partially visible. Interiors appear with filtered and delineated light forming patterns on floors and mats. While in an image of rooftops and treetops, the gaze is lifted.

A triangular overhanging roof juts into the upper right corner of the photograph, a slice of sky is framed in a way by rooftops upward-curving corners. Together with the trees, they continue in or are faintly echoed by the drifting clouds in the sky. Three mountain scenes from Mitake evoke associations with natural representations found in Japanese hanging scrolls, *kakemono*. However, the cities of modern Japan are also present in the book: in a shopping or amusement district, illuminated vertical advertisements draw



lines that seem detached from the architecture. Upwards, they form ethereal patterns in the night, which in turn absorb pedestrians on the street in the darkness below. In another image, we see what appears to be a massive, densely packed skyscraper city. It fills most of the frame and dominates the foreground, but closer inspection reveals the shapes to be gravestones in a sloping cemetery. of scale leads the viewer astray: the city of the living, however, is discernible in the misty background. Elsewhere in the book, a double-page spread is used to illustrate a contrast typical of many Japanese cities: the elongated format juxtaposes an unsightly wilderness of tangled cables and wires with wildly growing branches and foliage, seemingly jutting out from the opposite side in an attempt to rival the technical chaos of the electrical installations.







## Architecture and Nature

Traditional Japanese architecture connects with the earth and nature, as do many Danish houses. Frequently, they hide behind trees or follow softly curving lines in the landscape. In Klerk's captures, architecture often interacts with its surroundings – with the city, the neighborhood – but especially with nature. Taarnborg in Ribe – one of the most well-preserved Renaissance buildings in Denmark – is seen in interaction with the city, yet it gives Klerk ample opportunity to explore the nearby marshlands. The former royal summer residence, Klitgården near Denmark's northernmost tip, Skagen, is nestled among the dunes; it does not boast lofty towers, only the steep red roof pitch prevents it from completely disappearing behind the dunes. The house, now a work retreat, is a constant in every image in Klerk's book about the area.

Cliff walls are given similar treatment in her photographs of the tiny Danish island of Christiansø off Bornholm. Half the images are spread over two pages while the other half depict stone houses clinging to the cliffs and irregularly stacked stone walls, forming natural extensions of the rugged surroundings. Everything is made of the same material only in varying degrees of refinement, as stacking is not something nature can achieve. When violent waves are whipped into foam against the rocky island, the cliff-lined coast





appears to join forces with a series of menacing cannons along the towering fortress to defend the outpost. As a countermeasure, the purpose of bastion seems to protect the island from the fury of nature's elements than from invading forces. In contrast, the aim of the bunkers left behind from the Atlantic Wall, Germany's vast defense line from World War II, was clearly to prepare for a hostile assault on the Denmark's West Coast.

After the war, the concrete blocks have literally been tossed about by the elements and from a distance resemble natural formations shaped by nature itself. Indeed, the curved contours were initially designed not only to increase the physical resilience of defense positions but also to render them less visible by eliminating sharp angles and edges.

The earthen ramparts and moats surrounding the West Jutland manor house Nørre Vosborg, meanwhile, are not just for appearances. Situated close at the point where the Storå river flows into Limfjord at Nissum Bredning, the manor has had to contend more with storm surges than hostile enemies. As a residence of power, it is modest, but its tower gate makes its purpose known. Klerk's photographs were taken before the structures were restored, and in her images, the manor is often hidden behind trees and depicted from skewed angles. This contrasts starkly with the frontal sightlines typically favored by manor houses, especially once they stopped serving as actual fortifications. Power architecture began to utilize elevated positions to visually dominate the surroundings. From a foundational core, the structure extends central visual and movement axes out into the distance, with control over nature gradually dissolving or weakening the further one moves away from the building.

Despite occasional symmetry, Nørre Vosborg never fully lived up to this power scenography, a fact that Klerk's photographic style is hardly to illustrate anyway. In her portrayal, the manor resembles Sleeping Beauty's castle, and here, as elsewhere, the images focus as much on the landscape surrounding the architecture as on the architecture itself. Duckweed, algae, and floating plants have taken over the stagnant moat, forming a sticky green mass thick enough to support fallen leaves without immediately becoming soaked through sinking to the bottom. Building elements are decaying; several are in such a state of ruin as to be nearly reclaimed by nature. A stone staircase has almost surrendered to a vegetation that over time has gained supremacy by exploiting the smallest cracks between the stones to sprout forth. The staircase appears barely accessible, and a weathered wooden bridge hardly passable seeming only just capable of supporting the plant stems and exposed roots that have found their way across it. A gate is rotting away, weathered stone walls are overgrown with weeds or covered in moss and lichen. An apple tree has shed most of its fruit, and close-ups of fallen leaves and plant parts convey an impression of a melancholic world falling



to the ground. At one point, Klerk revisited the manor, where she shows, from a indefinite but presumably high vantage point, the place shrouded in snow. A series of images depict how it blankets the landscape in varying thickness, obliterating all differences by transforming everything into its own substance.

Regardless of a building's geographic location, Klerk's imagery gives the impression of nature's ultimate supremacy. The sand-covered church near Denmark's northernmost point, Skagen, not far from Klitgården, has literally been engulfed by sand. The color of the steep yet relatively low Nubian Pyramids of Meroë in Sudan blends in with the desert sand and appear slightly displaced in some image compositions. A state of decay in several places weakens their clean contours, so they almost resemble large stones from a distance. In many other locations, size ratios can reveal nature's su-

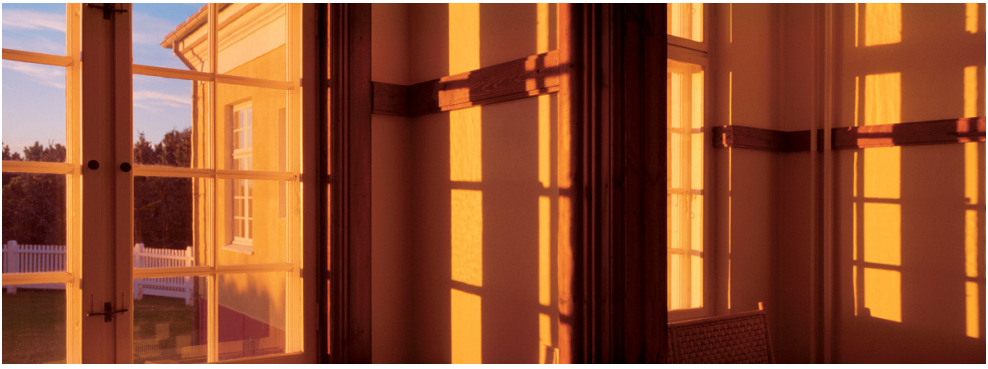




premacv. Mountain walls form an overwhelming backdrop for towns and houses (such as in Amalfi), and leaden clouds in the Faroe Islands rest heavily atop the built landscape, thus pressing it under pitch-black soffits.

When it comes to architecture, Klerk generally does not seem eager to reproduce entire structures as isolated objects: She often takes up-close or distant positions that either highlight details or allow the architecture to merge with its surroundings. Many visual artists would take a more traditional approach, using natural elements as set pieces, such as trees serving as *repoussoirs* that frame an architectural element. In contrast, Klerk does not hesitate to let them obstruct the view by cutting into the architecture and thus forming visual barriers that sometimes even occupy the center of the image. From a low camera position, otherwise ground-hugging vegetation can appear to thrust forward, forming a foreground that is as focused as the background, but which intrudes with its visual heft with the potential to gain dominance.

When we move inside the architecture, such as Klitgården, we are offered a series of oblique views into the interior with its many panels, giving us a nice impression of the Art and Crafts-style character of the furnishings, resulting from architect Ulrik Plesner who was so clearly inspired by William Morris. However, we do not gain a clear sense of the internal spatial layout. The intention being not to illustrate the floorplan but to merge glimpses of the interior into a clear spatial distribution. The exterior form of the house is also left to a certain extent for the viewer to guess at. This is even more true for her photographs of Nørre Vosborg, which do little to piece together an overall plan.



When Klerk ventures indoors, it is as though she continually seeks to the outdoors. She appears drawn to doors and windows, each serving as apertures for movement and views – especially the latter, which she often leaves half-open. They open up to the outside world, framing larger or smaller fragments of it like pictures. Inside, we often see composite shadow drawings, intricate light patterns, or reflections projected from outside into the interior space. These may be a reference to camera obscura of the past – the dark box that became the predecessor of the photographic camera. At any rate, Klerk is clearly preoccupied with the relationship between inside and outside. In one image from Klitgården in Skagen, which also serves as a kind of inner framing of the book, one can see from one window to another situated in a wing perpendicular to where the viewer is located. Next to the viewer's position, perhaps in an adjacent room, is a glimpse of the light from a third window. Altogether, a light play is presented that is spatially difficult to decipher. Like the repetitive nature of a wooden fence outside, glimpsed through the vertical lines of the window panes, which come exceedingly close to being abstractions devoid of objects.

## Formats and Formalities

The final image is an example of the compositional principle that something of a Klerk hallmark. We have already seen how her double spreads allocate space for architecture on one side while reserving the other for the natural surroundings. In her book on Klitgården, a characteristic white picket fence leads the eye on a visual journey – a sort of sideways travelling through the summer residence's surroundings. Perhaps Klerk's background in the film industry comes into play here: In traditional film language, once we are immersed in the narrative space, the framing of the format cannot deprive us of the sense that a camera movement could open the space to the sides at any time.

Janne Klerk is fascinated by long lines, particularly horizontal. Her images of Danish coasts follow the landscape; they naturally mimic the subject's extended lines and exploit its panoramic possibilities to varying degrees.



The photographs in her exhibitions and book publications almost always have identical formats, but in the book *Denmark's Coasts*, they nearly always extend to the edge or suggest an infinity that leads beyond the page's edge. The paradox is that the cropping or interruption does not mentally signal a halt but rather encourages the idea of continuation. The notion that landscapes are not something experienced as snippets is paradoxically emphasized by the rhythm in the book, which fundamentally varies according to a set of recurring proportions, some of which occasionally make room for the short (and very informative) texts that punctuate the book's progression.

The panoramic formats can perhaps be compared to Japanese *makimono*, horizontal picture scrolls or hand scrolls, which can be viewed unfurled in their entirety in museums but are otherwise intended to be unrolled one arm's length at a time. The effect of wide formats like Klerk's, I believe, is the sense that there is always something you do not see but could come to see. The striking format, which horizontally expands the frame, can thus also deny it. Monet's aforementioned water lily paintings seem deliberately to lack a delineated frame (for practical reasons, they merely have a thin border or edge). The intention with the large-format paintings is for the viewer to feel surrounded by their delicate, floating visions and to sink into a world without divisions that refuses boundaries of any form. Together, they coloristically constitute a primordial soup, potentially containing an infinite imagery. Monet's paintings, of course, ultimately cannot avoid being framed; they do not continue indefinitely. But if the frame sets the image in motion and, as a boundary, transforms the surface into an energy field, it constitutes more a flickering all-over movement than distinct vectors leading to a particular place.

As mentioned, the image formats are the same in Klerk's exhibitions as in her books. However, it is clear that the photographs, in particular, come into their own when blown up in large format. In front of a format that almost has the character of a cinemascope screen, Klerk's viewer, like Monet's, is surrounded by the depicted world. In Monet, the colors partially free them-



selves from the object world, but even in Klerk's work, there is no sense of unimpeded access to the pictorial space – which does not contradict being optically overwhelmed by or absorbed into it. The gaze does not extend inward with the notion of actively penetrating the depicted world. A sharp focus of the style Klerk favors could otherwise show the way forward in contrast to a more diffuse, less clear peripheral vision. That this is not the case, I believe, is because the viewer's gaze is dispersed or glides along the horizontal format without stopping and fixing on a particular point. Neither the wide focus nor the format which spreads out invite the viewer inside. In different ways, thematically or formally, the image places instead obstacles in the way, thus halting the viewer's potential progress. Some photographs appear as inaccessible landscape silhouettes that do not engage the viewer by pretending to create a spatial connection. Clear paths into the landscape space are rarely indicated.

The way Klerk photographs bridges such as those crossing the Great Belt and the Øresund is indicative to me. She does so either from an almost freely floating vantage point at the top of a pylon or from a position under the bridge, where enormous, weather-beaten concrete piles dominate the image field. Both positions cut the viewer off from a potential movement into the space. In neither case is a way opened to continue forward, and only in the first case do we glimpse, in extension of the enormous steel cables, the highway, which is fundamentally abstract in nature because rather than leading from one place to another it essentially passes all places by, creating an uninterrupted mobility that is not interrupted by cities. In a more conventional sense, any impulse to move might be weakened by a very low viewpoint or (indeterminate) high viewpoint. If it is close to the ground, it does not promote the accessibility of the image space – instead we are relegated mentally to crawling forward in the image space. And if it is placed far above, we risk losing our footing and our contact with the ground.

Stairs, especially in exteriors, do not seem particularly accessible, and if the image suggests a possible direction of movement in the form of a road or



path, the viewer is not placed in the middle of it but is pulled slightly to the side. Moreover, the road often bends, hides, dissolves in mud, or is actually flooded, like the “ebb tide road” at Skallingen or the *låningsvej* at Mandø, a road that is only accessible at low tide. As a rule, no continuous route is



laid out for the viewer, nor is a clear endpoint indicated. Although this is not the case in the image that won Klerk first prize in a poster competition organized by Ringkjøbing County for the Vinden cultural festival (in 2003)<sup>10</sup>. That photograph is something of an exception, however, as the viewpoint is in the middle of a road, which vanishes into the horizon. The stretch of road is not straight, but it is bordered by windswept trees with a persistent inward tapering that creates a perspective pull towards the horizon. The shadows of the trees presumably fall across the road from the east, given the trees' dramatic curvatures toward the east, likely due to the prevailing westerly wind – a wind that, like light, is not visible itself but only reveals its presence through its effects. The point of the image, as I see it, is that both the trees and the shadowplay move across the road from opposite sides, and toward the straight path it outlines. The hard materiality of the asphalt's paving appears as a sharply drawn mosaic of gravel and rubble. The trees, on the other hand, seem to seek out a different path – or at least to move beyond the road and its predetermined direction. Furthermore, due to the cropping of the image, the trees in the forefront are not visually rooted to the ground.

Movement impulses can also be hinted at in places by means of footprints in snow or sand but are weakened when they, in themselves, cause the viewer to question due to their size or nature. However, the viewpoint, its positioning, and the nature of the subject are the most common barriers for the viewer. We are confronted by an impassable road, a swampy area, an overgrown wilderness; we stand in seeming discomfort at the water's edge or find ourselves at the foot or more often on the brink of a steep, rugged slope. More or less uncertain viewpoints and problematic viewer positions create difficulties for the image observer; these must be assumed to work on at least a more subconscious level when a comfortable security is almost imperceptibly undermined. This might be most evident when the viewer seems to be on the edge of an abyss, perhaps even about to fall into it, so he or she almost hovers over the depths with a downward gaze. A certain dizziness is thus conveyed by long formats that follow or shoot out from Hammerknuden on Bornholm, and from the chalk cliffs of Stevns and Møns. The sense





losing your footing may not seem threatening as such but clearly exceeds the safer domain of the Golden Age painters, where the viewer is normally assured solid ground underfoot<sup>11</sup>.

The wide format is occasionally accompanied by rhythmically repeated elements parallel to the image plane, helping to convey a sense of the format's lack of closure—a kind of visual ellipsis that suggests an imagined continu-



ation (...). The fence at Klitgården has already been mentioned. Klerk also utilizes fascine fences in the marshlands (e.g., along the Rømø Causeway): with rows of driven posts connected by bundled spruce or pine branches, they attempt to hold back the material carried away by the tide while allowing the water to recede. In Klerk's work, they become almost minimalist repetitions, counting an infinite beat in the landscape and giving the impression of never stopping, extending beyond the edge of the image. Small boats or large ships can similarly point beyond the edge of the image. Stones and flowers can also form small patterns, textures that, through their repetitions, anticipate an infinity that knows no bounds.

A bit less striking is the continuation impulse in a photograph from Korevle near Ellingelyng (Sejrø Bay). The place name, which translates literally to "Cow's shoal", is confirmed by a row of sedate cows, which move to the right at slightly irregular intervals, their direction aided by the reading direction. From the shoal, they wade across a shallow stream to the meadow where a couple of them appear practically drowning in the tall grass. In the foreground a meadow expanse with its blossoming vegetation, filling most of the image with a sharp focus on its biodiversity.

This picture illustrates a recurring trend in Klerk's work, in which the horizon line is placed either very high or very low within the image. The Kor-





evle image is an example of the former; the latter is evident in a photograph where Randerup Church, in the distance, occupies the middle of the low horizon line. From a distance, the church seems entangled in a web of vegetation. Simultaneously, the low viewpoint allows a series of plant stems to shoot up in the foreground of the image, sharply defined but cut off from the ground. In contrast, the high milk-white sky appears empty, only faintly articulated, constituting a kind of a large, open projection surface for the viewer.

A high horizon line, on the other hand, allows the earth to dominate the image plane. It appears as a barren or deflowered surface. Perhaps, isolated stalks stick up in sharp relief or a diverse, clearly outlined mosaic of vegetation shoots up in the foreground.

She allows the Wadden Sea to visually flood the foreground. The marshlands take over, or the beach fills the image plane with pebbles, creating a detailed mosaic, or with piles of boulders. Ice scree take the form of repetitive patterns, towering in flakes, tips, or blocks. Sand flats or light soil create peculiar patterns in the form of small peaks or depressions, ripples, or winding furrows created by the wind, standing in sharp contrast in the low light. Sometimes, one can be in doubt about the scale as beach images resemble aerial photos showing flat landmasses and expansive wetlands.

When the sky dominates, drifting clouds or massive cloud banks can be broken by a dramatic scenography of light, creating layers of light vaults and heralding a potentially violent weather change. This does not prevent the upper and lower sections from sometimes mirroring each other, e.g., when

clouds echo in the sea foam, or when landscape contours and cloud formations merge or create pictorial rhymes.

## Coastline and Forest Lake

The countless indentations and projections of the Danish coastline make it about as long as Italy's coastline. With countless bays, fjords, peninsulas, and spits—and especially islands—it stretches over 8,000 km, perhaps even more. How such stretches are measured, I do not know—but it is certain that nowhere in Denmark can one be more than 100 km from the sea. Water has always fascinated Janne Klerk, and the book about Danish coasts stems from her thematic choice when she participated in the large-scale “Denmark in Transformation” project<sup>12</sup>. This led to her monumental work *Denmark's Coasts – A Photographic Story* (2015), which in 2022 was joined by *Reflections at the Foot of the Sky* (2022). Its scale is not Denmark's vast coastlines; it does not map out a nationwide grand tour or prolonged national journey. Instead of encompassing the entire country, the *Reflections* project focuses on a very small woodland lake in a nature reserve around which Klerk revolves. The lake is about 100 meters in diameter, and it takes five minutes to walk around it. The *Reflections* project, like the coastal concept, was realized in both an exhibition and a book of the same title. These two projects and books are undoubtedly Klerk's major works and demonstrate the breadth of her extensive oeuvre, while also mirroring each other through their similarities.

The book *Danish Coasts* is divided into two parts. The first volume focuses on Jutland, starting the journey in the mainland's largest city, Aarhus, it moves counterclockwise, following the coastline northward, then after rounding the tip of Skagen, continuing along the expansive, straight lines of the West Coast. At the German border, it shifts back to the more intricate eastern coastline, ending where it began. The second volume, concerning the Danish islands, including Bornholm, similarly begins its odyssey in Copenhagen, specifically at Kalvebod Brygge. The coastline around North



Zealand is followed—again counterclockwise—but the round trip is interrupted on the west side to take the Great Belt Bridge to Nyborg. From there, the route heads north and around Funen, concluding the South Funen Archipelago. The Great Belt Bridge serves again as a connection back to Zealand, where the journey resumes southward, including the South Sea Islands, and returns to Copenhagen, Amager and the Øresund Bridge. The bridge acts as a springboard to Bornholm, where the entire journey ends at the country's eastern outpost: Ertholmene.

The harbors of the largest cities form the starting points for each of the two volumes with the harbor being the most humanized meeting place between land and sea and the place where societal changes are most conspicuously revealed. Fishing and industrial harbors, especially in the east, have become marinas, and small cutters have been scrapped in favor of giant trawlers engaging in industrial-scale fishing. Silos and other large architectural objects that blocked the cities' sightlines to the sea have been replaced by windswept waterfront apartments. The Iceberg—the jagged building on the waterfront district of Aarhus Ø—creates openings to the water by shifting the buildings and cutting them up in inverted V-shapes. The blue-green glass balconies project more or less obliquely from the chalk-white house peaks, the windows of which appear from a distance to be overlapped by other peaks; their shapes sometimes seem to be cut along continuous but fictional lines. The area appears deserted in Klerk's photographs, but otherwise, she discreetly refrains from revealing her opinion; the architecture is not bad. The tendency towards staging can, however, take on a parodic character, implicitly suggested in other photographs of Frederikshavn's Palm Beach—an example of overt trivialization—or in details easily overlooked at Copenhagen's Kalvebod Brygge or in Tuborg Harbor, where lime grass has been transplanted, reminiscent of natural beaches.

Whereas Aarhus Ø offers sculptural forms with associations to floating natural phenomena that have not place in the Danish landscape, the office buildings at Kalvebod Brygge in Copenhagen have achieved iconic status



for their theatricality. For instance, we see the long side of a building from a lateral position where one would normally expect to also see the short side with walls meeting at a right angle. The visual impression of the building's facade as a paper-thin backdrop comes from the fact that the two sides actually meet at an acute angle, invisible from the viewer's position. Consequently, the facade's relatively smooth appearance is staged.

In their encounter with the sea, harbors and coastlines mark the outward face of the seafaring nation. As the country's visible borders, they form a round horizon for the nation's history. Klerk's *Denmark's Coasts* has been called an epic, a heroic poem. The scope—both thematically and in terms of page count—qualifies for the appellation, which associates more with history painting than landscape painting. But in that case, the work is more an *Odyssey* than an *Iliad*, even though Klerk rarely set sail to view the country from the sea. In any case, the exhibitions and the book originate from the photographer's explorations along the extensive coastlines of Denmark. They do not appear uninhabited, nor are they overcrowded, and the people seen do not detract from the surroundings: they are observers. Some have moved out onto a balcony, perhaps to enjoy the view of a harbor. A few seem to be at work—such as those engaged in breaking up fishing boats—but for the most part, they appear passive and enjoying life. They are casual passersby, campers, beachgoers, tourists. The coastal theme makes it clear that human actors do not appear as protagonists but as extras—they face the scenery or are a smaller part of it. They do not attract much attention; often, they're slightly out of focus—and they themselves may be characterized by some rapid inattention. Take, for example, the cyclist passing a thatched house where the road bends; the wide format reveals the surrounding nature he is leaving behind in his haste—including a beach nestled behind a low cliff.

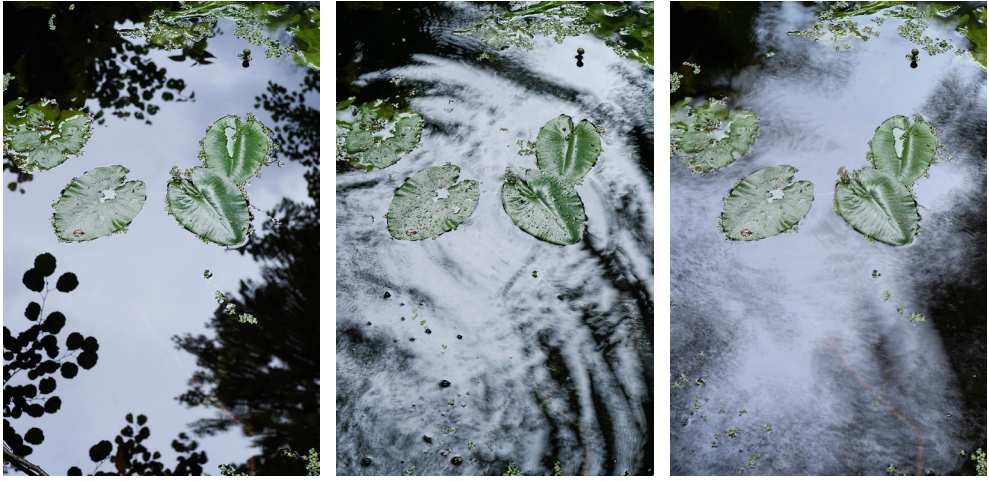
We do not see people quarreling or embarking on a heroic battle against nature. Visually, it lacks a counterpart. Narratives are usually investments in time, where the deposit of human energy is made in anticipation of time yielding meaning. Even though today's climate change is human-made and brings negative interest, for natural reasons, it is visually more difficult to extract human actions from *Denmark's Coasts*. Social agency is only indirectly present through the measures it has left behind: settlements, harbors, ferry terminals, bridges, roads, dikes, breakwaters. . The changes taking place in the country's wrestling with the sea are linked to nature itself. It is the elements—earth, water, air—that are primarily active in breaking down, moving, and depositing material. The sea attacks protruding cliffs, where a steeply plunging seabed allows the waves to eat into them, while shallow coastal lines elsewhere provide shelter for the formation of sandbanks. The natural elements do not intend anything; they simply follow the natural laws that it is their lot to follow. Some of the country's changes are relatively rapid—such as migrating dunes—but the human actions captured appear as



short-term adjustments that ultimately lose impact in the face of geological time, which is so infinitely slow that it can hardly serve as as the subject in a heroic narrative. It is a bit like a melody played too slowly for the notes to gather into a comprehensible sequence. For the most part, we are relegated to a different scale, both spatially and temporally, than human action. In both dimensions, there is an order of magnitude that lies beyond human reach. In the confrontation with nature, humanity has created myths about the first and last things, but Klerk's approach is clearer-sighted and adheres to a carefully detailed registry, where nature itself is capable of conveying its dominion and grandeur. To me, she seems to serve more as eyewitness than narrator.

Where the coasts envelop the landscape as one expansive entity with the islands as outposts, the lakes are introverted—inland lakes that contain small, often stagnant micro-worlds with little inflow and outflow. In the *Reflection* exhibition and book, the focus is thus *inward*, not *outward*. However, changing skies are reflected in the inconspicuous puddle, which, as a micro-world, manages to outline universal connections.

The extroverted coasts lend themselves to grandiose widescreen formats, while the portrait format better allows the lake to come into it own as its mirror draws the sky down to the ground. The gaze is not so much cast *out* into the surroundings or *along* landscape lines as it is drawn *down* towards the depths—but simultaneously, the water surface mirrors *upward* toward the sky and the clouds. Images in portrait format slightly outnumber those in landscape format, and the book's dimensions accommodate this by being slightly taller than it is wide, with some photographs presented in extra-wide format as double-page spreads.



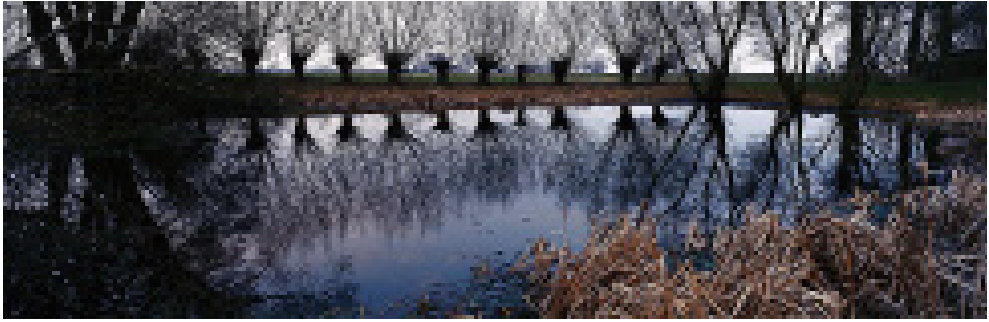
In *Denmark's Coasts*, Klerk provides the locations where the photographs were taken, anchoring stages along a route. In contrast, the locations are omitted in *Reflections*. The forest lake circles around itself in a way that seems timeless and placeless. The seasons are sensed in their cyclical return, but time is otherwise scaled down to small fluctuations, recorded in short series of still photos where the water surface and its reflections change character. If the coastal images might perhaps be attributed epic dimensions, the more intimate reflections of the forest lake are best compared to poetry or lyricism—they contain shifting moods detached from both subject and object.

Klerk's camera identifies in a way with a nature that portrays itself. The reflections are more changeable than what is mirrored and yet possess the same degree of reality. It is nature itself that creates the images. Without becoming independent, they are part of it. They make it clear that nature is far from a fixed and defined object. It is a green temple, perhaps, but straightforward to pinpoint and locate.

Several instances in Klerk's earlier works could be said to anticipate *Reflections*. Undergrowth with ivy, low shrubs and bushes, fallen twigs and leaves seem always to have been a favorite motif for Klerk. Exploring the forest floor naturally required lowering her gaze, and the same applies to focusing on the lakebed or water surface. The water can be murky, making it opaque, and the lakebed may only be faintly visible. But most of the blurring and distortions are the result of the water surface being disturbed by phenomena such as light breezes, sudden gusts of wind, raindrops or hail, fallen cones or twigs. In a way, Klerk delegates the camera's capacity to reflect reality to nature itself, patiently awaiting potential outcomes of how air and water (in their various states) interact—each elusive and ephemeral substance. Like the element of creation, water mirrors the sky, and the aquatic plant reflect the vegetation along the shorelines which shimmering in the ripples on the lake. Initially, the focus is on a vegetative







world without clear forms—a fermenting world whose elements merge into one another in constant transformation.

The viewpoint from which the lake is seen is just as indefinite and floating. Whereas coastal landscapes often lack a foreground that offers footholds, the bodily and spatial coordinates are almost disregarded at the lake. The scale is unclear. The reflections that turn right into left play a less significant role, serving merely to confuse orientation when it becomes unclear what is up and down: Tree crowns hang downwards, making them appear as windfall with exposed roots (similar to the many fallen trees in Klerk's coastal images). Reflections around a horizontal axis suspend gravity, while the separation between reflection and the reflected often causes uncertainty as branches bow deeply down over the water: It is as if they continue uninterrupted in their reflections. Often, it's a matter of where exactly the water's reflection resides? When a breeze creates veiling disturbances in the form of ripples on the surface, a few sharply focused small leaves still floating on top may be all that marks where the reflection occurs.

Reeds rise up out of the water and water lilies reach upwards towards the light, but otherwise, the small forest lake is filled with fallen plant debris in various states of decay. Most of it is literally in decline: Leaves fall and mingle with spruce needles, seed capsules, and detached plant stems. Some withered leaves have curled up and are about to sink to the bottom. Others have settled in layers beneath the surface or found rest on the bottom in brownish layers. Those that have retained some of their green color still sway on the surface; here they have collected pollen, which surrounds them like a delicate fringe.

Nature has tuned its colors and its entire composition. Repetition patterns are broken by small waves or fragmented by ripples on the water's surface, creating visual rhymes and echoes. However, the resulting patterns look very different. Tree trunks form a partially dissolved rhythm of dominant verticals. Branches cut through the rippled water in blurred diagonals or nervously frayed zigzag forms; a fringe of leaves roughly gathers in a slanted line. Fallen cones or perhaps just raindrops spread rings on the water's sur-



face reminiscent of astronomical phenomena. In some cases, an intense field of light appears at the center of motion lines that almost explosively move away from the focal point. In other cases, there is the impression of almost uniform patterns spreading in all directions or with varying shades evenly distributed over a surface without any real orientation.

The lake as a more defined field never appears in Klerk's photographs; at most, one glimpses something that could be a reed-covered lake shore.

At certain points, the viewer may feel as though they've descended into an impenetrable, underwater forest, turning the lake into a kind of visual aquarium. Yet, nowhere does the viewer find solid ground; everything transforms into light, floating visions. Displayed at the Kerteminde Museum, Klerk's photographs achieved a sense of weightlessness through the slight protruding of their thin, unframed surfaces from the wall, as if detached from it. This hanging method also emphasizes how configurations devoid of weight sometimes approach a sort of naturally abstracted state. They shed recognizable forms that could anchor these nameless elements into something linguistically graspable. It is a micro-world that knows no stable objects, bound by a linguistic corset of fixed attributes.

Architecture, as a motif appears as a relatively standalone or defined object; it has a clear reference point that remains ascertainable despite varying perspectives and aspects. Buildings largely materialize contour drawings, anticipating their references. In photographs, their nature as object is typically most clear in facades but becomes less apparent if the portrayal avoids sym-



metric frontality or, as with Klerk, favors skewed angles where architecture merges more with its surroundings. With landscapes, it becomes harder to speak of the motif as a pre-contoured object: it cannot be delimited or divided but is perceived as a diffuse whole surrounding the viewer. In Klerk's micro-universe of reflections, determinations become even more challenging. Here, it's difficult to distinguish something asserting itself with more object-like contours. Elements dissolve into their fluid aspects rather than anchoring in a denotable core independent of photographic mediation. What is seen and the manner of seeing form a unity that melds together.

Architecture in Klerk's work represents more permanent frameworks for human actions, closer to humans than landscapes and therefore more temporally bound and ephemeral. In contrast, the very close natural processes more immediately point toward a universe of abstract and cosmological dimensions, where the micro- and macro-universes, the smallest and largest, mirror each other. These are notions abstractly anticipated in a more romantic context by Alexander von Humboldt, who sought unity and synthesis throughout nature.

Just before the title page of *Reflections*, and also as its conclusion, the reader encounters the same photograph covering a double-page spread, with individual sheets attached to the inner sides of the cover. The image shows black, blurred figures, likely trees, reflected in water rippling in a gentle breeze. The forms are dissolving, reminiscent of ink bleeding into its surroundings, retaining only faint traces of their original shape. To me, they evoke the calligraphy often found in Chinese and Japanese scroll paintings.



In a more figurative sense, one can imagine that Janne Klerk possesses a particular ability to read such *palimpsests*, written with nature's brush. *Reflections* reminds us that knowledge can be a driving force behind images, just as we can gain knowledge through images.

Medieval monks viewed nature as God's great book, yet the learned among them typically placed more trust in what they could read in a book than in what they could see with their own eyes. Janne Klerk has amassed a wealth of knowledge while interpreting human-made and natural surroundings through her lens, conveying it with a broad vision and aesthetic sensibility she is able to share with others. She helps us expand our understanding of architecture, landscape, and nature, viewing them from unfamiliar perspectives and placed in new contexts. If every reframing is a contribution to a representation of the world, it is also a means of gaining new insights. Indeed, we think through images as much as we see through thought and knowledge.

## Notes

- 1 Apart from the picture gallery on Janne Klerk's website and a visit to the "Spejlinger" exhibition at Kerteminde Museum in 2023, the article primarily draws on the following books:

Altid strømmer floden – dog er vandet er aldrig det samme, Rhodos, Copenhagen 2001

Anne Marie Nielsen and Hans Edvard Nørregård-Nielsen (eds.): Tårn-  
borg – Midt i Ribe, Forlaget Rhodos, Copenhagen 2004

Klitgården, Rhodos, Copenhagen 2003

Hans Edvard Nørregård-Nielsen: Nørre Vosborg. En vestjysk herregård,  
Gyldendal, Copenhagen 2008

Danmarks kyster - en fotografisk fortælling by Janne Klerk, volume I-II,  
Forlaget Mimesis, Copenhagen 2015

Ertholmene – en lomme i tiden, et sted i nuet, Copenhagen 2019

Spejlinger ved himlens fod, Forlaget Fotografico, Copenhagen 2022

The discussion of Talbot's work is based on the first chapter "Beginnings" in Peter Larsen's book "Album. Photographic Motifs," Spartacus Forlag / Tiderne Skifter, Oslo / Copenhagen 2004.

- 2 Milan Kundera's thoughts on slowness and memory from "Slowness," Gyldendal, Copenhagen 1995, p. 30: "There is a secret bond between slowness and memory, between speed and forgetting [...] / In existential mathematics, this experience takes the form of two basic equations: the degree of slowness is directly proportional to the intensity of memory; the degree of speed is directly proportional to the intensity of forgetting."
- 3 One can compare photography to C.W. Eckersberg's (1814-16) and Constantin Hansen's (1837) depictions of the same subject. The former is a recording of an architectural prospect without people, the latter an idyllic painting that architecturally combines several periods of architecture and populates the foreground with picturesque Romans leisurely enjoying a game of boccia.
- 4 Reference to Edward S. Casey's work "Representing Place – Landscape Painting and Maps," University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2002, p. 8. Alexander von Humboldt's extensive work "Kosmos – Entwurf einer physischen Weltbeschreibung" (1845–1862) was a bestseller translated into several languages. It had significant influence on the American Hudson River School of landscape painting with artists like Thomas Cole, Albert Bierstadt, and especially Frederic Edwin Church.

- 5 Cf. Relying on Anthony Portules's insightful article "A Phenomenology of Display: Monet's L'Orangerie, the Panorama Rotunda, and the History of Proto-Installation Art," 2021 ([https://www.academia.edu/61679219/A\\_Phenomenology\\_of\\_Display\\_Monets\\_LOrangerie\\_the\\_Panorama\\_Rotunda\\_and\\_the\\_History\\_of\\_Proto\\_Installation\\_Art](https://www.academia.edu/61679219/A_Phenomenology_of_Display_Monets_LOrangerie_the_Panorama_Rotunda_and_the_History_of_Proto_Installation_Art)).
- 6 Georges Clemenceau was an atheist, republican, and anti-imperialist. However, he earned the nickname "The Tiger" due to his uncompromising attitude towards defeated Germany, even if others surpassed him in terms of vengeance.
- 7 I believe that in this context, it is also appropriate to point out how the Orangerie, with its spatial orientation, designates and participates in the royal axis, which originates in the east from the courtyard of the Louvre. In 1989, it received a western conclusion that could only seal Art's association with peace that Monet sought to promote. Otto von Spreckelsen's Arche de L'Humanité in La Défense serves as a gateway for humanity. It is not only a frame or an open window to the world (repeated on multiple scales), its sides also mirror the surroundings. Thus, it combines two consistent images of art's representation of reality. With The Louvre at the beginning of the axis, a royal palace transformed into an art museum, Arche de L'Humanité provides a counterweight and culmination in relation to the two warlike triumphal arches. Together, these three monuments form a progression where they double their mutual distance and height along the way, ultimately culminating in the unwarlike window to the west.
- 8 The following presentation of features in Japanese garden art and architecture draws primarily on David and Michiko Young: *The Art of the Japanese Garden*, Tuttle Publishing, Vermont and Singapore 2003, and Yoshinobu Ashihara: *Tokyo through the Twentieth Century*, Kodansha International, Tokyo 1992 (Japanese first edition 1986).
- 9 The book "Altid strømmer floden – dog er vandet aldrig det samme," Rhodos, Copenhagen 2001, contains photographs from the stay. The title is a quote from a Japanese poem, reminiscent of Heraclitus' aphorism that one cannot step into the same river twice. While everything flows and the only constant is change, this does not imply that the physical world is chaotic, but rather that everything exists in a state of becoming. This mindset is not dissimilar to Eastern Buddhism.
- 10 The jury's choice is certainly correct and speaks of sound visual judgment, but in my opinion, the last part of the rationale is not only mysterious but also affected in its wording: "The image is a born classic that inscribes the Jutlandic mind and embraces a high Nordic tradition. From Edvard Munch through Asger Jorn to Per Kirkeby, the motif with its apparent rationality has become a symbol of the Nordic mind's detours."

- 11 Examples regarding Møns Klint include C.W. Eckersberg, Frederik Sødring, P.C. Skovgaard, Louis Gurlitt. Several have included the site's protective railing, and the latter safely places the viewer on a path leading towards Sommerspiret (which collapsed in 1988, Store Taler slid in 2007). Eckersberg's "Møns Klint. Udsigt til Sommerspiret" (1809) shows a railing that appears precarious, and the small scene — viewed from a safe place — directly addresses the dizziness that the view can induce. An oak tree in the foreground forms clear contours with formations in the chalk cliffs.
- 12 In 2008, Klerk was invited along with thirteen other photographers to participate in the grand photo project "Danmark under forvandling," resulting in the three-volume work "Herfra hvor vi står" (2010). Participants were free to choose their themes, and Klerk chose the country's coastline. This work spurred further exploration, where she systematically photographed Denmark's extensive coasts. In 2015, the exhibition "Danmarks kyster" could be seen at Sophienholm, and her monumental two-volume work with the same title was published the same year.

*Anders Troelsen holds an MA in Literature and a BA in Film Studies. He is Professor Emeritus at the Aarhus School of Architecture and a former Associate Professor in Art History at Aarhus University. His latest major publication is *Kunstværk, udenværk og visuel kultur. Om at se på billeder* (Aarhus University Press, 2022). He is currently working on the project *Byen på høj-kant. Skyskraberen i urbanistisk perspektiv* (The City on Edge: The Skyscraper in an Urbanist Perspective), funded by the Novo Nordisk Foundation.*